

“Exploring a critically important topic in today’s church, *A Ministry of Discernment* looks at the essential role of the laity in receiving God’s revelation. Suggesting bishops are the gateway between the *sensus fidelium* found in the local church and the *consensus fidelium* that guides the church as a whole, Dr. Osheim offers Ignatian discernment as a mode for discovering and cooperating with the action of the Spirit in the apostolic community. There is a freedom in what is offered, with the teaching function of the bishop grounded in mutual learning and listening with the faithful. The process offered here would also serve pastors and parish staff as they discern the movement of the Spirit within their parishes.”

— Marti R. Jewell, DMin
Associate Professor
School of Ministry, University of Dallas

“This is a timely book, echoing the concerns of Pope Francis for a listening church, a more dialogic church, a synodal church. Amanda Osheim here enriches the current theology of the *sensus fidelium* by demonstrating the value of Ignatian discernment as a model for local bishops in listening to the Holy Spirit in their churches and bringing local senses of the faith to bear on the teaching of the universal church. This important book will be welcomed by bishops, theologians, and laypeople for its deep spirituality and practical insights.”

— Rev. Dr. Ormond Rush
Associate Professor
Australian Catholic University

“Recently, theologians have explored the *sensus fidelium*, an ancient concept more honored in theory than in practice. Utilizing Vatican II and documents promulgated since then, Amanda Osheim outlines how an understanding of the Church as a communion invites bishops to a practice of discernment through dialogue with the people of the local church. Her perspective yields new theological insights. She further argues that this discernment requires new practices and structures. By plumbing the riches of *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius and the structures of the Society of Jesus she offers concrete suggestions for seeking the *sensus fidelium*.”

— Zeni Fox
School of Theology and Ministry, Seton Hall University

“*A Ministry of Discernment* views episcopal authority through the lens of Christian spirituality. By doing so, Amanda Osheim offers a fresh approach to both ‘teaching’ and ‘listening’ in the church. *A Ministry of Discernment* displays a fine understanding of the ecclesial dimension of faith and an equally impressive grasp of Ignatian discernment, including its implications for those who exercise oversight in a body whose every member is called to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit. This book is rich in insights for the present and future of the Catholic Church.”

— Richard Lennan
Professor of Systematic Theology
Boston College
School of Theology and Ministry

A Ministry of Discernment

The Bishop and
the Sense of the Faithful

Amanda C. Osheim



A Michael Glazier Book

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*To my parents, David and Rosemary Osheim,
who remain my first and best teachers in the ways of faith.*

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Abbreviations

AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i>
AS	<i>Apostolorum Successores</i>
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i>
CIC	<i>Code of Canon Law</i>
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i>
UG	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i>

Preface

What is the sense of the faithful?

To a degree, Roman Catholic theology has rich resources for answering this question: The sense of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*) is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the baptized. Through the Spirit, the faithful are adopted daughters and sons of God. Formed into a family by a common faith, laity, religious, priests, and bishops share an ability to recognize God's revelation which makes them witnesses to Christ whose lives embody the church's apostolic tradition. The *sensus fidelium* is God's faithfulness to the church through the Holy Spirit and allows the church in turn to be faithful to God in its pilgrimage.

Answering this question becomes more difficult, however, if we want more than a theological definition of the *sensus fidelium* as a *concept* but, instead, are seeking to understand the *content* of the *sensus fidelium*. When it comes to the question of what the faithful believe and know—the substance of faith incarnated in history and culture—answers are harder to come by. Yet answers to this question are needed for the *sensus fidelium* to be a source of the church's understanding of God's mystery. Without a means of knowing the *sensus fidelium* substantially, we risk limiting the *sensus fidelium* to a platitude about God's presence in the church rather than fully exploring the *sensus fidelium* as a way of more deeply cooperating with the Holy Spirit for the church's life and mission.

Why is knowing the substance of the *sensus fidelium* difficult? In part because the *sensus fidelium* doesn't come to us neatly

summarized in doctrinal propositions about faith and morality. Rather, it arises out of the work of the Holy Spirit who makes the church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The Holy Spirit makes us one with others in Christ. As the body of Christ and people of God, we learn to receive and respond to the gift of faith: our faith is both personal and communal. Through the Holy Spirit our union in faith is also apostolic. We receive the Good News of Jesus Christ handed on by the apostles who are sent to the world at Pentecost. As “missionary disciples” ourselves, we continue the apostles’ work of handing on, or traditioning, our faith.¹ The Holy Spirit’s indwelling, which empowers us to receive the apostles’ faith and to live out our faithful response, leads to growth in holiness as we are united more intimately with God, who invites us to join in the divine life.² Participating in the divine life as human beings means unity, faith, and holiness are expressed through our histories and cultures, and so the church is catholic. The Holy Spirit, through whom the Son was incarnate in history and culture, incarnates the body of Christ within our histories and cultures as well.

The *sensus fidelium*’s link to the very life and nature of the church means the sense of the faithful is a spiritual reality. As noted above, this is not to say the *sensus fidelium* is abstracted from our earthly lives; rather, the *sensus fidelium* is a spiritual reality because it is rooted in the work of the Holy Spirit. To know the *sensus fidelium* means we must know the Holy Spirit at work within the church. Consequently, if we wish to know the *sensus fidelium*’s substance, we will need to take into account the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—complex spiritual realities that cannot be captured through blunt instruments such as opinion polls.

¹ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013), 24. All citations from *Evangelii Gaudium* are taken from this translation.

² Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 2. All quotations from the Vatican II documents are taken from this translation.

These spiritual realities require us to have more than one method of knowing the *sensus fidelium*. The church is rooted in the mystery of God, which we will never fully comprehend but which we may grow to understand in diverse ways. Theologians have been at work to develop both the theory and practice of knowing the *sensus fidelium*, work that should be further prompted by the International Theological Commission's inclusion of the *sensus fidelium* as a criterion of Catholic theology.³ Without offering an exhaustive list of theologians' efforts, several examples provide a sense of their projects. Orlando Espín considers how coherence among Scripture, tradition, and popular piety manifests the "‘faith-full’ intuitions" of the *sensus fidelium* in Latino/a spirituality.⁴ Ormond Rush argues that the role of the *sensus fidelium* in determining the canon of Scripture is itself a normative process for discerning the church's faith and emphasizes the need for mutual, dialogical reception among the faithful, theologians, and bishops.⁵ Natalia Imperatori-Lee turns to aesthetics and literary narrative as expressions of the *sensus fidelium* at the intersection of the personal, communal, historical, and cultural.⁶ Edward Hahnenberg suggests methods from practical and contextual theology, such as ethnography, may help us enter more deeply into the personal lives of the faithful in order to perceive the *sensus fidelium*.⁷

³ International Theological Commission, "Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles, and Criteria," Vatican website, 35–36, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_teologia-oggi_en.html.

⁴ Orlando O. Espín, "Tradition and Popular Religion: An Understanding of the *Sensus Fidelium*," in *The Faith of the People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 66–67.

⁵ Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

⁶ Natalia Imperatori-Lee, "Latina Lives, Latina Literature: A Narrative Camino in Search of the *Sensus Fidelium*" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Milwaukee, WI, June 2015).

⁷ Edward Hahnenberg, "Through the Eyes of Faith: Difficulties in Discerning the *Sensus Fidelium*" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Milwaukee, WI, June 2015).

This book offers an additional approach to knowing the *sensus fidelium* that responds to a particular problem. At times the search to know the sense of the faithful seems blocked by the question of who is faithful—in other words, which members of the church we ought to trust as sources of the *sensus fidelium*. The question is a fair one. The church recognizes that some persons, while they appear to be part of the church, do not act with love for God and others (see LG 14). It would be hard to describe these persons as faithful to the God who both redeems us through love and calls us to love. Further, as Avery Dulles and Richard Gaillardetz have noted, participation in the church's communion forms and matures an individual's sense of faith.⁸ Thus it seems we must differentiate not only between Catholics who love and Catholics who do not love but also between Catholics along a spectrum of formation throughout the church's communion.

Answering the question of whom we should trust as witnesses to the *sensus fidelium* presents serious difficulties. It would require that we make determinations about the holiness of others in order to gauge the intimacy of their participation in God's life—not a simple task, given our own limitations and sinfulness. After all, even when canonizing saints, the church has an extended process for verification, including submission of evidence, and relies as well on the clarity gained through historical distance from the potential saint. Further, the sanctity of particular persons is not normative for the church, though it may be illuminative. Conversely, in the *sensus fidelium* we hope to discover the faith not only of individuals but of persons joined by the communion of the Holy Spirit. Attempting to sort between the sheep and goats in that communion is not only practically daunting but, in all

⁸ Avery Dulles, "Second General Discussion," in Catholic Common Ground Initiative, *Church Authority in American Culture: The Second Cardinal Bernardin Conference* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 119; Richard R. Gaillardetz, "Power and Authority in the Church: Emerging Issues," in *A Church with Open Doors: Catholic Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz and Edward P. Hahnenberg (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 95.

humility, we have to acknowledge that it is God's task and not ours (Matt 25:31-46). If, in order to know the *sensus fidelium*, we must first determine who is faithful, then it seems we may be stumped. On the one hand, not all in the church's communion represent the *sensus fidelium*, and some in the church's communion represent the *sensus fidelium* more fully than others. On the other hand, determining on a case-by-case basis which persons in the church's communion represent the *sensus fidelium* is beyond our ability, and even if it were not, we would need to look into the lives of many individuals in order to arrive at the communal sense of the faithful.

Yet what if we take a more subjective path to knowing the *sensus fidelium* so that the emphasis is not on others' holiness but rather on our own: How do *we* know the *sensus fidelium*? In other words, how might we develop into persons who can discern the Holy Spirit well? This book explores spirituality as a means of forming persons of discernment who may better know the *sensus fidelium*. The *sensus fidelium* is a spiritual reality; through spirituality we may better discern that reality as it is expressed in the church's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic life.

In order to undertake this exploration of spirituality in a way more likely to provide practical outcomes for knowing the *sensus fidelium*, the following chapters build a comparative model of discernment. The first element in this model is the bishop's discernment of the *sensus fidelium* in the local church, or diocese. Bishops aren't the only ones who need to know the *sensus fidelium*; the *sensus fidelium*, however, has a particular claim on the bishop: it is a source for learning the apostolic tradition that the bishop is to teach.⁹ Thinking through the spiritual process of how the bishop learns from the *sensus fidelium* helps to root the bishop's teaching ministry in learning from the local church, an essential aspect of the church's catholicity. Focusing on the bishop's ministry provides

⁹ Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The Office of the Bishop within the *Communio Ecclesiarum*: Insights from the Ecclesiology of Jean-Marie Tillard," *Science et Esprit* 61, fasc. 2, 3 (September 2009): 178-79.

us with a means not only of exploring how the *sensus fidelium* is known but also of developing the theology of episcopal ministry within the local church.

The second element of the comparative model is the spirituality of discernment cultivated through Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* and the structures that support discernment in the Society of Jesus. Ignatian spirituality has a strong connection with discernment, not only in the discernment of spirits, but also through practices that aid us in becoming persons who habitually receive and respond to God's communication of love within salvation history. The Society's structures embody this spirituality of discernment and ground obedience and authority within communal discernment in order to unite the Society's members in fulfilling Christ's call to mission.

Turning to Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit structures is not intended as a means of imposing this part of the church's heritage on either bishops in particular or the church as a whole. Other spiritualities can offer us insights into the nature and process of discernment, and other structures may facilitate discernment. Rather, paying close attention to Ignatian spirituality and the structures that embody discernment within the Society offer us one way of imagining the bishop's discernment of the *sensus fidelium* in the local church and of reconsidering how the local church's structures may facilitate that discernment.

Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit structures offer us a model for discernment rather than a mold into which all discernment must fit. By viewing the local church and the ministry of the bishop through the lens of Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit structures, a comparative model of discernment can be created. The first four chapters of this book are pairings that help build the model. The first pairing describes the *sensus fidelium* in the larger context of the church as an apostolic communion and the bishop's ministry within the local church. The second pairing considers how discernment is developed through the *Spiritual Exercises* and is embodied in the Society of Jesus' structures. The fifth chapter translates insights from Ignatian discernment and Jesuit structures into the

context of the bishop's ministry within the local church. It suggests spiritual practices that form the bishop into a person of discernment who receives the *sensus fidelium*, and structures of the local church that facilitate the bishop's ministry of discernment.

The book moves from ecclesiological theory to imagining spiritual practices and church structures in the hope of contributing not only to the academic conversation about the *sensus fidelium* but also to the ways the church practically lives out our response to the Holy Spirit. Those reading this book who wish to see the more immediate shift from theory to suggestions for practice may read from chapter 1, which lays out some foundational principles of the church and *sensus fidelium*, and then proceed to chapter 5, which points toward practical conclusions for ministry within the local church. Intervening chapters may then be explored to gain a deeper background. Chapters 2 through 4 provide analysis of the bishop's ministry, Ignatian spirituality of discernment, and the structures of the Society of Jesus that are the foundations for the conclusions reached in chapter 5.

Chapter 1, "Receiving God through Each Other: The Church's Apostolic Communion," situates the *sensus fidelium* in a church which comes into being through the authentic, limited, communal, and transformative reception of God's self-gift, or revelation. The Holy Spirit works for this reception in all the baptized and enables us to respond by gifting ourselves in return. This reception and response empowered by the Spirit creates the *sensus fidelium*. Through the Holy Spirit, the church as a whole both learns and teaches. We join the church's communion by learning to receive God's self-gift through others, and our lives are witnesses to a revelation that in turn teaches others.

Through reception and response, the church is an apostolic communion: we are united in a shared faith that sends us on mission. Within an apostolic communion, in which no one group of people knows God's mystery completely, authority and obedience must be more than command and acquiescence. Rather, through authentication we receive others' authoritative insights into God's mystery in ways that allow these insights to become internal,

shared truths that prompt our obedience. Authentication occurs when we learn from others through dialogue by asking honest questions and being willing to admit that some of our past answers may have been mistaken. It is within this apostolic communion that the bishop must discern the *sensus fidelium* through a union with the local church in which he continues to learn the apostolic faith.

Chapter 2, "Surveying the Local Church: The Bishop's Role and the Diocese's Structures," looks closely at how ecclesial documents from both Vatican II and following the council conceive the bishop's ministry within the local church with particular regard for how the bishop may receive the local church's faith. These documents, which are normative for the bishop's ministry, reflect Vatican II's shift to envisioning the church as an apostolic communion. Thus they highlight the need for the bishop's dialogue with the local church and describe the bishop's need for personal characteristics and virtues to aid his ministry with the faithful in relational rather than autocratic ways.

Yet the imaginative shift in understanding the church as an apostolic communion is not entirely reflected in these documents. Rather, they retain elements of a church that inclines to institutionalism, which divides the church between the bishops, who teach, and the rest of the faithful, who learn. This means there are some critical absences within the documents that are obstacles for the bishop's discernment of the *sensus fidelium*. First, dialogue is viewed as a means for better implementation of the bishop's pastoral plan rather than as the opportunity for the bishop to learn the apostolic faith. Second, the bishop's symbolization of the universal church's faith is not complemented by an understanding of how the bishop becomes the symbol of the local church's faith. Third, the documents do not adequately describe how the bishop cultivates personal qualities and virtues not only *for* his ministry but also *through* his ministry. By turning to Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit structures, these absences can begin to be addressed.

In chapter 3, "The *Spiritual Exercises*: Developing Persons of Discernment," the *Spiritual Exercises* is explored as more than

simply a means of making a singular discernment. Instead, the *Exercises* provides spiritual practices that form persons of discernment: those who discern authentically by consciously engaging in the limited, communal, and transformative ways we receive and respond to God. For Ignatius, to discern is to make distinctions that help us to see ourselves more clearly in relation to God and others, so we may authentically overcome ourselves and join in the communication of love.

Growth into a person of discernment has several aspects: aiding the communication of love by distinguishing between our internal thoughts and those that arise externally to us; the use of imagination to see our personal history in relation to salvation history; the development of humility in order to receive and respond to Christ's mission of salvation; cultivation of indifference to answer Christ's call as fully as possible; and awareness of consolations and desolations as ways of attending to our growth into persons of discernment. Exercises that form us in making these discernments develop a spirituality that makes discernment a habitual part of our conscious response to God, which we undertake both personally and communally.

Chapter 4, "The Society of Jesus: Structures of Discernment and Processes of Authentication," shifts from considering the spirituality of a person of discernment to the structures of discernment that embody and facilitate this spirituality within the Society of Jesus. Particular attention is given to how discernment grounds obedience and authority in the Society. Obedience is intended to be more than external acquiescence to the will of authority. Rather, the companion who obeys his superior is to share the will of the superior, which requires an internal transformation. Conversely, a Jesuit superior's will gains authenticity because it is shaped by his reception of his companions' discernments. Processes of authentication join the superior and his companions in a mutual search for the divine will. By engaging in discernment and processes of authentication with his companions, the superior fosters a union of wills within the community that allows the companions to join together as they participate in Christ's salvific mission.

For the good of the Society, the superior's discernment is further aided by particular persons who are empowered to counsel and raise concerns with the superior about the integration of his personal spirituality with his ministry. These persons become part of the Society's structures that help to ensure its spirituality of discernment will guide its common life and mission. Through these structures, the Society both cares for the superior as a person and also for the well-being of the Society and its mission.

Chapter 5, "Discerning the *Sensus Fidelium*: Episcopal Spirituality and Diocesan Structures," finishes construction on the comparative model of discernment begun in the previous chapters. By following the blueprint of knowing authentically by acknowledging the limited, communal, and transformative ways we receive God's self-gift, it translates insights from Ignatian spirituality into a vision of how the bishop becomes a person of discernment who learns to receive the *sensus fidelium* personally and who responds through his ministry. Through personal practices of discernment, the bishop simultaneously cultivates the habits necessary for growth in holiness and learns to receive the faithful of the local church. By receiving the *sensus fidelium* discerningly, the bishop becomes a symbol of the local church's faith, which in turn shapes his ability to teach within the local church in ways that may be received meaningfully by the faithful and that foster a union of minds. Renovated and newly constructed diocesan structures which embody communal and dialogical processes of authentication are suggested, and persons who are empowered to aid the bishop in integrating his personal spirituality with his ministry of discernment are identified.

Finally, a note about language. As is evident already in this preface, I use the first person frequently in this book. There is a risk of presumption in writing about "we" "us" and "our" with regard to faith and spirituality, but those risks are worth several rewards. First, I write as a Roman Catholic theologian. The ideas and suggestions that unfold in these pages are intended to reflect my position within the church as one member of a family of faith; using the first person reflects my hopes for this family. This is not

intended to exclude “extended family” from other Christian denominations. Rather, it is meant to reflect Vatican II’s indication that Catholics advance in ecumenism in part by attending to the need for renewal within the Roman Catholic Church (UR 4). Refining discernment of the *sensus fidelium* within Roman Catholicism may increase our ability to discern the Holy Spirit at work in other Christian traditions as well. Second, writing critically about spirituality is a step toward abstracting the spiritual life from the people and communities who live it. To avoid further removing spirituality from lived experience and to invite readers to consider more personally the implications of spirituality for their own lives, I have chosen to use more personal language. Third, in these pages I write quite a lot about what the bishop in the local church ought to do; these prescriptions are, however, grounded in a larger vision of what we as a church ought to do. The bishop’s need for personal conversion and learning to fulfill his ministry are part of the universal call to holiness; we are all called to conversion and learning in order to fulfill our baptismal vocation.

This book is the product of several stages of development, and I am deeply grateful for the guidance and support I have received throughout its evolution. Courses with Michael Byron and Patrick Quinn at the St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity formed my early thinking about the Holy Spirit, ecclesiology, and the *sensus fidelium*. Mentors and colleagues in Campus Ministry at the University of St. Thomas shaped my understanding of ministry. As my initial ideas coalesced into a dissertation at Boston College, Michael Himes, my director, offered not only affirmation and support but also many of the theological foundations upon which this project is built. My committee members, Michael Fahey and Catherine Mooney, were generous with both their time and comments and were instrumental in refining my articulation of theology, spirituality, and history. I am thankful for Richard Gaillardetz’s and Ormond Rush’s scholarship as well as for the enthusiasm they expressed for this project as the manuscript took shape. Kevin Ahern, Robert Beck, John Edwards, and John Waldmeir were

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Chapter 1

Receiving God through Each Other: The Church's Apostolic Communion

Rebbe Shmelke of Nikolsburg, it was told, never really heard his teacher, the Maggid of Mezritch, finish a thought because as soon as the latter would say "and the Lord spoke," Shmelke would begin shouting in wonderment, "The Lord spoke, the Lord spoke," and continue shouting until he had to be carried from the room.¹

Perhaps it is easy to forget the awe Rebbe Shmelke feels. We may be so overwhelmed by the noise of our lives that God's words are lost within the daily cacophony, or in the face of evil and suffering we may grapple more with God's silence than with God's words. Yet in both the Jewish and Christian traditions, God speaks to enter into human history and act for salvation. God speaks, and the world is created from a watery chaos; Abraham and Sarah enter a covenant; a people are liberated from oppression into freedom; prophets call for justice. For Christians, God's speech enters the world as Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word.

Implicit in Rebbe Shmelke's wonder are two important aspects of God's speech, or revelation, which are also causes for contemplative awe. First, it is not only that God speaks but also that we

¹ Quoted without further attribution in Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989), 35.

hear. We are capable of receiving God's revelation. Second, we hear God's words through others. God's revelation is mediated via our communication with each other. Our reception of revelation through others is the foundational reason that a Roman Catholic bishop's ministry ought to include discernment of the sense of the faithful. Yet, in order to understand the shape of that discerning ministry and to propose the spiritual practices and church structures that allow it to flourish, we must first understand more about how receiving revelation through others shapes the church's common life of faith.

This chapter explores the intersection of revelation, reception, and the church in four sections. The first, "Receiving God's Self-Gift," views God's revelation as an invitation to join in the divine life. God's invitation to us is received in authentic, limited, communal, and transformative ways. In order to receive and respond well to the invitation, we must engage in discernment that allows us to be both hearers and doers of God's word (Jas 1:22). The second section, "Receiving with the Spirit," considers the Holy Spirit as co-witness with the apostles to revelation. Through the Holy Spirit's faithful presence, the church is in turn empowered to remain faithful to God. Both the ministry of bishops and the sense of the faithful are manifestations of the Spirit's ongoing action within the church and are ways by which God's revelation is known and communicated. Third, "Models of Faithful Reception" investigates how reception is conceived differently in two models of the church: institution and apostolic communion. These models form how the church imagines reception occurring within the church's life and inform how bishops and the faithful receive from each other. The final section, "Receiving with Discernment," follows the contours of the church's reception when it is marked by discernment. Dialogue that incorporates processes of authentication and learning is necessary for the church's full and faithful reception of the God who speaks.

These four sections provide the theological context for the bishop's discernment of the *sensus fidelium*. They point as well to three implications for discernment. First, discernment needs to be

a virtue, that is, discernment is an ongoing and personally transformative habit of episcopal ministry. Second, the bishop's discernment occurs in a church that is both learning and teaching. Episcopal discernment empowers the bishop's teaching ministry because, in his discernment, the bishop learns from others. Third, just as our reception of faith occurs within contexts of culture and history, so too does the bishop's discernment of that faith. The primary context for episcopal discernment of the sense of the faithful is the local church.

I. Receiving God's Self-Gift

Revelation is the communication of God's self, or God's self-gift. Through revelation we do not receive ideas "about God"; rather, we receive God. To be sure, in the process of receiving revelation, we do come to make claims about who God is; in its essence, however, revelation is God's gift of self to us. Through self-gift, God does not remain aloof, waiting apart from humanity in an infinitely prolonged game of hide-and-seek. Instead, by sending the Son and Spirit, God dwells among and within us. *Dei Verbum* describes this mystery:

It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will, which was that people can draw near to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature. By this revelation, then, the invisible God, from the fullness of his love, addresses men and women as his friends, and lives among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company.²

² Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), par. 2, in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations; The Basic Sixteen Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014). Unless otherwise indicated, all citations of Vatican II documents come from the Flannery edition.

God's revelation teaches us not only who God is but also who we are called to be. *Dei Verbum* reminds us that God isn't "just talk": God's self-communication through Christ and the Spirit is an invitation to join in the Trinity's divine life. When we receive God's self-communication, God receives us so that we become "sharers in the divine nature."

Our participation in the divine life is God's saving gift to us, and our salvation begins with that gift's communication. What is the divine life like? Augustine imagined the Trinity itself as loving self-gift. The Father continually gives himself to the Son; the Son continually receives the Father and gives himself in response; and the Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and Son.³ Through this dynamic bond of love arising from mutual self-gift, the Trinity is three persons in one God. If the divine life is a communion flowing from mutual self-communication, then our participation in the divine life will be like it: a communion rooted in communication, a graced reality both created and expressed by receiving each other and giving ourselves in loving self-gift. The path of revelation is one of communication, of self-gift. We walk that path by receiving God's Word, and our journey of reception transforms our capacity to share God's revelation with others.

Reception and response. Our reception of God's self-communication calls for a response. When God's self-communication falls on deaf ears, God's invitation is left unopened. When the invitation is authentically received, however, we discover that God's offer to join in the divine life means that we cannot remain stationary. We are sent by Christ and empowered by the Spirit to walk a path that wends ever-more deeply into the divine life. On that pilgrimage we carry with us not only God's self-gift but also God's way of communicating that gift: the mutual offering and return of love that marks the Trinity. We receive God through our creation in the divine image, the waters of baptism, and consecrated bread and

³ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), vi, 5.

wine of the Eucharist. Yet through the incarnation, God also receives us. God did not use our humanity as a ventriloquist uses a puppet. Rather, the permanence of the union between divine and human in Jesus Christ tells us that if the path of God's revelation is self-communication, then the purpose of that path is communion.

Through the faithful reception of God's self-communication within history, the church comes into being and discovers its mission. The church originates in reception of revelation because through it believers are brought into saving union with the triune God and each other. God's loving address to the human person initiates a graced reciprocity of reception. Through the communication of God's very self in Christ and the Holy Spirit within history, humans are invited to share in the divine life. By receiving God's invitation with faith, believers respond in kind by communicating themselves into union with God and others through their self-gift.⁴ God reveals not in order to communicate propositions but in order to invite humanity into relationship with God's very self. Through the incarnation that invitation takes the form of self-gift, and with the aid of the Holy Spirit the believer receives this gift and responds through loving self-gift as well. This mutual exchange, always initiated and empowered through divine grace, creates the church through communion and propels the church's mission.

⁴J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 17. "If we had to sum up in one word the real context of Salvation, as much individual as collective, announced in the Gospel of God, we would use, following many of the Fathers, *communion*, the word which sums up Acts. It is surely not by chance that down to the present time Jewish and Christian thought have conveyed a view of the 'authentic man,' underlining the fact that the human being finds his authenticity and affirms his full singularity only in communion. According to this thinking, the drama of our history is precisely that man has become an isolated being, creating a broken world in which individuals live side by side without establishing authentic bonds of communion. In this way, humanity has condemned itself in reality to a state of non-existence. It has reduced itself to becoming hardly more than a collage of individuals."

An apostolic reception. The church's apostolicity is based on this mutual reception and is rooted in a communion brought about by the Holy Spirit. The church is apostolic in faith. Through tradition and Scripture, the apostles communicated to others "what they themselves had received" through their own experience of Christ with the aid of the Holy Spirit (DV 7). The content of the apostolic tradition is God's revelation, more particularly, the revelation of the Word incarnate. Yet the church is also apostolic in action. If our mission is to communicate to others *what* we received, we are also empowered to communicate the *way* we received it: authentically, limitedly, communally, and transformatively.

While the Word of God is eternal, the incarnation of the Word occurred within time: "Grace supposes culture, and God's gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it" (EG 115). Just as Jesus' personal communication of God in action, parable, and symbol was shaped by such contexts as first-century Palestine and Second Temple Judaism, so our reception and response to revelation is shaped by our own, multiple contexts. Our communication with God occurs within history, and that historical context means the church's ability to participate faithfully in the conversation requires acknowledgment of the way we know God. Thomas Aquinas's dictum is important: our way of knowing shapes what we know.⁵ More colloquially, this might be translated as "when you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail." The point is that whenever we learn something, we don't come as blank slates but rather with capacities, whether natural, developed, or infused, that give us a certain ability to perceive and understand.

What is our way of knowing as a church? First, we know as human beings, creatures of God who are made in God's image; there exists a correspondence between God and human beings that makes authentic communication with and knowing of God possible. Second, we know as human beings, creatures of God who are historical and finite and therefore limited. God is a mys-

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), I, q. 12, a. 4.

tery who will always go beyond our ability to comprehend completely. Further, we are also impacted by the limitations of sin, both personal and social. In humility, we acknowledge that God communicates with us through—and not simply despite—our limitations. Third, while we can come to know things “for ourselves,” we seldom if ever come to know “by ourselves.” Rather, we are dependent on those who come before us: our communities, families, and friends who help us learn. Fourth, in speaking about the knower as a Christian, the church also affirms that our capacity for knowing and understanding God is transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit. When we become part of Christ’s body in baptism, we begin to share the mind of Christ (Phil 2:1-11). Our love of God and neighbor is the path of self-gift that leads to more intimate communion. This communion itself produces in us a type of knowledge as the Holy Spirit fosters us as daughters and sons of God. The path of knowing that the church walks in order to participate in the divine life is authentic, limited, communal, and transformative. This way of knowing impacts the church’s shared apostolic witness, in other words, our common reception and communication of God’s revelation.

A historical reception. Without attention to how we know, or receive God’s Word of salvation, the church’s ability to judge how we in turn communicate that salvation faithfully is put at risk. While the incarnation teaches us that we should not fear the historical and transitory, as human beings we may be tempted to overcome our finitude by trying to make the momentary into the eternal. The Synoptic Gospels share the story of the transfiguration, literally a “mountaintop moment,” that Peter, in the midst of fear or excitement, wishes to prolong by making three dwellings. Yet for the disciples, the transfiguration is not an invitation to remain in place but is rather a confirmation of Jesus’ prediction that it is necessary to move forward to Jerusalem and the betrayal, suffering, death, and new life that stand on the horizon. For those of us who know the “whole story” the gospels tell, it can be easy to think Peter foolish for not trusting that passion precedes glory for the Son of Man; we know the transfiguration is not the final

chapter. In the midst of our personal lives, however, we may be aware of the times we have mistaken an oasis for the end of the journey. Similarly, it may be difficult for us as a church to discern the difference between the message and the media through which that message is communicated; between the moral and the specific practices by which we live out that moral; between the teaching and the words we use to teach.

If the church grows in its understanding of revelation, it is because we learn anew in each generation to express that revelation in our lives of faith. A literary example helps illustrate the continual need for reception and re-expression. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Collins is clearly delighted when Lady Catherine de Bourgh lowers herself from the heights of the aristocracy to offer her vicar advice; he lauds her "condescension."⁶ In the United States, a country that often imagines itself as radically egalitarian, condescending behavior is not praised but is seen as betraying an inflated sense of self-worth over against another. Not only has the word changed in meaning over time, the differing political and social structures of nineteenth-century Britain and the twenty-first-century United States shape that word's meaning. Something quite similar happens within the church's expression of faith as well. Thomas Aquinas brought to bear both faithfulness and intelligence in describing the church's belief about the Eucharist. His word "transubstantiation" has described this mystery for centuries for Roman Catholics and offered an oasis in the midst of early, quite violent disputes as to the nature of the Eucharist.⁷ Yet Pope Paul VI acknowledged that while the mean-

⁶ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, in *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen*, The Modern Library (New York: Random House, n.d.), 270.

⁷ "[I]t cannot be claimed that the Council of Trent defined anything in regard to the philosophy to be used in interpreting the eucharistic celebration. All we can conclude is that the Council of Trent found in Thomas's Aristotelianism a theological system capable of interpreting the eucharistic doctrine that had matured, and been formulated during, the controversies and discussions of the Middle Ages." Enrico Mazza, *The Celebration of the Eucharist: The Origin of the Rite and the Development of Its Interpretation*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 248.

ing of the Thomistic description needs to be retained, the church also needs to find other ways of explaining its belief.⁸ In a similar vein with regard to the Gospel, Pope Francis explains:

While it is true that some cultures have been closely associated with the preaching of the Gospel and the development of Christian thought, the revealed message is not identified with any of them; its content is transcultural. Hence in the evangelization of new cultures, or cultures which have not received the Christian message, it is not essential to impose a specific cultural form, no matter how beautiful or ancient it may be, together with the Gospel. (EG 117)

Today we do not often describe our reality in terms of substance and accidents; the philosophical ideas that allowed the word “transubstantiation” to be meaningful do not translate with equal coherence to all cultures. As the metaphysical categories Thomas developed from Aristotle have receded in the face of new ways of describing reality, the word “transubstantiation” may be more limited today in its authentic ability to express the church’s faith in a way that allows for that belief to be received communally and transformatively.

Yet the challenge the church faces is not simply one of trying to distinguish between the essence God’s self-gift and the changing

⁸ Paul VI, Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, Vatican website www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_03091965_mysterium_en.html. Paul VI refers to the Council of Trent’s articulation of eucharistic theology, indicating: “These formulas—like the others that the Church used to propose the dogmas of faith—express concepts that are not tied to a certain specific form of human culture, or to a certain level of scientific progress, or to one or another theological school. Instead they set forth what the human mind grasps of reality through necessary and universal experience and what it expresses in apt and exact words, whether it be in ordinary or more refined language. For this reason, these formulas are adapted to all men of all times and all places” (24). Yet Paul VI also recognizes a distinction between the concepts and their expression: “[Expression] can, it is true, be made clearer and more obvious; and doing this is of great benefit. But it must always be done in such a way that they retain the meaning in which they have been used, so that with the advance of an understanding of the faith, the truth of faith will remain unchanged” (25).

ways we communicate this revelation in order that it be received and lived in each generation—though that is crucial. There is also a need to distinguish between those historical and cultural ideas and actions that accrue in the Christian tradition but are not necessarily expressions of revelation, or may even be counter to God’s revelation. For instance, the church’s relationship with chattel slavery has been varied by region and era. At times, both in word and action, Catholics acted to mitigate or prohibit slavery. At other times, however, Catholics both engaged in and fought for slavery. To the extent that Catholics justified slavery through an appeal to the apostolic faith or thought slavery compatible with the Gospel, the church’s apostolic witness was rendered both false and dangerous.⁹

⁹ For primary sources and insight into the social-political context see Kenneth J. Zanca, ed., *American Catholics and Slavery, 1789–1866: An Anthology of Primary Documents* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994). While in 1839 Pope Gregory XVI’s *In Supreme Apostolatus* addressed slavery with vehement opposition, many American Catholics interpreted this as a prohibition on the “slave trade” rather than on slavery itself. American Catholics regarded slavery in various ways, yet even many who abhorred the idea of slavery and expressed compassion for the enslaved made no effort to change the religious, economic, and political practices that justified slavery. Bishop Spalding of Louisville, Kentucky, feared freeing the slaves would end in their loss of faith: “But where the dominant religion is Protestant it becomes very difficult in practice to decide how the slaves can be emancipated to their spiritual and also temporal profit. Almost all the Catholics who are Negroes are found in the states of the South, and those who are emancipated and go to the states of the North become almost all, at least their children, within a short time Protestants, or else indifferent and infidel. In my dioceses, for example, there are from two to three thousand such Catholic Negroes, who are among the best and most devout of my flock. Now I am convinced that if these were suddenly emancipated in the present circumstances of violence and war, they would all be lost to the Church and to heaven: and so would also be the sad result with the others” (211). In addition, the apostolic tradition was used in attempts to uphold slavery. Bishop Verot of St. Augustine, Florida, stated in a sermon: “I wish to show, on the one side, how unjust, iniquitous, unscriptural, and unreasonable is the assertion of Abolitionists, who brand slavery as a moral evil, and a crime against God, religion, humanity and society; whereas, it is found to have received the sanction of God, of the Church, and of society at all times and in all governments. On the other

A discerned reception. Yves Congar is helpful in pointing out two aspects of the church that must be distinguished in order to grasp the differences between creaturely versus sinful limitations on our historical reception of God's self-gift. The first aspect of the church is its divine institution, reflected in essential elements of the church's life such as revelation, sacraments that unite us to God, and the apostolic ministries.¹⁰ Due to these divine roots, the church is an agent of God's salvation; these are institutions that redeem. As God's gifts, these institutions in themselves are not open to change, though our understanding and human expression of them may reflect aspects of the divine mystery more or less clearly. The attempt to find new language to describe our eucharistic beliefs is an example: the sacramental essence of the Eucharist does not change but, rather, our understanding and expression of it may.

In addition to these divine roots, Congar notes a secondary aspect of the church. As the communion of the redeemed, the church's members are in need of salvation; we are still in the midst of a salvific pilgrimage with God and each other. This means that in addition to the natural limits we have as finite beings attempting to live in relationship with the mysterious God, there is another limit, that of sin. So, not only will our expressions of faith fall short, they will also be hindered by personal and social sin. The church is called to trust that the grace of God continues to work through our brokenness and not simply around it. We proclaim a savior who rose after dying broken on a cross, and it is through the crucifixion and not only after it that God is mysteriously at work.

Nevertheless, as an apostolic church growing in communion with God, we also have a responsibility to reflect deeply on our traditions and to discern through them how we are being faithful

side, I wish to show the conditions under which servitude is legitimate, lawful, approved by all laws, and consistent with practical religion and true holiness of life in masters who fulfill those conditions" (202).

¹⁰ Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 85–86.

to God's revelation—or are not. Failure to discern, or poor discernment, may result in a lack of faithfulness to God: the gift is rejected, or our response is stunted. If the church's mission is to be a sacrament of salvation, then a failure to reflect on the essence of that salvation and to translate it thoughtfully into new contexts is a failure in the mission. Such failures in the mission have the potential to damage others' relationships with God and with the community of faith. They can also denigrate and alienate the people with whom the church hopes to share the Good News with the result that the Gospel becomes "bad news" instead. Finally, and ultimately quite related to the church's faithfulness to God and its communication of the Good News to others, lack of discernment between the eternal and historical breeds disagreement and turmoil within the church, threatening relationships of love and justice. Here we may well think of Christian participation in the African slave trade as a scandalous countersign to the Gospel, the effects of which are still all too real today.¹¹

II. Receiving with the Spirit

We are called to be a church that redeems while acknowledging that we ourselves are in progress toward redemption. Without acknowledging the limitations that our creatureliness and sin place on our communication of God's revelation, our knowledge of the apostolic faith that lights the path into the divine life is dimmed. In order to authentically receive and respond to God's

¹¹ Laënnec Hurbon, "The Slave Trade and Black Slavery in America," trans. John Bowden, in *1942–1992: The Voice of the Victims*, ed. Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo (London: SCM Press, 1990), 90–100. In addition to the lasting personal and institutional effects of slavery within the United States, Hurbon argues, "[T]he history of the slave trade and the slavery of the Blacks which began with the discovery of the New World is still part of our modern world and of Western civilization, and is even the background without which neither anti-black racism nor the present under-development of the African continent would be unimaginable" (90).

gift of salvation, however, we also need to account for the Holy Spirit's role in the communal and transformative aspects of reception, which help us to discern God's authentic self-gift within the limits of human finitude and sin.

The apostles' message, mission, and authority came from Christ, and the apostles' witness was a proclamation of salvation. Through their witness to Christ, the apostles communicated salvation authentically.¹² If the apostles were co-missioned by Christ to share in a salvific mission, then the Holy Spirit is co-witness to the authenticity of that salvation.¹³ The Holy Spirit does not constitute the apostolic tradition but, instead, "His role is to actualize, to interiorize, to personalize what Christ said and did once for all men and all times, and thus to *witness with* the apostles or Christians."¹⁴ The Spirit recalls the teaching of Christ to the apostles so it may be handed on; as the ever-faithful witness to Christ, the Spirit ensures that the church's divine institutional roots remain alive even as the Spirit prompts church members to lives of conversion and holiness in faithfulness to our divine roots.¹⁵

Through the Holy Spirit, the recollection of Christ through the apostolic tradition does not become stale or ineffective. Instead, the Holy Spirit acts to deepen the church's insight into revelation, which "involves not merely a fidelity of memory, but also a fidelity of living, vital adherence."¹⁶ The deposit of faith itself is immutable, and nothing can be added to what the apostles received and witnessed in Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, however, the church grows in its understanding of the meaning of that revelation, which is shown both in our ability to recognize the Gospel and our ability to express it in words and action.¹⁷ The Holy Spirit mediates in a dynamic and generative manner between the eternal

¹² Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions* (London: Burns and Oats, 1966), 26.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

God who is revealed within history and the communication of that historical revelation throughout all time.¹⁸

Congar explicates the relationship between communion and the apostolic tradition: "The aim of the apostolic witness as it is transmitted, and its effective result if it is received, is to join or assimilate the faithful to the witnesses themselves. The Church spreads by the association of new disciples to the apostles, and exists essentially as a communion of faith with the apostles."¹⁹ This means the church's union and mission are mutually conditioning; the mission's purpose is communion, and communion empowers and shapes the mission. Thomas Rausch writes, "What resulted from the reception of the apostolic preaching by those who became the converts of the apostles and other early Christian missionaries was the Church itself."²⁰

Sharing the apostolic faith. By the second century, the ministry of handing down and guarding the apostolic tradition was associated with the episcopate.²¹ Through the bishops' teaching ministry, the Spirit makes it possible for the church to confidently confess its ecclesial traditions as authentic expressions of the apostolic tradition.²² Historical and scriptural sources indicate that some form of normative, pastoral leadership centering on witness to Christ, worship, and adjudication of practical concerns is inherently part of the church's faithful practice. These sources also demonstrate that the existence, structure, and relationship of the episcopacy to the local church developed throughout the apostolic and subapostolic periods. The episcopacy is part of the apostolic

¹⁸ Ibid., 22. "The deposit of faith is entrusted to a Church living out historically the history of salvation. It allows for a kind of 'midrashic' activity in actualizing it, and even, in a sense, in bringing it to its full achievement: to preserve it 'with the aid of the Holy Spirit,' is to live by it."

¹⁹ Ibid., 14.

²⁰ Thomas Rausch, "Reception Past and Present," *Theological Studies* 47 (1986): 499.

²¹ J. N. D. Kelly, "'Catholic' and 'Apostolic' in the Early Centuries," *One in Christ* 6, no. 3 (1970): 283.

²² Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 46.

tradition; like all aspects of the apostolic tradition, however, the form a bishop's ministry takes is conditioned and discovered through history and culture.²³

Episcopal ministry is one way the Holy Spirit manifests God's faithfulness to the church; it is, however, not the only way.²⁴ The apostolic succession of the episcopate is contextualized within the apostolicity of the whole church: "[T]he 'hierarchical' function exists within the communion of the *ecclesia*."²⁵ Vatican II's Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, illustrates this understanding of the church. The document does not begin immediately by defining the church but with a meditation on the mystery of the triune God. Within the context of God's mystery, the corresponding mystery of the church is discussed through evocative, scriptural images such as "the people of God" and "body of Christ." Only after describing the entirety of the church in its relationship to God are particular vocations within the church—such as the roles of bishops, laypersons, and religious orders—discussed. While the church believes episcopal ministry is graced with the Spirit, in *Lumen Gentium* the activity of the Spirit throughout the church is also stressed. The church as a whole, and not only the episcopacy, is apostolic.

Three senses of faith. The Holy Spirit's work throughout the church invokes the *sensus fidei* (sense of the faithful person), *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful people), and *consensus fidelium* (consensus of the faithful peoples). These three terms describe how the Holy Spirit works personally and communally to aid the

²³ For an historical and theological examination of the development of the episcopacy in the apostolic and subapostolic church, see Francis A. Sullivan, *From Apostles to Bishops: The Development of the Episcopacy in the Early Church* (New York: The Newman Press, 2001).

²⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 295. Sullivan's scriptural analysis in *From Apostles to Bishops* often references Brown's interpretations from this text, as well as Brown's more explicit exploration of the early church in *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984).

²⁵ Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 45.

church's faithful witness. In maintaining the church's apostolicity within history, the Holy Spirit does not operate on the church but within and through the communion of the faithful. Received into the church, we in turn receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whose internal witness gives knowledge of God through Christ. The *sensus fidei* points to a particular type of knowledge within believers. This knowledge is rooted in personal union and communication with God and the church; it is knowledge gained through the active reception and return of God's love.²⁶ Francis Sullivan describes the *sensus fidei* as both an instinct and a disposition and compares it to the virtue of faith; Zoltán Alszeghy indicates it is "an experiential knowledge based on what has been lived," in contrast to an intellectual knowledge.²⁷ Pope Francis both characterizes the *sensus fidei* as an instinct and links it with the ability to discern "what is truly of God" (EG 119). This instinct for faith is not merely a gauge by which a person of faith determines whether an action or idea coheres with the apostolic tradition. Rather, the *sensus fidei* forms the basis for the believer's life as a daughter or son of God and is also the living expression of faith. Through the *sensus fidei*, the church has not only Scripture but also an authentic and living tradition.²⁸

In the local church, or diocese, the love of God is drawn together and mediated through history and the community of faith. Sullivan distinguishes between the *sensus fidelium*, which refers to the common faith expression of the local community, and the

²⁶ "For what we call the *sensus fidelium* is rooted precisely in this lived margin, this space of truth that emerges between the received Word and what it becomes through the power of the Spirit for the believer who tries to conform himself to it. . . . Thus life itself is a commentary which renders explicit the Word that is received, and this unfolding adds to the understanding of the objective data themselves." J.-M. R. Tillard, "*Sensus Fidelium*," *One in Christ* 11, no. 1 (1975): 15.

²⁷ Francis A. Sullivan, "The Sense of Faith," in *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church*, ed. Bernard Hoose (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 86; Zoltán Alszeghy, "The *Sensus Fidei* and the Development of Dogma," in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, ed. R. Latrouelle, vol. 1 (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 139.

²⁸ For the relationship between the *sensus fidei* and Scripture, see part 2 of Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

consensus fidelium, which indicates agreement in the church's universal communion. The Spirit's abiding presence within the church provides the faithful of the local church with an instinct for both developing and recognizing authentic expressions of faith that accord with the content of revelation transmitted by the apostles.²⁹ Such expressions are clothed with the cultures, histories, languages, and rituals particular to the local church. In a sense, church traditions bear a dual identity. They reflect not only the apostolic faith but also the contexts in which they are expressed. These identities are not necessarily opposed to each other but invite what Pope Francis describes as a synthesis: God's self-communication is embodied in our histories and cultures as the church receives, lives, and hands on its tradition (EG 123, 143).

As the *sensus fidelium* of a local church is received by other churches, a universal *consensus fidelium* may develop. The aim of the *consensus fidelium* is not to flat pack one local church's faith for global distribution to the universal church; rather, the *consensus fidelium* is a recognition that a local church's faith is shared by the universal church as well, though that faith may be expressed diversely through local histories and cultures. The *consensus fidelium* may come forth when the truth to which a local church's *sensus fidelium* points is recognized as contributing to the common good of the local churches in universal communion.³⁰ For example, in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II referred to the preferential option for the poor.³¹ The phrase originated in the local churches of Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s and reflected the cultural synthesis resulting from the Gospel's reception, interpretation, and expression within the political and social

²⁹ The Spirit dwells within the church, though it is well to note that the Holy Spirit is not hypostatically united with the church as the Son's divine nature was united to human nature in the incarnation. The distinction is important: we hold Jesus Christ to be sinless; not so the church, inasmuch as we are the communion of the redeemed and not only the institution that redeems.

³⁰ Sullivan, "The Sense of Faith," 88, 90.

³¹ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991), 11, Vatican website, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html.

context of the poor.³² Here reception is at work both within the Latin American local churches' reception of Scripture and in the universal church's reception of the preferential option for the poor as a universal *consensus fidelium*. Gustavo Gutierrez writes that the preferential option for the poor is "the most substantial part of the contribution from the life and theological reflection of the Church in Latin America to the universal church."³³ In turn, as the preferential option for the poor is received by local churches as the *consensus fidelium*, it is interpreted and expressed through the cultures and histories of those local churches.

The bishop and the sensus fidelium. *Lumen Gentium* states, "The whole body of the faithful who have received an anointing which comes from the holy one cannot be mistaken in belief. It shows this characteristic through the entire people's supernatural sense of the faith when, 'from the bishops to the last of the faithful,' it manifests a universal consensus in matters of faith and morals" (LG 12).³⁴ Here the *sensus fidei* is upheld as an essential element of

³² "This commitment—the expression 'preferential option for the poor' is recent but its content is biblical—is an essential component of discipleship." Gustavo Gutierrez, "The Option for the Poor Arises from Faith in Christ," *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 319.

³³ *Ibid.*, 318.

³⁴ This statement from *Lumen Gentium* is open to two related criticisms. First, is consensus in the church ever erroneous, that is, consensus about something antithetical to the apostolic faith? The historical record seems to indicate at certain times and places the church reached consensus about praxes it later abandoned or condemned. Second, in critiquing Vicentius's statement that "Christianity is what has been held always, everywhere, and by all," Newman writes, "[W]hat is meant by being 'taught *always*?' does it mean in every century, or every year, or every month? Does '*everywhere*' mean in every country, or in every diocese? . . . [H]ow many Fathers, how many places, how many instances constitute a fulfillment of the test proposed?" John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2007), 76. As a criterion for determining the church's faith, *Lumen Gentium*'s statement presents the same difficulties as does Vicentius's. *Lumen Gentium* 12 may be nuanced in two ways that are justified by its context within the constitution. First, not every consensus within the church is a manifestation of the apostolic faith; instead, consensus about the apostolic faith must be reached through ecclesial discernment. Second, the statement need not be interpreted as a criterion

the church's faithful response that incarnates the Gospel throughout history. This faithfulness is not first based on the holiness of the church's members but is rooted in God's faithfulness to the church through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, the apostolic faith of believers is "aroused and sustained" as a living, embodied tradition (LG 12). Further, the *sensus fidei* is a gift shared by all within the church.³⁵ It provides the context for the bishops' role in the church's apostolicity.³⁶ J.-M. R. Tillard writes:

[I]n all this the Magisterium acts "in osmosis" with the *sensus fidelium*. Not that it therefore trails behind popular faith, contenting itself with ratifying what the latter perceives. It exercises a function of its own, a function which the Spirit has not entrusted to others. But this function requires that the Magisterium should draw from the very life of the People of God

for adjudicating truth, but rather as an affirmation of belief in the Holy Spirit who witnesses to the apostolic faith throughout the church and not only within the hierarchy.

³⁵ Tillard interprets 1 John 2:27 as the bestowal of a lasting anointing by the Spirit through which "that teaching of Jesus, present in the believer, gives him the intimate meaning of the truth (vv. 20–21), and instructs him in all things; the Christian is henceforth 'born of the Spirit' (John 3:8). Having arrived at this degree of spiritual maturity he has no more need to be taught (1 John 2:27): the only thing that still matters is that he should remain in Jesus and allow himself to be taught by God (cf. John 6:45)." J.-M. R. Tillard, "*Sensus Fidelium*," *One in Christ* 11, no. 1 (1975): 13–14. This interpretation points to two aspects of the *sensus fidei*. First, it underscores the inalienability of the Holy Spirit's presence through the sacrament of baptism. Second, however, it alludes to the dialectic of grace and sin: one may respond more or less fully to the Spirit, and therefore one's life may be a greater or lesser expression of the *sensus fidei*.

³⁶ The term "magisterium" has held various meanings in church history and has thus been used to describe diverse groups within the church. I will follow Francis Sullivan, who notes that "in modern Catholic usage, the term 'magisterium' has come to be associated almost exclusively with the teaching role and authority of the hierarchy. An even more recent development is that the term 'magisterium' is often used to refer not to the teaching office as such, but to the body of men who exercise this office in the church: namely, the pope and bishops." Francis Sullivan, "Magisterium," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak et al. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987), 617–23.

the reality to be discerned, judged, and promulgated or “defined.” For it has to exercise all its activity upon the Word *as received and lived* in the Church.³⁷

The *sensus fidelium* is not an inferior source of authority but is rather a foundation for the teaching authority of bishops. Through their participation in and reception of the *sensus fidelium*, bishops are formed in their own ability to know God and thus to minister for the good of the church’s communion and mission.

III. Models of Faithful Reception

If the church communicates for communion, we must ask what communicative models mark the church, and what practical consequences they hold for a mutual reception of self-gift that is both reflective of and sustained by God’s grace. A model is not monolithic and may not capture everything that occurs within the church. Yet models can be helpful for pointing out certain tendencies, strengths, and weaknesses that are influential for how we perceive God, the church, and each other. Models seek to describe what is happening in the church’s life but can also serve as corrective prescriptions for our practices that help us better envision and embody the church.

Since Vatican II, the ecclesiology of communion has become a primary model for how the Roman Catholic Church imagines itself. The council’s dual retrieval of the scriptural images of the body of Christ and people of God in such documents as *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* has implications for the church’s practice and structures and contrasts with how the church tended to view itself in the centuries immediately preceding Vatican II.

³⁷ Tillard, “*Sensus Fidelium*,” 28. Italics in original. “Those having a responsibility in the leadership of the Church have, indeed, to *recognise* with their own charism and *receive* this *sensus fidelium* in which they also participate, as baptized Christians.” J.-M. R. Tillard, “Reception-Communion,” *One in Christ* 28, no. 4 (1992): 319. Italics in original.

The imaginative shift in the church's self-perception has to do with how we understand reception within the church and what we ought to do to foster it.

Reception in an institution. Partly in response to Reformation ecclesiology, in the centuries preceding the Second Vatican Council, an institutional model of the church developed. Whereas Congar refers to the church's institutions as its rootedness in God's salvific gifts, Avery Dulles employs the phrase "institutional model" to describe a view of the church that prioritizes hierarchical ministries and emphasizes the church's organizational structure.³⁸ The institutional model gained prominence due to the polemics of the Reformation. Martin Luther emphasized justification as an interior reality and criticized some external trappings of the Roman Catholic Church as offering an illusory path to salvation rooted in human endeavor rather than divine grace. This led some Roman Catholic theologians to conclude that Luther believed the "true" church to be an invisible, internal reality. In other words, these theologians thought Luther eschewed the ways in which the church is made visible through its practices and structures.³⁹ Robert Bellarmine's description of the church at the beginning of the seventeenth century displays a Catholic response to this reading of Luther's ecclesiology. Bellarmine defined the church as a visible society composed of rational beings united by the profession of the same faith and the reception of sacraments,

³⁸ See Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1978), 39–50.

³⁹ Michael Himes, "The Development of Ecclesiology: Modernity to the Twentieth Century," in *The Gift of the Church*, ed. Peter Phan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 47. *De servo arbitrio, D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar, 1883–), 18:652. "Luther had cautioned that 'the church is hidden and the saints are unknown' and on occasion expressed his insistence on the word of God as the sole authority in the Church by denouncing canon law and hierarchical authority, especially that of the papacy and episcopacy. Read unsympathetically, such statements seemed to lead to the conclusion that there are two quite different meanings of the word 'church': one, the true Church known by God and revealed at the final judgment, and the other, the earthly institution whose membership might or (more likely) might not coincide with the true Church."

under the headship of legitimate pastors, most particularly Christ's earthly vicar, the pope.⁴⁰

As a response to Luther's ecclesiology as interpreted by Roman Catholics, this definition of the church works well: Bellarmine points to the incarnational quality of the church. Our expression of a common faith is embodied within history through sacraments and structures. In our own time, which has suspicion of institutions, often for serious causes, Bellarmine's definition also reminds us that leadership has the potential to be sacramental and not only scandalous. Further, the definition's emphasis on the church as a "rational society" means that just as faith and reason may be brought together beneficially in Catholic theology, the very life of the church also invites our rational affectivity as an essential element of the church's full humanity.⁴¹

The definition's serious liability is that it makes no mention of two persons of the Trinity and refers to Christ only in terms of his vicar. Abstracted from his own further theological reflections and a historical context that included many attempts at episcopal and ecclesial reform, Bellarmine's definition promotes a view of the church as first and foremost a social body with laws, functions, and authorities rather than as a graced communion of the triune God with humanity.⁴² David J. Stagaman writes that in this definition of the church, which was widely disseminated through the

⁴⁰ Himes, "The Development of Ecclesiology," 47. Himes quotes Bellarmine's definition from *Disputationes de controversiis Christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos*, 3 vols. (Ingolstadt, 1586–1593), 4.3.2.

⁴¹ Here I presume that in Bellarmine's time we may still be able to describe our emotional lives as part of our rational natures rather than as alien to it.

⁴² For example, underscoring the bishop's role was not necessarily (or at least not only) an imposition of episcopal power but may also have been a reminder to absentee bishops of the necessity of residency in order to minister to the souls in their care. Lack of residency was a chronic problem in the Middle Ages. Bishops varied widely in their commitment to their ministry and, if in residence, their way of responding to the needs of the local church, secular power dynamics, and relationship to the papacy. Though from an earlier period, Southern offers enlightening depictions of episcopal variety in the thirteenth century: R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 190–210. Further, Bellarmine's definition aside, the Middle Ages also saw the rise of conciliarism in the church, which reflected ongoing negotia-

manuals used to train seminarians, "Ecclesiology becomes hierarchy, the Church a fixed and set structure of offices where issues of authority are paramount."⁴³ In the nineteenth century, the institutional model's focus on the bishops to the exclusion of the laity led to Giovanni Perrone's division of the church into two factions: the *ecclesia docens* (teaching church), or bishops, of whom the term "church" was most properly predicated, and the *ecclesia discens* (learning church), or the laity, who "were to accept what they had been taught based on the authority of the teaching Church."⁴⁴

One of the dangers of a sharp distinction between the teaching and learning church is that it contributes to institutionalism: focus is given to the church's leadership and law, rather than to the abiding presence and continuing activity of the Holy Spirit throughout the church.⁴⁵ By dividing the church into two camps, the mutual reception and response involved in communication for communion

tions over the origin and location of authority within the church, as well as the church's relationship with secular power.

⁴³ David J. Stagaman, *Authority in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 109, 110.

⁴⁴ Bernard P. Prusak, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology through the Centuries* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 249–50. Here the bishops' ability to teach authoritatively is abstracted from their ministry, and "magisterium" is made coterminous with "episcopacy." Perrone's was not the only ecclesiology of the period, and he was influenced by Johann Adam Möhler's presentations of ecclesiology grounded in the activity of the Holy Spirit and Christ. Nevertheless, ultramontaniam, which Perrone promoted at Vatican I, "was an attempt to ensure the unity and good order of the Church by creating a highly centralized, omniscient papacy exercising its authority through a hierarchical chain of command in which the bishops were the principal links." Himes, "The Development of Ecclesiology," 60.

⁴⁵ The theoretical models of the church prevalent at any one period of the church's history do not, of course, preclude the Holy Spirit's presence within the church. "God is mediated through historical circumstances, not above, below, or around those circumstances," and that mediation is first and foremost the result of God's faithfulness. Michael J. Himes, "The Ecclesiological Significance of the Reception of Doctrine," *The Heythrop Journal* 33, no. 2 (April 1992): 150. Nevertheless, theory may deeply influence practices and relationships, and the ecclesiological question is what concepts of "church" nurture human cooperation with the Spirit and with each other.

is obscured. Instead, the Holy Spirit provides the hierarchy with the authority to communicate truth and renders the laity docile to magisterial teaching. In this unidirectional form of reception, the bishops are not dependent on the church; rather, through their reception of the Holy Spirit, bishops become the sole architects of communion and the independent arbiters of apostolicity. Exclusive attention to the hierarchy as “giving” and the laity as “receiving” narrows authority to apostolic succession. The result is that the bishops’ ministry is no longer contextualized within the apostolicity of the whole church, and the need for bishops to receive the faith through the *sensus fidelium* is unrecognized.

A time of transition. While Vatican II highlighted the church as a communion, in turning to a second communicative model it is well to remember that the institutional model stands close to us in the church’s historical journey. Practices and structures—whether societal or ecclesial—do not adapt easily to new paradigms and may require our conversion on several levels. The institutional model may still be the lens through which we view communion, so that the body of Christ is seen primarily as the union that results from assent to magisterial teaching. Further, as Pope Francis has noted, the church as a communion may become guilty of a “spiritual worldliness,” craning inward upon itself to such a degree that turning to look outward becomes a pain in the neck, restricting the church’s range of mission (EG 93–94). In describing the church as a communion, then, it is also necessary to remember that the Holy Spirit not only makes the church one but also holy, catholic, and apostolic. Through the creedal marks of the church, communion is deeply linked to apostolicity: the church’s communion is marked by Christ’s co-missioning and the Spirit’s co-witnessing, and the church is a body sent forth on a pilgrimage of salvation. This pilgrimage is our lived response to God’s gift.

By exercising our responsibility as a communion of pilgrim witnesses, the church cultivates holiness by receiving more deeply the mystery of our own salvation and incarnates catholicity as we learn to offer ourselves as a sacrament of salvation within diverse

cultures and contexts.⁴⁶ Reflection on the church's interior life ought not be an exercise in parochialism in which the church's communion becomes a sanctuary of complacency or self-sufficiency (something to which any group is susceptible); rather, it is an opportunity for dynamic reengagement with the diverse members of one body who have a common call to apostolic mission, holiness, and catholicity. A communion that is spiritually worldly and overly influenced by institutionalism may be distinguished from a communion that is enlivened by mission by describing the second model of the church as an apostolic communion. This model holds together the church's union and mission by uniting two metaphors: the church as the body of Christ in pilgrimage as the people of God.⁴⁷

Reception in an apostolic communion. In an apostolic communion, the church as a whole is both teaching and learning through mutual communication and reception. Reception, lived out in the church's mission, occurs within the church's communion in several ways: we receive from God, through each other, and as a communion of churches. First, God's initiative in self-communication is the foundation for all ecclesial reception. Communion in God, the source and goal of the human person, occurs through the reception of God's self-gift offered through the divine missions of the Son and

⁴⁶ EG 116. "In the diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with its own culture, the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the 'beauty of her varied face.' In the Christian customs of an evangelized people, the Holy Spirit adorns the Church, showing her new aspects of revelation and giving her a new face."

⁴⁷ The *Final Report* from the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops stated, "The ecclesiology of communion is a central and fundamental idea in the documents of the [Second Vatican] council." 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, *The Final Report*, AFER 28, nos. 1–2 (February–April 1986), C1. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis prefers the metaphor of the people of God to that of the Body of Christ: "The Church, as the agent of evangelization, is more than an organic and hierarchical institution; she is first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God. She is certainly a *mystery* rooted in the Trinity, yet she exists concretely in history as a people of pilgrims and evangelizers, transcending any institutional expression, however necessary" (111; emphasis in original).

Spirit. Christianity is based on the claim that through God's gracious and new initiative, the human person's final end is communion with God. Though this final end is beyond humanity's natural powers to attain, God's revelation of the final end is undertaken in such a way as to take account of our humanity, most explicitly in the incarnation.⁴⁸ Neither is the church abandoned to the waiting room of history but, rather, we receive the Spirit as companion for our pilgrimage. When we nourish God's gift by giving ourselves in a mission of love, the church's path becomes a history of salvation, stretching out to the fullness of the kingdom. Through this spiritual and historical process we are incorporated into Christ, and Christ is incorporated into us.⁴⁹

The basis for active reception of God's self-communication is the divine word proclaimed and the human "Amen" given to that word. Through this reception, the word is not simply heard but also put into practice.

In the Church of God . . . nothing exists which is not "communion," beginning evidently with love. That brings in also in a very full way the Word of truth, which is not reduced to a pure intellectual proclamation. It is inseparably Word pronounced and Word accepted, Word declared and Word "received," announcement and *Amen* declared on this announcement to the point that one cannot be in the truth without also "putting it" into action.⁵⁰

Through reception, God's authentic self-gift is transformed into a word of life-giving faith, which in turn transforms the recipients into a communion through their lived response. To receive Christ is to be drawn into the life of communion with God and thus to live out that communion's mission in love.

⁴⁸ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 238.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁵⁰ Tillard, *Church of Churches*, 125.

Tillard also reminds us that Christians are not born but rather are made through divine adoption.⁵¹ Christian identity comes through entrance into the church, which is transformative: "To become a Christian, one needs to be *received* into the communion of all those who share this divine origin. It concretely means to be *received* into the communion of the Church and to *receive* there, together with faith, the eschatological gifts of God. Christian identity is acquired only through this *reception*, never by human birth."⁵² Received into the church, the believer in turn receives the eschatological gifts of God, in which the once-for-all of Christ's death and resurrection are continually made present and which call the church forward on its journey into the fullness of life in God.

Tillard's description of the church's reception of God opens to a second form of reception within an apostolic communion: among the faithful. Our faith is received through the mediation of others, and Congar comments, "[I]t is normal for persons to depend on one another in order to achieve their supernatural destiny."⁵³ The faith received results not only in a communion with God but also in fellowship with others. Believers share a communal consciousness such that the ground of their relationship with God and encounter with the world is based in the same revelation.⁵⁴ Congar indicates: "The unity of persons in the Church is not a 'fusion,' but a 'communion': a large number of persons possess in common the same realities . . . as the content of their inner life, their memory and thus of their consciousness. Thus they are not conscious

⁵¹ J.-M. R. Tillard, "Tradition, Reception," in *The Quadrilog: Tradition and the Future of Ecumenism*, ed. Kenneth Hagen (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 330. "Since the city of the Christians 'is in heaven' (Phil 3:20) and because Christians are 'fellow-citizens of the saints of the household of God' (Eph 2:19), no one on earth is Christian by birth. The johannine Gospel speaks of the necessity of a rebirth, a birth from above, a birth out of water and Spirit."

⁵² *Ibid.*, 331. Italics in original.

⁵³ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 241.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 314–15.

of their *personal* opinions but of the teaching of *the Church* that derives from the apostles."⁵⁵

Congar construes faith not as opinion but as a conviction whose content is given to us by others in unity with the apostles.⁵⁶ The church's apostolicity, characteristic of all believers through their baptism, means all believers are "missionary disciples," responsible witnesses of revelation who have a role in incarnating and handing on the apostolic tradition (EG 120). The same Spirit who enables the individual's reception of and response to the Word also joins the individual believer to the communal confession of the church. We know God personally because we receive God communally.

Third, in an apostolic communion we receive God not only through each other personally but also as a "church of churches." Tillard writes that we come to faith as living, independent subjects. The local church is a communion of these believing subjects. The bishop's faith is the faith of his local church, and he represents the faith of that church to the other churches for recognition as apostolic.⁵⁷ The grounding of each local church in the apostolic tradition through the Holy Spirit allows local churches to receive one another and thus to have a universal communion. Conversely, through this process of reception, the universal church is present in the local church:

But the fact that the Churches are, in their communion of faith and life, one single and unique Church of God, marks their reciprocal relationships. It is put into practice and expressed by their "reception": they mutually "receive" each other as Church. . . . This possibility of "reception" of doctrine, of canons, of liturgical forms, decisions of one Church by the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 320. Italics in original.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁵⁷ Tillard, *Church of Churches*, 134. "The faith of the bishop is, in reality, that of his Church. In old practice, besides, his Church presented him for ordination because it recognized in his faith the deposit transmitted to it and preserved by it."

others has always been perceived as a very basic consequence of *communion* in faith.⁵⁸

Mutual reception within and among local churches is necessarily a continuous process of confirming the churches' faithfulness to the apostolic tradition and thus advancing their unity. The bishop's ministry is essential for the process of reception among local churches which forms the *consensus fidelium* of the universal church: bishops receive the *sensus fidelium* of their local church, communicate that faith to the universal church, and in turn offer the mind of the universal church to the local church.⁵⁹ Thus the bishop's growth into a personal symbol of the local church's *sensus fidelium* is vital for the church's faith as a whole.

By attending to multiple forms of reception, imagining the church as an apostolic communion paints a more complex picture of the church's communication for communion than does the institutional model. In the latter model, the process of receiving God's saving revelation is fairly straightforward; however consistently the model may function in practice, we nevertheless have a clear "flow chart" of reception: from God to the bishops to the rest of the church. Reception in an apostolic communion does not flow in straight lines of command. Rather, there are intersecting circles of mutual influence: families, parishes, religious orders, local churches, ecumenical initiatives, ecclesial organizations for

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See Richard Gaillardetz, "The Reception of Doctrine: New Perspectives," in *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church*, ed. Bernard Hoose (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 108–10. Also: "Reception also involves formal decisions on the part of those authorities who represent and serve the unity of the Church. In the classical model of reception the bishop symbolized the link between the local church and the apostolic Church; the bishops also maintained the communion between the local church and the universal Church by participating in conciliar gatherings. Sometimes it was the role of the bishops in council to initiate a process of reception through formal conciliar decisions. . . . Sometimes the authority of the bishops served to give formal approval to a process of reception already underway, thus bringing the process to a juridical close." Thomas Rausch, "Reception Past and Present," *Theological Studies* 47 (1986): 503.

charity and justice, parochial schools, national bishops' conferences, synods, the curia, and papacy. Reception in this model of the church is far from easy to systematize, though it does better reflect the interdependence and messiness of human history. How in the midst of these intersecting circles are we to distinguish between God's salvation and changing historical expressions of it? Between authentic interpretations of the Gospel and sinful distortions? How can we be transformed together into the body of Christ and walk faithfully as the people of God?

IV. Receiving with Discernment

The questions raised by reception in an apostolic communion call for reflection on forms of ecclesial discernment—in other words, discernment that is undertaken both personally and communally in order to receive and respond to God's self-gift authentically and formatively. Our ability to discern is grounded in the *sensus fidei*. Yet if this baptismal gift of the Spirit is to be fruitful, it must be unwrapped by the graced choices we make to be good receivers. Even though discernment may be sacramentally innate through the *sensus fidei*, discerning is a way of knowing—of receiving—that requires thoughtful development. Later chapters will investigate spiritual practices and church structures that assist discernment's development. Yet the apostolic communion model itself points to contours of discernment that bear keeping in mind.

Discernment and dialogue. Since the church comes to know God through reception of the divine self-gift, an apostolic communion challenges a strict division of the church into the *ecclesia docens*—the bishops who teach and transmit—and the *ecclesia discens*—the laity who learn and receive. The assertion that the apostolic tradition is entrusted to the entire church and that the Holy Spirit works throughout the church to further the reception and communication of the apostolic faith emphasizes that the bishops do not have a privileged source of revelation apart from the church, and that the entire people of God has a role in the church's salvific mission.

Though division of the church into two factions of “teachers” and “learners” is not tenable in an apostolic communion, it may still be said of the church that it is, as a whole, both teaching and learning.⁶⁰

The church’s teaching and learning, shared in diverse ways by the laity and bishops, maintain the church in its apostolic communion. Ormond Rush describes the truth communicated in institutional ecclesiology as “*monologic orthodoxy* in which the truth comes from above from a single authority.”⁶¹ In contrast, in order to promote apostolic unity, communion ecclesiology “presupposes a *dialogic orthodoxy* in which the truth is discovered ‘from below’ through a process of dialogue.”⁶²

One of the benefits of promoting dialogue is the opportunity to engage more closely with those with whom our faith is shared and to discern the relationship between action, intent, and meaning. In his important essay “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine,” John Henry Newman used the word “consult” in a quite narrow manner, which emphasized how faithful practices are observed: “Doubtless [the laity’s] advice, their opinion, their judgment on the question of definition is not asked; but the matter of fact, viz. their belief is sought for, as a testimony to that apostolical tradition, on which alone any doctrine whatsoever can be

⁶⁰ “*Docens* and *discens* are two determinants of the same, sole community; they are two adjectives which qualify two functions of the whole community; they are not two nouns which introduce a dichotomy in the community. To be both teacher and learner emerges as a dual function of one and the same Church and not as two fractions of the Church or within the Church.” Leonardo Boff, “*Ecclesia Docens* and *Ecclesia Discens*,” in *Who Has a Say in the Church?*, ed. Jürgen Moltmann and Hans Küng (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 48.

⁶¹ Ormond Rush, “Determining Catholic Orthodoxy: Monologue or Dialogue,” *Pacifica* 12, no. 2 (June 1999): 126. Emphasis in original. See Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 47–48. Dulles’s list of the benefits of this model includes a foundation for the uncertainties of the present in a past which is considered secure and a strong sense of one’s identity in relationship to one’s church.

⁶² Rush, “Determining Catholic Orthodoxy,” 126. Emphasis in original.

defined.”⁶³ For Newman, the “*fidelium sensus* and *consensus*” is a “branch of evidence,” and he compares them to a clock which might be “consulted” for the time of day.⁶⁴ Newman’s argument encountered fierce criticism in his own time, which tended to institutional ecclesiology. Within an apostolic communion, however, consultation may be understood more broadly.⁶⁵ Dialogical consultation may better allow for the meaning and purpose behind faithful behaviors to be disclosed and thus diminish the observer’s tendency to superimpose her or his own explanations onto the observed behavior. It is one thing, for example, to observe faithful Christians engaged in devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe; one goes a step further by inquiring of the faithful what their piety means in relation to the church, their families, and their cultural and political contexts.⁶⁶ In other words, dialogue allows us to

⁶³ John Henry Newman, “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine,” in *Conscience, Consensus, and the Development of Doctrine* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 393.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 392–93. Newman indicates that he uses the word “consult” in its popular meaning as in “consulting our barometer” or to “consult a watch or a sun-dial,” as opposed to its more technical meaning of “consult *with*” or “take *counsel*.” Thus the quotation above continues: “In like manner, we may ‘consult’ the liturgies or the rites of the Church; not that [they] can take part whatever in the definition, for they are documents or customs; but they are witnesses” (393). In the context of communion ecclesiology, Newman’s view of consultation with the laity is the minimal requirement for reception of the *sensus fidelium*; the more technical terminology, which he does not intend to employ in this essay, is both appropriate and necessary.

⁶⁶ The necessity of dialogue in the consultation process reflects “a philosophic change since Newman’s day, from an epistemological question, how the church knows the truth of the faith tradition, to a hermeneutical question, how the church, in different times and places, comes to understand the faith tradition. Communication of the faith from the church in one time and place to another requires delicate instruments of interpretation if the catholicity of the faith is not to be lost.” Paul G. Crowley, “Catholicism, Inculturation and Newman’s *Sensus Fidelium*,” *The Heythrop Journal* 33, no. 2 (April 1992): 168. Francis highlights the importance of popular piety for the inculturation of the Gospel: “Nor is it devoid of content; rather it discovers and expresses that content more by way of symbols than by discursive reasoning, and in the act of faith greater accent is placed on *credere in Deum* than on *credere Deum*” (124). Dialogical consultation aims at

discern—or see—further into others’ witness and opens up the possibility for a deeper reception of one another’s *sensus fidei*, a necessary step in knowing the *sensus fidelium*.

The purpose of discerning via dialogue is the church’s diverse unity in mission. In monological orthodoxy, the requirement for unity may be mere uniformity. Conversely, dialogically based unity better allows for diversity because through it the church learns to recognize an underlying consensus of faith woven through diverse cultures and practices. After discussing the limitations of orthodoxy upheld by a monolithic unity based in hierarchical authority, on the one hand, and orthodoxy that devolves into “totally incommunicable liberal pluralism,” on the other, Walter Kasper indicates “the only alternative is orthodoxy regarded as a process based on dialogue. This approach is based on the conviction that truth in the Church has to emerge from a process of dialogue between all the charisms and tendencies.”⁶⁷ Dialogue aims at forming consensus in the church through the process of listening. Thus dialogue toward consensus involves, and implicates, all members of the church in a spiritual process.⁶⁸ Dialogue serves as discernment’s context and catalyst.

Discernment and authorities. The role of the people of God in the reception and transmission of the apostolic faith poses the challenge of recognizing diverse sources of authority. While the institutional model associated authority with the hierarchy alone, in

developing the faithful’s reflective interpretation of their piety as well as gaining through that reflection a greater insight into the *sensus fidelium*.

⁶⁷ Walter Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 150.

⁶⁸ Kasper describes an epistemology “which differs from both authoritarian and from democratic processes of decision. Consensus in faith and the determination of a consensus is a spiritual process. It can only be detected by the *sensus fidei* produced by the Spirit, an interior feel, a sort of sixth sense for faith. . . . Often a purely intellectual process will not produce agreement or clarity about where truth ends and error begins. Nevertheless the Church must make unequivocal statements at least on fundamentals. This is only possible by spiritual judgment. The only way to be sure of the shared truth in the faith is by doing the truth together.” *Ibid.*, 145.

an apostolic communion authority arises from the co-witness of the Spirit shared by all Christians through their baptism. Kasper indicates that dialogue is the mark of genuine authority within the church, and it is therefore particularly incumbent on the bishops:

Institutionalized authority is—or is meant to be—something like institutionalized freedom. It ought to be a centre of communication, responsible for seeing that everyone has a say. In this general dialogue it ought to articulate and emphasize shared basic convictions, but too often it is prevented from doing so by its own isolation and inability to communicate. Today in the Church we suffer, not from an excess of authority, but from a lack of genuine authority which is in a position to articulate the faith that is binding on all in such a way that all people of good will can see themselves represented in it and a consensus is created.⁶⁹

Here Kasper construes authority in terms of how bishops do—or do not—foster dialogue and guide the church in orthodoxy. A discussion of authority also introduces questions of obedience in a church whose members are each graced by the Holy Spirit to be responsible communicators of the apostolic faith. Kasper writes, “An attitude of obedience to ecclesiastical authority is not the principal expression of the ecclesiality of faith. Membership of the Church is not demonstrated by blind obedience, but by listening to others and being willing to accommodate them.”⁷⁰ Empowered by the Spirit, all the baptized may communicate authentic knowledge of God; all the baptized are sources of authority within the

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 148. See also Sullivan: “As we have seen above, the basic notion of *koinonia* is sharing or participation. Hence, the exercise of hierarchical authority will meet the requirements of an ecclesiology of communion to the extent that it promotes the participation in the life of the Church of all its members, according to the gifts and capacities of each. On the contrary, authority will fail to meet the requirements of an ecclesiology of communion when it so restricts active participation to the few, that the many are prevented from having that share in the life of the Church of which they are capable.” Francis Sullivan, “Authority in an Ecclesiology of Communion,” *New Theology Review* 10, no. 3 (August 1997): 24.

⁷⁰ Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith*, 143.

church. Yet if this is the case, how can we understand obedience in the church?

Nicholas Lash helps to address this question by contextualizing the relationship of authority and obedience within the greater question of how truth is known. Religious belief is not a different kind of knowing from other knowledge; in our knowing we “believe” many things that have not been proven demonstrably to us.⁷¹ We can, however, ask for authentication for our belief.⁷² Central to Lash’s question is whether truth is something that human beings create, or whether it is received and therefore something that calls for discernment, appropriation, and creativity.

Part of discerning authoritative sources within the church is acknowledging that each human authority is limited. Since no single human authority can stand in place of the absolute authority of God, both authority and obedience are the result of recognition, or discernment, of the truth through multiple, particular authorities.⁷³ Lash writes, “Ultimately, the only authority is the authority of truth: the truth that is God, the source and ground of all truth. The ‘problem’ of authority, therefore, is the problem of establishing criteria for the discernment and prosecution of truth: for ‘hearing’ the truth and ‘doing’ it.”⁷⁴ A variety of authorities, however, presents the need to foster a common mission, which through the Spirit is both the church’s gracious reality and essential responsibility.⁷⁵

Having set up the problem of authority within a church that is in its entirety the communicator of the apostolic tradition, Lash asks: “Where the christian discernment and appropriation of truth is concerned, in what sense can there be experts who ‘know,’ who stand in relationship to Christ such that, as mediators of his knowledge of God, they are entitled to be the recipients of unqualified

⁷¹ Nicholas Lash, *Voices of Authority* (Shepherdstown, WV: Patmos Press, 1976), 79. Here, as elsewhere in this book, Lash is deeply influenced by John Henry Newman.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

trust on the part of the rest of the believing community?"⁷⁶ To answer this question, he follows Newman's thought in *Lectures on the Prophetic Office* by inquiring whether church leaders, scholars, or saints can be the ones who "know." Church leaders manifest God's fidelity to the church when in particular circumstances and through divine assistance they define a teaching as somehow normative for the life of the church. Bishops do not have access to a source of revelation apart from the church, however, and thus it seems they cannot be the only ones who know.⁷⁷ Scholars have technical expertise in some sources of Christian knowing; this expertise, however, can yield quite varied interpretations, and scholarly sources are not the only sources of Christian knowledge.⁷⁸ Finally, while saints do exemplify the relationship between holiness and knowledge of God, Lash notes that having one's heart in the right place is perfectly compatible with being wrongheaded.⁷⁹ Thus each of these groups has something to offer to Christian knowing, but no one group is at all times the only authoritative source for all Christian knowing. Lash concludes that these three groups, "symbolically" representative of the three-fold office of Christ, must remain in creative tension with one another:⁸⁰

This tension, which is constitutive and not destructive of the believing community, will be, at one level, a tension between groups of functionaries—between church leaders and scholars, for example. At another level it will often be a tension which the individual christian experiences within himself: a tension between pastoral prudence and scholarly integrity, for example; or between the trustful generosity of living faith and the caution characteristic of scholarly enquiry.⁸¹

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 91–92.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 92–94.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 95–96.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

If Lash is correct about the necessity of this tension in the church, then no one authority may claim to stand alone; we must discern the truth these authorities know personally because the church participates in knowledge of God communally. For Lash, obedience is found in the recognition of truth, and not merely in acquiescence to the authority who communicates that truth. The problem of authority is the “criteria on the basis of which truth, both practical and theoretical, is discerned, responded to, appropriated, and embodied.”⁸² Within Lash’s conception, we may give obedience to each of these three general groups within the church, but that obedience need not be blind. Asking for truth to be authenticated does not remove the possibility of an obedient response to the truth expressed through these authorities; rather, it renders obedience a more complete expression of the believer’s acquiescence to God.⁸³ Lash writes:

We are saved by Christ’s obedience not because it was blind but because it was obedience, because it was unswerving and total response to perceived truth. This is not to deny that at its focal point—in the garden and on the cross—it was an obedience to truth that was only “darkly” perceived. And obedience to darkly perceived truth always carries within it, as part of its constitutive agony, the risk of being profoundly and disastrously mistaken.⁸⁴

Identifying authorities within the church and seeking authentication from them begin the process of transition from an external communication of truth to a mutual communication of truth; it is the movement by which God’s truth, initially external to us, comes to dwell within and thus to transform us into persons of faith capable of responding to God through our lives.⁸⁵ Conversely, authorities should see in others’ requests for authentication an opportunity to follow the “God whose self-expression as a man has

⁸² *Ibid.*, 99.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

convinced us, wooed us, compelled us to answering recognition, love, and trust."⁸⁶ Discernment is a process of authentication reflecting this dynamic of mutual authority and mutual obedience.

Discernment and learning. The discernment that is authentic, limited, and communal becomes transformative as well when we acknowledge our need to learn of God from one another. While "magisterium" is associated with "teaching function," Frederick Crowe argues for an explicit acknowledgment of the necessity of learning within the church, and for an intelligent, reasoned, and methodologically coherent understanding of the process by which the church learns.⁸⁷ By recognizing the process of learning, Crowe proposes that the church is ultimately living out its call to discipleship.

Jesus, we know, advanced in wisdom and age. He learned obedience from the things he suffered. He strove to the very end to learn the divine will, ready always to do it, but asking whether there was not another way than the one the Father seemed to have chosen. Indeed, he asked questions of others, too, not all of them rhetorical surely, some of them presumably in order to learn the answers. . . . To affirm then that we are a learning Church is simply to affirm our Christian discipleship, a pattern of life that in this as in other matters is modeled on Jesus of Nazareth. We do indeed belong to a learning Church, and our learning Church had a learning founder. There should be no more than a momentary hesitation in making so simple an affirmation.⁸⁸

Crowe notes that the process of learning itself raises problems that we may find difficult to accept. The first is the recognition

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁷ Frederick Crowe, "The Magisterium as Pupil: The Learning Teacher," in *Developing the Lonergan Legacy: Historical, Theoretical, and Existential Themes*, ed. Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 288.

⁸⁸ Frederick Crowe, "The Church as Learner: Two Crises, One *Kairos*," in *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, ed. Michael Vertin (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 373.

that when we learn we must ask questions about things of which we are ignorant. The church needs to admit that there are questions to which we do not yet have answers. The second is the realization that when questions are asked, ideas about possible answers are produced—and some of these ideas will be wrong. Therefore, beyond admitting that there are questions that we cannot yet answer, the church also needs to concede that some ideas of how to answer these questions have been mistaken.⁸⁹ Refusing to acknowledge these aspects of the church's learning does not change the fact that the church learns but instead hinders our ability to engage the learning process—to be transformed disciples.

In order to reclaim the church's learning function, Crowe suggests that it is necessary to think through the Christian message in relation to the church's pilgrimage through history:

Let us be clear on what we are doing and what we are not doing. We are not proclaiming a new God, a new Christ, a new Holy Spirit. All these are divinely given in revelation; and just as we had nothing to do with the giving of revelation, so we can do nothing to change it, nor should we wish to change it. We are asking, however, what God's revelation, given through Hebrew images and in Hebrew language in scriptural times and scriptural places, means for us today.⁹⁰

The participation of the laity in the process of learning is crucial for determining how the church's communication is coherent today, not only for the church's sake but also for the sake of its mission.⁹¹ Crowe finds inspiration for this learning process in

⁸⁹ Crowe, "The Magisterium as Pupil," 289.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 290. Crowe's essay was originally an address to the Paulinian Conference held at St. Paul's College, Winnipeg, on February 12, 1990.

⁹¹ "The *instinctus*, the spiritual discernment, the religious needs, the true sense of direction of the body of the faithful carry the dynamism of the faith where the Spirit wills: into the turbulent stream of human problems and searchings, on to the floor of the workshops where mankind is building its future. For faith is for man as he is, and is 'catholic.'" Tillard, "Sensus Fidelium," 28.

Bishop Bernard Hubert who suggested at an extraordinary synod that the bishops “go back and discuss the themes considered with the members of the people of God responsible for the mission of the church.”⁹² Crowe interprets the bishop as inviting “feedback from the people of God, based on their experience of the world we live in,” discussion that should include every member of the church.⁹³ In the learning process of consultation, the laity become teachers. More recently, the desire to learn from the faithful was reflected in the preparatory survey sent out to all the churches for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family.⁹⁴ The church deepens its redemption by embracing its divine roots: we learn to discern and discern in order to learn.

Lash and Crowe help to bring out the questions of reception in an apostolic communion in relation to the *ecclesia discens* and *docens*: How does the church come to a realization of truth, or learn, given multiple sources of authority? The conclusions of both scholars return us to the necessity of dialogical discernment and help to describe the contours of that dialogue. For Lash, this dialogue acts as part of the process of authentication that provides for mutual trust and mutual obedience within the church; for Crowe, it is only through the genuine asking of questions—including asking questions of the laity and the formulation of answers that

⁹² Crowe, “The Magisterium as Pupil,” 292. Crowe quotes the report of Bishop Hubert’s statement in *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, English (December 16, 1985), 12. See also Tillard: “Indeed, even at the level of the understanding of the content of Revelation and of the rendering explicit of its elements, those faithful who have no hierarchical responsibility cannot be seen as simply receiving what is determined by the heads of the Church enlightened by the researches of theologians or other specialists in ‘educated faith’; the faithful have a specific part to play in this knowledge of the whole Church of the truth given to Jesus Christ.” Tillard, “Sensus Fidelium,” 12.

⁹³ Crowe, “The Magisterium as Pupil,” 292.

⁹⁴ Lorenzo Baldisseri, Letter to Cardinal Timothy Dolan, October 18, 2013. scribd.com/doc/180575701/Vatican-questionnaire-for-the-synod-on-the-family. In his capacity as secretary general of the Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Baldisseri asked that dioceses distribute the synod’s preparatory document “as widely as possible to deaneries and parishes so that input from local sources can be received regarding the themes and responses to the questionnaire, as well as any helpful statistics, for the preparation of the *Instrumentum laboris*.”

may be at times wrong—that the church develops as a learner and is thereby enabled to teach.

V. Conclusion

If dialogue as a spiritual reception and mutual exchange is a means of discerning the apostolic faith, then practices and structures that incarnate that dialogue by incorporating processes of authentication and learning are necessary. What are these practices and structures? In order to address that question, later chapters investigate one aspect of the dialogical process, the discerning reception of the *sensus fidelium* by the bishop within the local church.

Reception of the *sensus fidelium* represents for bishops, as it does for all believers, participation in an apostolic communion embodied within history through a living tradition. While each of the faithful has a baptismal vocation for transmitting the faith, an apostolic communion recognizes a particular role for the bishops in authoritatively defining and teaching the faith they receive. Three implications arise from this claim.

First, while not all that the bishop receives requires further doctrinal definition, a continual attitude of discerning reception is important. The bishop's discernment of the *sensus fidelium* ought to be a virtue in two senses of the word. To be a virtue, this discernment must be habitual. While dialogically based discernment is vitally important at times of crisis within the church, it is always necessary and may help to prevent the church's unity from devolving into polemics. In addition, this discernment will also be virtuous if it develops the bishop's own capacity to know and respond to the activity of the Holy Spirit at work throughout the church, as well as within his own spiritual life. The virtue of discernment should lead to both conversion and communion and authenticate the bishop's authority through his spirituality.

Second, magisterial authority is not the only authority in the church. As Lash reminds us, God is the ultimate authority, and others within the church participate in this authority through the

ways in which they know God. It is necessary for bishops to take into account in a positive, rather than in a competitive, manner other ecclesial authorities. This recognition is enacted when the need of learning from these authorities through honest questioning toward authentication is embraced and when the possibility of mistakes in developing answers is acknowledged as a quite human part of the process of coming to know. The *Spiritual Exercises* and the structures of obedience and authority within the Society of Jesus will help us construct a comparative model for incorporating these first two implications into the bishop's ministry of discernment within the local church.

Third, the *sensus fidelium* is always contextualized within history. Sullivan's description indicates that the *sensus fidelium* may be valid for the church of a particular time and location without necessarily becoming normative for the universal church. Nevertheless, the bishop's representation of the *sensus fidelium* is an essential part of learning the *consensus fidelium* of the universal church. This necessarily means that the bishop must draw distinctions between all that goes on within and around the church and the work of the Holy Spirit which is always mediated through diverse people, cultures, times, and locations. This is not to say that the bishop "distills" the activity of the Holy Spirit from the events of history in such a way as to make the expression of the apostolic tradition ahistorical. Rather, it points to the importance of understanding the local church as the context for the bishop's discernment, a subject taken up in the next chapter.