

## ‘Sensus Fidei’ in the Life of the Church

### International Theological Commission

Humble listening and proper consultation are necessary to discern the “sensus fidei” (sense of the faith) and “sensus fidelium” (sense of the faithful), especially on matters of controversy within the church, according to a new document from the International Theological Commission. Prepared by a 10-member subcommission and published on the Vatican website in late June with the approval of Cardinal Gerhard Müller, prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, the document aims to explain the meaning, purpose and limits of the capacity of individual believers and of the church as a whole to discern the truth of faith. “When

*“Is the ‘sensus fidei’ something different from the majority opinion of the faithful in a given time or place, and if so how does it differ?”*

the reception of magisterial teaching by the faithful meets with difficulty and resistance, appropriate action on both sides is required,” it says, calling for “constant communication and regular dialogue on practical issues and matters of faith and morals between members of the church.” The document charges theologians with the task of critically examining “expressions of popular piety, new currents of thought and also new movements in the church for the sake of fidelity to the apostolic tradition.” Laypeople must commit to active participation in the liturgy and the sacraments, constant prayer, active engagement in the church’s mission and “a willingness to follow the commands of God,” the theologians said. Church leadership, for its part, must be open to what Pope Francis calls “new ways for the journey,” as discerned by laypeople. “One of the reasons why bishops and priests need to be close to their people on the journey and to walk with them is precisely so as to recognize ‘new ways’ as they are sensed by the people,” the document says. The full text follows:

#### Preliminary Note

In its quinquennium of 2009-2014, the International Theological Commission studied the nature of *sensus fidei* and its place in the life of the church. The work took place in a subcommission presided by Msgr. Paul McPartlan and composed of the following members: Father Serge Thomas Bonino, OP (secretary-general); Sister Sara Butler, MSBT;

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