

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ASSISTANCE TO THE MAGISTERIUM IN TEACHING: THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES

INTRODUCTION¹

Roman Catholic theology asserts that the magisterium is assisted by the Holy Spirit in its teaching. But this claim rarely receives much direct attention. What kind of help does the Holy Spirit give the magisterium? On what kinds of teaching? In what circumstances? And how does this help differ from the assistance the Holy Spirit gives to Christian believers who are not part of the magisterium?

While much discussion has occurred in this century regarding the inspiration of the Scriptures, comparatively little has gone forward regarding this other important dimension of the Holy Spirit's guidance, namely, assistance to the magisterium in teaching. And yet this claim is a very important one, often used to stop further discussion of disputed questions as well as to explain the normative basis of early teaching by the councils or popes. Just what does it mean?

Michael and I have been thinking about this claim for a long time. My own interest in it started during my master's theological studies when I tried to explain to my fellow students in Protestant churches how the Holy Spirit was assisting the magisterium. Later I began to study the question in earnest by focussing on the understanding of infallibility. Meanwhile, Michael has spent his past three decades considering philosophical issues of epistemology. And our topic is certainly related to epistemology, since it touches on the way the magisterium can know the faith, especially when a question is disputed. So when the topic of this year's convention was announced, we thought we might be able to offer a few useful reflections on theological and philosophical aspects of the question.

In fact, it is precisely the relationship between the theological and philosophical aspects of the question that we find especially interesting. Sometimes a debate about a particular theological issue is also—or even primarily—a debate about a philosophical issue that lies beneath the theological issue but is unnoticed or unacknowledged. In the case of our topic, this certainly seems to be a fair suspicion. Roman Catholics make a certain kind of truth claim about the magister-

¹Although we have collaborated on everything in this paper, O'Gara is the principal author of the introduction and sections 1, 2, and 6, while Vertin is the principal author of sections 3, 4, 5, and the conclusion.

ium because they assert that the Holy Spirit assists the magisterium in its teaching, and hence first with its knowing of the truth so that it will know what to teach. But a claim to know the truth is always accompanied by philosophical presuppositions about what knowing the truth means, and about whether such knowing is even possible. Even when one claims that the truth known is beyond unaided human reason's capacity to discover (as Vatican I defined revelation), that very claim bespeaks presuppositions about the capacity of human minds aided by faith to know that truth. These presuppositions are what we want to examine today.

Before we start, however, let us emphasize two presuppositions that we ourselves maintain, presuppositions that are not generally open to dispute in Roman Catholic theology. The first is one to which I just referred. God's revelation is something that cannot be discovered by human reason alone: faith is necessary for the knowledge of revelation. In that sense, revelation is something given by God that is beyond anyone's ability to acquire without the aid of faith. Our second presupposition is about the magisterium. With Roman Catholic theology, we assume that the magisterium's unique role of *episcopo* within the Church includes a unique role in teaching within the Church. In short, we assume faith is needed to know revelation, and we assume that the magisterium has a unique role within the Church to teach this revelation. Our task here is to probe *how* the Holy Spirit assists the magisterium in this teaching of revelation and of other matters related to revelation.

As a final preliminary comment, let me say that we will be attempting to consider and interrelate three different levels of ongoing theological discussion. The first level is that of particular doctrinal problems and various proposed solutions. The second level is that of general theological accounts of how a doctrine emerges as normative within the Church. The third level is that of philosophical presuppositions underlying the general theological accounts. We will be suggesting that there are three different general theological accounts of how doctrine emerges as normative within the Church, each with its own conception of the Holy Spirit's assistance, and that these different general theological accounts are crucially influenced by different philosophical presuppositions about how objective knowledge arises.

1. THREE PARTICULAR DOCTRINAL PROBLEMS, AND THE NORMATIVITY OF SOME PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Let us begin by recounting three particular doctrinal problems and a proposed solution to each. The extent of agreement that the proposed solution is normative, constituting a definitive standard for Christian thought and practice, differs from one example to the next.

The first doctrinal problem arose around the year 150, and it constituted a special challenge to harmony among Christians for the next three hundred years. Is Jesus both divine and human and, if so, precisely how? Such names as Arius,

Nestorius, Cyril, and Athanasius will remind you of the long and arduous process that culminated in 451, with the decree by the Council of Chalcedon that in Jesus there are two natures, one divine and one human, united in the divine person of the Logos. The normativity of that decree is a matter of *virtually universal* ecclesial consensus except for those once called "Monophysites."

The second doctrinal problem has been with us at least since the Reformation. Just what is the nature of justification? Luther, condemning what he took to be the Roman position, argued with some passion that faith alone, not works, is what justifies. The Council of Trent, responding that faith without good works is dead, condemned what it took to be Luther's position. In recent decades, however, careful study by theologians on all sides of this issue has come to suggest that, whatever the precise character of the sixteenth-century differences, at least the present-day Lutheran and Roman Catholic understandings of justification are not radically opposed. Indeed, there seems to be some prospect that in 1997, the four-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of Trent's decree, Lutheran and Roman Catholic authorities will declare that these condemnations no longer apply to their dialogue partner today. In light of these developments we suggest that the normativity of the present-day Lutheran-Roman Catholic account of justification is a matter of *growing* ecclesial consensus.

The third doctrinal problem is the possibility of ordaining women to the priesthood. Lutheran, Anglican/Episcopal, and many other Protestant communions in fact do ordain women, and they offer doctrinal arguments in favor of the practice. Orthodox and Roman Catholic communions do not ordain women, and in *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* Pope John Paul II declared that the Church has no authority to ordain woman and that this judgment is to be held definitively by the faithful.² After this declaration, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith gave its judgment that this teaching about women's exclusion from priestly ordination pertains to the deposit of the faith and that it has been taught infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium.³ This judgment by the Congregation is presently a source of controversy, such that it seems accurate to say that at least thus far its normativity is *not* a matter of widespread ecclesial consensus.

²John Paul II, "Ordinatio sacerdotalis," *Origins* 24 (1994-1995): 49, 51-52.

³Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Reply to the *dubium* concerning the Teaching Contained in the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*," *Origins* 25 (1995-1996): 401, 403.

2. A CLASSICAL COGNITIVIST VIEW OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ASSISTANCE: NORMATIVE DOCTRINE AS AUTHORITATIVELY TAUGHT TO THE CHURCH

Bernard Lonergan contrasts classicism with historical-mindedness,⁴ and his category of classicism corresponds at least roughly to what (for purposes of later comparison) we are labelling the "classical cognitivist" account of how normative Christian doctrines emerge. A hallmark of classicism is its view that doctrines are normative only insofar as they are authoritatively taught to the Church. Primarily the authoritative teacher is God. Secondly, the authoritative teacher is the magisterium, itself divinely instituted to interpret and transmit God's revelation. This view itself rests on two prior (if sometimes unspoken) convictions, namely, that (a) the basic reason a religious doctrine is normative is that it is true, expressive of reality, epistemically objective, and (b) a religious doctrine is manifest as true only insofar as it is authoritatively taught.

After introducing the issue of relative priority of teaching and learning in the Church, Frederick Crowe goes on to indicate something of the classicist approach. "Suppose we put our original question to the sources themselves, and ask in that context whether teaching or learning has the priority. Some will answer, teaching, and they will do so with unshakable certitude." On this view, Crowe continues,

there is an original teaching, and it has absolute priority. In that case, for the Church as a whole, it is not learning but teaching that has the priority. It may well be that for individual members of the Church learning always comes first, but that is only a limited and relative priority: limited to us, or some of us, and relative to an original situation where things are different. In that original situation, and therefore for the Church as a whole, teaching has a priority, a priority attached primarily to sources given us by God, and secondarily to the magisterium also given us by God to interpret the sources.⁵

Crowe mentions an aspect of the classical cognitivist view that is characteristic of its approach: an emphasis on the magisterium's unique access to truth. This access is often described in terms of illumination and sometimes understood as an effect of the sacrament of orders for those called to the episcopate. One scholar speculated that this theory of assistance of the Holy Spirit sees an increase of assistance with the increase of hierarchical office in the Church. In this position, the priority goes to teaching, which is given by God to the Church;

⁴Bernard Lonergan, "The Transition from a Classicist Worldview to Historical-Mindedness," ch. 1 of his *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974).

⁵Frederick E. Crowe, "The Church as Learner: Two Crises, One *Kairos*," in his *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989) 370-71.

and priority secondarily therefore goes to the magisterium, given by God to interpret the teaching correctly within the Church.

Last January the national Canadian newspaper the *Catholic New Times* carried many letters to the editor that discussed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's judgment about the teaching on women's ordination. An extract from one of them provides a good popular summary of the position I have been elaborating. The writer, John D'Asti of LaSalle, Ontario, writes, "Catholics interpret the passage [Mt 16:13-19] to mean that Peter was the first pope of an unbroken line of popes to whom Christ gave authority over His church to 'bind and loose' on earth and in heaven. This authority now rests in John Paul II and will rest in each of his successors, guided by God 'until the end of the world' (Mt 28:20)." He continues, "Christ's words to St. Peter tell us that His Vicar on earth has a special relationship with His Father. If and when God wants married priests or female priests, the pope will know."⁶

"If and when God wants married priests or female priests, the pope will know." In this comment, the writer puts a great emphasis on the pope as a source of knowledge because, he explains, of the pope's "special relationship" to the Father.

Vatican I was more sophisticated than this letter writer, of course, but its teachings on the normativity of doctrine also are embedded in a largely classical cognitivist worldview. The council emphasizes that "the meaning of the sacred dogmas is perpetually to be retained which our Holy Mother Church has once declared; nor is that meaning ever to be departed from under the pretense or pretext of a deeper comprehension of them."⁷ Vatican I defined as dogma the unique way that, under certain circumstances and because of his office, the bishop of Rome "is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith or morals. . . ."⁸

The emphasis of Vatican I on a classicist approach to doctrinal normativity was reflected, not surprisingly, in the emphases of the majority bishops at Vatican I. It is reflected as well in the interpretations of Vatican I after its close, which generally presented Vatican I as having taught what Peter Chirico, citing Hans Küng, calls "*a priori* infallibility."⁹ *A priori* infallibility saw little role for

⁶John D'Asti, letter to the editor, *Catholic New Times* 20 (21 January 1996): 12.

⁷First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius*, in Denzinger-Schönmetzer 3020; translation (Latin into German) is from Josef Neuner and Heinrich Roos, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, ed. Karl Rahner, (English) trans. Geoffrey Stevens (Staten Island NY: Alba House, 1967) 38.

⁸First Vatican Council, *Pastor aeternus*, trans. in Margaret O'Gara, *Triumph in Defeat: Infallibility, Vatican I, and the French Minority Bishops* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988) 269.

⁹Peter Chirico, "Papal Infallibility since Vatican I," *Chicago Studies* 22 (1983): 168-

a process of reception after an authoritative teaching had been given. Furthermore, it regarded the magisterium as the guardian and expounder of the unchanging deposit of faith. Classicist ideas of assistance distinguish sharply between the magisterium and the rest of the Church, since the magisterium are the ones who are assisted in knowing what the teaching is; they expound this to the rest of the Church. Yves Congar has called the ecclesiology linked to this view of the Holy Spirit's assistance a "pyramidal ecclesiology."¹⁰

Classicist views of assistance to the Holy Spirit do not mix easily with discussions of reception. The Vatican slips into a classicist position in one sentence of its 1991 response to *The Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, prepared jointly by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Commenting on ARCIC's view of reception, the Vatican statement says, "For the Catholic Church, the certain knowledge of any defined truth is not guaranteed by the reception of the faithful that such is in conformity with Scripture and tradition, but by the authoritative definition itself on the part of the authentic teachers."¹¹ The second part of this sentence summarizes the classicist position.

To sum up: classical cognitivists give primacy of place to authoritative teaching, and they conceive the assistance of the Holy Spirit as helping the magisterium to teach and the rest of the Church to learn. Concretely, classicists explain that the decree of Chalcedon is normative because it issued from an ecumenical council. Discussions on justification are interesting to Roman Catholic classicists; but since they regard Trent as an ecumenical council and therefore authoritative, they view its teaching as the unchanging standard in this matter: contemporary Lutheran views on justification must be judged in its light. Finally, Roman Catholic classicists feel confident that the question of women's ordination is closed. The magisterial position is clear, claiming a heritage from the practice of Jesus and the history of the Church, and standing as a teaching of the universal and ordinary magisterium. Hence the question is only improperly labelled "disputed."

3. A NONCOGNITIVIST VIEW OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ASSISTANCE: NORMATIVE DOCTRINE AS AUTHENTICALLY CONSTRUCTED BY THE CHURCH

We are labelling "nongnativist" the second general account of how normative Christian doctrines emerge. This account's most distinctive claim is that

69, citing Hans Küng, *Infallibility? An Inquiry* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1971).

¹⁰Yves Congar, "La 'réception' comme réalité ecclésiologique," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 56 (1972): 392-93.

¹¹"Vatican Response to *The Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission," *Origins* 21 (1991) 444; cf. 446.

doctrines are normative only insofar as they are authentically constructed by the Church. As we interpret this account, it is the conclusion of two prior lines of argumentation, one negative and the other positive.

The first prior line of argumentation is the following: if a doctrine ever were authoritatively taught—in the limit, by God, then that doctrine would indeed be manifest as true, expressive of reality, epistemically objective; and in that case the doctrine would be normative precisely because of its epistemic objectivity. As it turns out, however, no doctrine ever is authoritatively taught. The very idea of God's transmitting a divine message to humankind reflects an outmoded, premodern notion of the genesis and function of religious meanings. Consequently, no doctrine is ever normative by virtue of being epistemically objective.

Nonetheless—and this is the second prior line of argumentation—there are such things as normative doctrines, doctrines that quite properly serve as a standard for testing whether given words, attitudes, and actions rightly merit the label "Christian." How do such doctrines arise, and what is the basis of their normativity? The noncognitivist contention is that religious doctrines are the result of a community's effort to express its religious experiences, feelings, emotions; and normative doctrines are none other than the expressions that are recognized as successful in this regard. That is to say, normative doctrines are the consequences of authentic ecclesial constructivity, the products of authentic communal self-expression. And in this context, the Holy Spirit's assistance is conceived as fostering the authentically ecclesial character of this creative process within the Church, and *thereby* fostering the normativity of the doctrines resulting from that process.

The noncognitivist account of how normative Christian doctrines emerge is not usually asserted by Roman Catholics. Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians, most Anglicans/Episcopalians, and many Protestants are resolutely cognitivist in this regard. The most prominent proponents of doctrinal noncognitivism are other Protestant Christians who envision certain distinctive features of modernity as definitive and therefore meriting incorporation by a Christian theology come of age. In this connection, a book we have found both lucid and helpful is George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*.¹² Lindbeck labels the two main versions of doctrinal noncognitivism the "experiential-expressivist" explanation and the "cultural-linguistic" explanation. Experiential expressivism envisions doctrines as simply *expressive*, at best reflecting changing Christian experience from one age to the next, and therefore needful of refinement and even modification as history unfolds. Christian experience produces Christian doctrines.¹³ The cultural-linguistic

¹²(Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984). Our comments on this book involve interpretations, some of which are influenced by a perceptive review article by Charles Hefling, "Turning Liberalism Inside Out," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 3/2 (October 1985): 51-69.

¹³See Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 30.

explanation, by contrast, gives a privileged role to the doctrines emergent from earlier ages. For latter-day Christians, the function of doctrines is *regulative*, constituting a standard according to which we are challenged to shape our attitudes, words, and actions. Christian doctrines produce Christian experience.¹⁴ On both of these explanations, however, doctrines are misinterpreted if one takes them to be functioning cognitively, expressing objective reality, epistemically objective. On the contrary, they are simply the subjective products of ecclesial artistry—normative insofar as that artistry is authentic.

To sum up: doctrinal noncognitivists give primacy of place to authentic construction in the Church, and they conceive the assistance of the Holy Spirit as the fostering of an authentic creative process in every ecclesial quarter. Concretely, noncognitivists explain as follows the normativity of the three proposed doctrines with which we began. The reason the normativity of the Chalcedonian decree on the divinity and humanity of Jesus is a matter of virtually universal ecclesial consensus is that it manifestly satisfies the criteria of authentically ecclesial construction. The reason the normativity of the recent Lutheran–Catholic statements on justification is a matter of growing ecclesial consensus is that those statements more and more seem to satisfy the criteria of authentically ecclesial construction. Finally, the reason the normativity of the 1995 declaration by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding women's ordination is a matter of currently absent ecclesial consensus is that it manifestly does not (at least not yet) satisfy the criteria of authentically ecclesial construction.

4. EPISTEMICALLY OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE AS THE RESULT OF NONSUBJECTIVE KNOWING

Now, in the next two main steps of our presentation, we carry our analysis beyond the level of general theological accounts to the level of underlying philosophical presuppositions. In this section and the next we will be focussing not on the question of how a doctrine emerges as normative within the Church, but rather on the broader and more basic question of how there is genuine human knowledge of anything at all.

But why, after all, should we even bother talking about philosophical issues in the context of a theological discussion? For the very good reason that they are there already! Sometimes theologians—and sociologists and historians and physicists and others—are inclined to think that philosophical issues are fine to ponder, if that's your bag, but that such pondering is certainly not essential to the proper work of theology—or sociology or historiography or physics. In our judgment, this view is radically mistaken. Anytime you make a claim about anything at all, you are functioning at least implicitly as a philosopher. Whether in theology, sociology, historiography, physics, or any other enterprise, whenever

¹⁴Ibid., 35.

you say *such and such is the case* you are doing at least two things. First, you are affirming something of what you mean by *is*. Second, you are treating your affirmation itself as valid, correct, true. In other words, you are proceeding at least operationally as both a metaphysician and an epistemologist. You are free to deny this, of course, but such a denial only insures that your inevitable philosophizing remains merely operational, simply implicit, and thus unable to benefit from the refinements and corrections that can follow from addressing the philosophical issues explicitly. And that unrefined and uncorrected philosophizing will continue exerting its profound but unrecognized influence on all the questions you ask and all the answers you offer in your proper work as a theologian, sociologist, historiographer, or physicist.

Our goal here is briefly to address those philosophical issues explicitly. More exactly, we will be making four suggestions. First, in the history of explicit philosophy one can discern two very different basic conceptions of valid or epistemically objective human knowledge. Second, *one* of those conceptions is a crucial (though often unnoticed) component of *both* the classical cognitivist and the noncognitivist accounts of how normative doctrines emerge in the Church. Third, *the other* main conception of epistemically objective human knowing is a crucial (though often unnoticed) component of the historical cognitivist theological account, shortly to be presented. Fourth, since we judge that the second main philosophical conception subsumes the strengths of the first while avoiding its weaknesses, we are inclined on these philosophical grounds to favor the historical cognitivist theological account over the other two.

The distinguishing claim of the first basic philosophical conception is that epistemically objective human knowledge results from a cognitional process that is nonsubjective. In other words, one's basic challenge as a would-be knower is to get beyond oneself, to transcend the limitations of one's subjectivity, to get hold of the real—envisioned as what is "out there," "over there," "up there." Insofar as one succeeds in thus proceeding nonsubjectively, the result is true, valid, epistemically objective knowledge, envisioned as actual access to the realm of objects.

Historically, there are two important versions of this first basic conception. Let us label them "intuitional realism" and "intuitional agnosticism," with Plato as an example of the first and Kant as an example of the second. The intuitional realist claims that the requisite cognitional passage from subject to object at least sometimes actually occurs, and therefore that true knowledge at least sometimes actually arises. On the Platonic variation of this position, genuinely to know is intellectually to intuit the really real, identified as the set of subsistent otherworldly intelligible forms. But, in Plato's view, such intellectual intuiting sometimes does take place, and therefore genuine knowledge sometimes actually emerges. For the intuitional agnostic, by contrast, the requisite cognitional passage from subject to object never comes about, and therefore genuine knowledge never transpires. On the Kantian variation of this position, genuinely to know is intellectually to intuit noumenal reality, things-in-themselves. But, in

Kant's view, such intellectual intuiting is beyond the capability of the human subject. Consequently, genuine knowledge—in the strict sense of theoretical reason—is an impossibility.

Without intending to overdraw the point, we suggest that there is something of intuitional realism behind the classical cognitivist's claim that Christian doctrines are normative insofar as they are authoritatively taught—primarily by God, and secondarily by the magisterium. For the classical cognitivist conceives doctrinal normativity in terms of epistemic objectivity, epistemic objectivity in terms of authoritative teaching, and authoritative teaching in terms of nonsubjectivity. Recall what is perhaps the most prominent classical cognitivist reason why authoritative teaching is needed: at least in religious matters it is the unique way of overcoming the limitations of human subjectivity—and *thereby* achieving epistemic objectivity, and *thereby* in turn having doctrinal normativity. But the conception of epistemic objectivity as an actual attainment that arises in function of cognitional nonsubjectivity is precisely what distinguishes the intuitional realist perspective.

Again, without intending to overdraw the point, we suggest that there is something of intuitional agnosticism behind the doctrinal noncognitivist's claim that Christian doctrines are normative insofar as they are authentically ecclesial constructs. Recall the reason why the noncognitivist conceives doctrinal normativity in terms of communal processes deemed epistemically just subjective. No other alternative remains. If doctrines were authoritatively taught, their nonsubjectivity, thus their epistemic objectivity, and thus their normativity would be manifest; but no such authoritative teaching ever occurs. Now, the conception of epistemic objectivity as an attainment that would come about in function of cognitional nonsubjectivity, but in fact never actually does—this is exactly the intuitional agnostic view.

5. EPISTEMICALLY OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE AS THE RESULT OF AUTHENTICALLY SUBJECTIVE KNOWING

The distinguishing claim of the second basic philosophical conception is that epistemically objective human knowledge results from a cognitional process that is authentically subjective. In other words, one's basic challenge as a would-be knower is to proceed in fidelity to the best of one's self. The fundamental distinction is not between being a subject and somehow not being a subject (whatever the latter could mean), but rather between inauthenticity and authenticity in one's cognitional operations.

Let us label this position "intentional realism," and let us illustrate it with the updated presentation of Aquinas provided by Bernard Lonergan.¹⁵ Lonergan

¹⁵While the following account of human knowledge permeates all of Lonergan's works, for two brief and accessible summaries see "Cognitional Structure," ch. 14 of *Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967; Toronto:

begins with a careful description of the actual operations that supposedly we experience ourselves performing whenever we are knowing. Our concrete cognitional processes invariably include operations of experiencing data of sense and/or consciousness, forming hypotheses about intelligible relationships in those data, verifying those hypotheses, and evaluating what we have verified. At best, our performance of those operations is *authentic*, faithful to the imperatives to self-transcendence that predecisionally constitute the very dynamism of our concrete intentional consciousness. That is to say, at best our experiencing is *attentive*—attuned to all the available data. At best our understanding is *intelligent*—entertaining every conceivable understanding of the data. At best our verifying is *reasonable*—working toward the correct judgment by comparing alternative fact-hypotheses in terms of all the evidence for and against them. At best our evaluating is *responsible*—working toward the correct evaluation by comparing alternative value-hypotheses in terms of all the evidence pro and con.

Next, Lonergan argues that insofar as we perform our cognitional operations authentically, the consequence is knowledge that is genuine, true, cognitively normative, epistemically objective. In other words, epistemic objectivity is not fundamentally a matter of successfully suppressing one's own selfhood so that nothing impedes a direct grasp or encounter or intuition of objects "out there," "over there," "up there." Common though it is, such a conception is at odds with the concrete operational facts that emerge through careful appropriation of oneself as a knower. Concretely, *epistemic objectivity* is nothing other than what results from our *authentic cognitional subjectivity*. (Moreover, any effort to reject this conclusion self-destructs, for in the very act of rejecting the conclusion verbally one inevitably invokes it operationally.)¹⁶

Intentional realism commends intuitional realism for recognizing that we are indeed capable of epistemic objectivity, but it also criticizes it for incorrectly conceiving that achievement as resulting from cognitional intuition, immediacy, passivity. Again, intentional realism commends intuitional agnosticism for recognizing that our cognitional process is essentially discursive, mediated, self-consti-

University of Toronto Press, 1988), and "The Subject," ch. 6 of *A Second Collection*.

¹⁶A detailed discussion of religious experience is beyond the scope of the present essay. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that some intentional realists envision religious experience as both providing us with an enhanced criterion of cognitional self-transcendence and disposing us to operate in fidelity to it. That is to say, religious experience fosters our cognitional authenticity—our attentiveness in experiencing, our intelligence in understanding, our reasonableness in verifying, and our responsibility in evaluating. And it thereby promotes the consequence of cognitional authenticity, namely, epistemic objectivity. (See, e.g., Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1972] 238-44.) Such religious experience may later be interpreted theologically as the presence of the Holy Spirit. (See, e.g., Frederick Crowe, "Son of God, Holy Spirit, and World Religions," in his *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, 324-43.)

tuting; but it also criticizes it for incorrectly concluding that we are therefore incapable of epistemic objectivity.¹⁷

We reiterate our earlier suggestion that intentional realism constitutes a crucial (though not always explicitated) component of the third general theological account of how normative doctrines emerge in the Church, an account to which we now turn.

6. A HISTORICAL COGNITIVIST VIEW OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S ASSISTANCE: NORMATIVE DOCTRINE AS AUTHENTICALLY DISCOVERED BY THE CHURCH

Lonerger's category of historical-mindedness¹⁸ corresponds at least roughly to what we are labelling the "historical cognitivist" account of how normative Christian doctrines emerge. On this account, doctrines are normative only insofar as they are authentically discovered by the Church. This view itself rests on two prior (though often just implicit) convictions, namely, that (a) the basic reason a religious doctrine is normative is that it is true, expressive of reality, epistemically objective; and (b) a religious doctrine is manifest as true only insofar as it is authentically discovered by the Church.

In the process by which normative doctrines emerge within the Church, the fundamental step is authentic learning by the Church. Authoritative magisterial teaching, though surely a crucial contribution to the total process, is a step that is methodologically subsequent and derivative. What is obvious in the case of a human individual is no less true in the case of a human community: the activity of learning is absolutely prior to the activity of teaching. One must learn before one can teach.¹⁹

On this view, the emergence of explicitly articulated normative doctrines within the Church is a two-dimensional development. The first and more basic dimension of the development transpires on the level of concrete communal living. In response to some particular question, challenge, or crisis, the Church as a whole gradually works toward the lived recognition of an answer, a reply, a response that exploits the resources embodied in its communal living from the

¹⁷In the view of those intentional realists who take account of it, religious experience tends to reinforce intuitional realism's conviction that we are indeed capable of epistemic objectivity in our cognitional process, and to counter intuitional agnosticism's opposite conviction on this point. Correlatively, it tends to reinforce intuitional agnosticism's conviction that our cognitional process is essentially discursive, mediated, self-constituting, and to counter intuitional realism's opposite conviction on this point (e.g., see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 238-44).

¹⁸Lonerger, "The Transition from a Classicist Worldview to Historical-Mindedness."

¹⁹See Crowe, "The Church as Learner." Cf. John T. Ford, "Infallibility," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. J. Komonchak et al. (Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier, 1987) 517-21.

beginning down through the present age. Moreover, this instance of concrete collective cognitional process is at best authentic. That is to say, it is a process in which all the available *data* are taken into account, every possible way of *understanding* those data is explored, and one of those hypotheses eventually comes to be affirmed as true and good only insofar as *evidence* for it is grasped as sufficient. Furthermore, the normativity of the emergent answer is a function of the authenticity of the learning process. As a particular case of epistemic objectivity, doctrinal normativity is what follows from authentic ecclesial cognitional subjectivity.

The second dimension of the development is from lived recognition to explicit articulation. What has been grasped concretely comes to be expressed thematically. What has been learned performatively comes to be formulated and taught explicitly. Moreover, the normativity of an explicitly articulated doctrine is a function of ecclesial authenticity in two ways. Primarily, it depends upon the authenticity of the concrete ecclesial learning process whose result it aspires to express. Secondly, it depends upon the authenticity of that very process of expressing.

Crowe presents this position as envisioning "an absolute priority of learning over teaching in the Church, even with regard to the sources, divinely created and divinely given, of our faith. The sources are sources that have learned."²⁰ He emphasizes that this means the Church must follow the ordinary cognitional processes, "whether in the realm of nature or the realm of grace." He continues, "It means asking questions on matters of which we are ignorant; forming an idea of a possible answer, indeed, forming several ideas of different possible answers; weighing the pros and cons of the several alternative ideas; finally, coming to a judgment, and being able to say 'I've learned something.'"²¹

For the historical cognitivist position on the Holy Spirit's assistance, this experience of searching, questioning, weighing the evidence, and communal discussion is part of the process by which the Holy Spirit assists the Church. Several features stand out in this picture. First of all, it is a process; this means it takes time. Secondly, because discussion and search is involved, the historical cognitivist position tends more naturally to picture the whole Church as participating in an ongoing process of discovery that eventually finds expression in magisterial doctrinal teaching.

The Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission has described well this process of interplay between ordained ministers and the whole community. "Ordained ministers," it says, are "commissioned to discern" and to "give authoritative expression" to insights that are a deeper understanding of the Gospel and its implications. Yet these ministers, it explains, "are part of the community, sharing its quest for understanding the Gospel in obedience to

²⁰Crowe, "The Church as Learner," 371.

²¹*Ibid.*

Christ and receptive to the needs and concerns of all."²² This means that "the community, for its part, must respond to and assess the insights and teaching of the ordained ministers." *The Final Report* continues, "Through this continuing process of discernment and response, in which the faith is expressed and the Gospel is pastorally applied, the Holy Spirit declares the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the faithful may live freely under the discipline of the Gospel."²³

Richard McCormick provides a helpful discussion of the assistance of the Holy Spirit to the magisterium related to the process of discovery. He focuses just on the Holy Spirit's assistance to the "noninfallible magisterium" (*sic*) in moral questions. Two extremes must be avoided, he argues; the first would explain assistance in a way that "dispenses with human processes," presenting a kind of fideism in which the assistance is "a new source of hierarchical knowledge, arcane and impervious to any criticism developed out of Christian experience, evidence, and reasoning." This tends to dissolve the theological "fraternity," he warns. The other extreme, he continues, would simply "reduce this assistance to human processes" in a form of neorationalism in which "the action of the Spirit is simply identified with the shrewdest thinkers in the community and ultimately imprisoned in the best reasons they can unravel." This tends to ignore the nature of moral cognition and the significance of the *sensus fidelium*.²⁴

If we avoid these two extremes, McCormick continues, then we are in a good position to follow a middle course of associating the activity of the Holy Spirit with human processes without identifying it with them. For the magisterium, this means avoiding error in the gathering and assessing of evidence as a judgment is made. "Now the magisterium of the Church has special advantages to overcome these handicaps in arriving at moral truth," McCormick points out.

First of all, bishops as *pastors* are in a unique position to be in contact with the convictions, problems, beliefs, joys, sufferings, and reflections of all groups in the local Church. That is, they are positioned to consult the experience and convictions (the wisdom) of their flock. As *collegial pastors* they are in a position to pool this wisdom and weigh it through a process of dialogue and debate. In this sense the episcopal and papal magisterium have sources of information which exceed those available to anyone else.

In short, he continues,

though we cannot capture in human categories the operations and assistance of the Holy Spirit, can we not identify the human processes within which the Spirit must be supposed to operate? And since the hierarchy is uniquely situated to im-

²²Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "Authority in the Church I," *The Final Report* (London: SPCK and Catholic Truth Society, 1982) #6.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Richard A. McCormick, *Corrective Vision: Explorations in Moral Theology* (Kansas City MO: Sheed & Ward, 1994) 91.

plement these processes, is it not open to the assistance of the Spirit in a special way when it does so? That is, the ability of bishop-pastors (and through them to the pope) to range beyond the isolation of their own reflections or those restricted groups is the foundation for the confidence that in doing so they will be specially open to the Spirit, and that their authentic pronouncements will show this.²⁵

McCormick is discussing the assistance of the Holy Spirit to the magisterium only in its teachings that are not exercises of infallibility, but we think we should apply these insights to teachings that exercise infallibility as well. In fact, we think that sometimes contemporary Roman Catholic theology is schizophrenic on this point, using a historical-minded view of assistance when thinking of noninfallible teaching but switching abruptly into a classicist explanation when describing assistance in teaching infallibly. Now we agree completely that there is a difference between teachings that exercise infallibility and teachings that do not. But I think these two kinds of teachings are distinguished by the relationship of their content to the Gospel's central saving message, not by different accounts of assistance by the Holy Spirit. Crowe's reflections help us to see this. We think the French minority bishops at Vatican I also had a hint of this insight. The Holy Spirit does not follow classicist patterns when assisting infallible teachings but then suddenly switch into historical-mindedness in assisting when noninfallible matters arise—sort of like a teacher who uses lecture style for more important topics but then switches into discussion mode for less central matters. Historical-mindedness recognizes that the Holy Spirit always assists us precisely through human cognitional processes of discovery, rather than replacing them with some illumination.

A historical-cognitivist stance on assistance is linked to an ecclesiology of communion, and that includes an account of reception. *The Final Report* is very clear that reception is not the creation of truth nor the legitimation of a magisterial decision;²⁶ rather, "the assent of the faithful is the ultimate indication that the Church's authoritative decision in a matter of faith has been truly preserved from error by the Holy Spirit."²⁷ Reception is part of the process of interplay between magisterial teaching and evaluation by the whole Church, and is attributed by ARCIC to the Holy Spirit.

A historical-cognitivist stance on assistance therefore leaves room for the possibility of dissenting from magisterial teachings that are not exercises in infallibility. While magisterial teachings on such matters receive a presumption in their favor, writes McCormick,²⁸ dissent is also a possible outcome "of a

²⁵Ibid., 92-93.

²⁶Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "Elucidation (1981): Authority in the Church," *The Final Report*, #3.

²⁷"Authority in the Church II," *ibid.*, #25.

²⁸Richard A. McCormick, "Loyalty and Dissent: The Magisterium—A New Model," *America* 122 (1970): 675.

respectful and docile personal reflection on noninfallible teaching. Such reflection," he explains, "is the very condition of progress in understanding in the Church. Dissent, therefore, must be viewed and respected as a part of that total approach through which we learn."²⁹ If dissent is part of the process of learning which precedes teaching in the Church, then it too must be related in some way to the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that magisterial teaching at Vatican II began to make a shift from classicism to historical-mindedness. *Dei verbum* taught that the tradition which comes from the apostles "develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding" in the Church "of the realities and the words which have been handed down."³⁰ As the centuries succeed one another, it continues, "the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth." God, "who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of His beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (cf. Col 3:16)."³¹ The picture presented by Vatican II emphasizes a process of growth in which the whole Church deepens its understanding, led by the Holy Spirit in a conversation that is still unfinished.

This historical-mindedness was continued in *Mysterium ecclesiae*, which acknowledged that dogmatic truth taught infallibly is sometimes "first expressed incompletely (but not falsely), and at a later date . . . it receives a fuller and more perfect expression." It emphasized the importance of the context for understanding a teaching, and explained that sometimes dogmatic formulations "gave way to new expressions which, proposed and approved by the sacred magisterium, presented more clearly or completely the same meaning." For *Mysterium ecclesiae*, the assistance of the Holy Spirit enables the magisterium to maintain an "ever true and constant" meaning to the dogmatic formulas even while new expressions of this meaning are found.³²

To sum up: historical cognitivists give primacy of place to authentic learning in the Church. Like classical cognitivists, they affirm that Christian doctrines are normative because they are true. But unlike classical cognitivists, they argue that in the Church (as everywhere else) true teaching follows true learning, and true learning is a process that takes time. Moreover, like noncognitivists, historical cognitivists affirm that normative Christian doctrines emerge through a process that includes the whole Church. But unlike noncognitivists, they argue that this

²⁹Ibid., 676.

³⁰Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation [Dei verbum]*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966) #8.

³¹Ibid.

³²Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Mysterium ecclesiae," *The Tablet* 227 (14 July 1973): 668.

process is not a matter of ecclesial constructing but rather of ecclesial discovering, and its results are not just Christian products but rather Christian truths. Historical cognitivists thus build on the strengths of the other two groups, but correct them as well.

Regarding the assistance of the Holy Spirit, historical cognitivists agree with classical cognitivists that the Holy Spirit fosters sound Christian doctrine by fostering spiritual discernment on the part of authoritative teachers and spiritual docility on the part of ordinary hearers within the Church. But they contend that the *fundamental* way the Holy Spirit fosters the emergence of normative Christian doctrine is by fostering the authentically ecclesial character of the learning process at every level within the Church. The result of this process comes to expression in magisterial teaching.

Finally, historical cognitivists explain as follows the normativity of the three proposed doctrines we noted at the start. The reason the normativity of the Chalcedonian decree on the divinity and humanity of Jesus is a matter of virtually universal ecclesial consensus is that it manifestly satisfies the criteria of authentically ecclesial learning. (In fact, the recent agreements between the Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox churches show that they have learned that the meanings intended by each other's Christological teaching are not contradictory.) The reason the normativity of the recent Lutheran-Catholic statements on justification is a matter of growing ecclesial consensus is that those statements more and more seem to satisfy the criteria of authentically ecclesial learning. Finally, the reason the normativity of the 1995 declaration by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding women's ordination is a matter of currently absent ecclesial consensus is that it manifestly does not (at least yet) satisfy the criteria of authentically ecclesial learning. (It is only very recently that the question of women's ordination has arisen in its modern form. Furthermore, the fact that the Anglican communion and many Protestant communions presently ordain women while the Orthodox do not, has new significance since *Lumen gentium's* affirmation that the one Church of Christ extends "beyond the visible limits" of the Roman Catholic Church. Hence a historical-minded position on the Holy Spirit's assistance would conclude that an ecclesial consensus on this issue has not yet been reached and consequently the question remains open.)

CONCLUSIONS

1. Often there are *particular theological* disagreements about how to explain the fact that some given doctrine has or has not been widely accepted as normative within the Church. Frequently an influential element underlying the particular theological disagreements is a *general theological* disagreement about how normative doctrines emerge within the Church (including how the Holy Spirit assists the Church in believing and teaching). And frequently an influential

element underlying a general theological disagreement, in turn, is a *philosophical* disagreement about how epistemically objective knowledge arises.

2. Precisely because the general theological and philosophical disagreements underlying a particular theological disagreement often are overlooked, they often are left unaddressed. On the other hand, any effort to address a particular theological disagreement that does not also address underlying general theological and philosophical disagreements is bound to be inadequate, for it is insufficiently radical.

3. Concretely, proponents of either of the first two general theological stances tend to collapse the other two stances together, always to the detriment of the third. That is to say, classical cognitivists tend to think that everyone who affirms that subjectivity is involved in knowing is a noncognitivist. Conversely, noncognitivists tend to think that everyone who affirms the possibility of epistemically objective knowing is a classical cognitivist. Such a blurring of stances deepens misunderstanding.

4. The most promising concrete procedure for surfacing and addressing all three levels of disagreement would seem to be generous, candid, and self-critical dialogue involving all the disputants.

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