

## Determining Catholic Orthodoxy: Monologue or Dialogue

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**Abstract:** This article examines the notion of orthodoxy and the appropriate process for its determination in the Catholic Church. After outlining extreme approaches to the question, the article proposes that any approach to the determination of orthodoxy must make clear its position on three areas of theological enquiry: the theology of religious language; theological epistemology; and theological hermeneutics. It is then proposed that the determination of orthodoxy is a dialogic process of reception within the church.

HOW IS ORTHODOX BELIEF to be determined, according to the teaching of the Catholic Church? Part of the difficulty in addressing this question is that the concept of orthodoxy has been variously conceived throughout church history. One could speak of a history of the concept "orthodoxy", just as there has been a history of the concept of "heresy", of "dogma", indeed a history of the notions of "authority" and of "magisterium".<sup>1</sup> How one understands appropriate determination of orthodoxy in the church today would need to attend to those histories. Furthermore, attention would need to be given to how one understands notions like "meaning", "truth", "authority", "infallibility", and, above all, "revelation" and "faith". This essay seeks to address only some of these issues. On the brink of the third millennium, Pope John Paul II's call for a new phase in evangelisation raises the question: how is the teaching office of the church to be exercised so that it will *faithfully* proclaim the Gospel in the new millennium, with an authority that is *convincing* and *effective*?

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1. On the notion of heresy, see Karl Rahner, *On Heresy* (London: Burns & Oates, 1964). On the history of the notion of "dogma", see Gerald O'Collins, *The Case Against Dogma* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975). On shifting paradigms of authority in the church, see T. Howard Sanks, *Authority in the Church: A Study in Changing Paradigms* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1974). On the history of the notion of "magisterium", see the special issue of *Chicago Studies* 17 (1978) entitled *The Magisterium, the Theologian and the Educator*.

## THE ULTIMATE REFERENT, AUTHORITY AND CRITERION OF ORTHODOXY

Orthodoxy is belief that is judged by the church to be faithful to God's revelation and received as such by the faithful. The ultimate *referent*, *authority* and *criterion* for determining such orthodoxy is not past doctrinal formulations, nor ecclesial authority, nor even Scripture itself, but rather God's revelation.<sup>2</sup> The foundation of Christian faith is this Gospel: God's living Word of salvation, God's self-communication embodied in word and event by Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. The Christ event was witnessed and received by disciples who handed on their "apostolic faith" as a treasured "deposit". The witness of this apostolic faith is found above all in the writings of Scripture and in its living transmission by the churches. Thus, the ultimate referent, authority and criterion of orthodox traditioning of the Gospel is revelation itself.<sup>3</sup>

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2. I take "revelation" and "the Word of God" as parallel categories for the ultimate referent, authority and criterion of orthodoxy. On "the word of God" as the objective principle of theological epistemology, see Otto Hermann Pesch, "Das Wort Gottes als objektives Prinzip der theologischen Erkenntnis", in Walter Kern, Hermann J. Pottmeyer and Max Seckler (eds), *Handbuch der Fundamentalthologie* 4 (Freiburg: Herder, 1988) 27-50; on "revelation" as the objective principle of theological epistemology, see Wolfgang Beinert, "Theologische Erkenntnislehre", in Wolfgang Beinert (ed), *Glaubenszugänge: Lehrbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik*, vol. I, (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995) 55-73. On the overcoming of the doctrinal-conceptual understanding of revelation as similar and parallel to the overcoming of the linguistic-objectivistic understanding of the Word of God, see Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "Theologische Erkenntnislehre als kritische Hermeneutik", in Julie Kirchberg and Johannes Mütter (eds), *Philosophisch-theologische Grenzfragen* (Essen: Ludgerus, 1986) 205-210. In his treatment of the reception of revelation, Jean Marie Tillard employs the category of "the Word". See his *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991) 105-144. A parallel category for this primary object of reception could also be named "the Gospel". See the Council of Trent's reference to "the purity of the Gospel [*puritas ipsa Evangelii*]" (DS 1501). Vatican II spoke in terms of "the full and living Gospel [*Evangelium integrum et vivum*]" (DV, 7b). On "Gospel" as the most suitable category for speaking of the ultimate authority, see John Thornhill, "The Gospel: The Ultimate Authority in the Life of the Church", *The Australasian Catholic Record* 72 (1995) 131-42.

3. "The supreme norm (*norma suprema, norma non normata*) of Christian faith and its transmission is the word of God alone – which has become flesh in Jesus Christ and remains present in the Holy Spirit – and not any of its forms of attestation. For although the word of God is attested to in Holy Scripture, in the teaching, liturgy, and life of the church, and in the hearts of the faithful, it does not (owing to its eschatological character) exhaust itself in any of its forms of attestation. Rather, it generates, in great variety and fruitfulness, constantly new kinds of testifying." See Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "Tradition", in René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (eds), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (Middlegreen, Slough, UK: St Pauls, 1994) 1124. See also Herman J. Pottmeyer, "Normen, Kriterien und Strukturen der Überlieferung", in *Handbuch der Fundamentalthologie* 4, 124-52. See further, Walter Kasper, *Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1965). David Tracy likewise emphasises the relationship between text and event in biblical texts: "Like Judaism but unlike Islam, Christianity considers the scriptures not the revelation itself but the original witness to the revelation.... It is the revelatory event and not the witnessing texts that must play the central role in Christian self-understanding". See Robert M. Grant

The way revelation has been described in the last paragraph already indicates the major shift in the last hundred years in the Catholic Church's teaching on the nature of this revelation.<sup>4</sup> *The shift is significant for how orthodoxy is conceived.* To highlight the implications of this shift, one could (somewhat simplistically, but usefully) contrast two models of orthodoxy, one that appeals exclusively to Vatican I's treatment of revelation and faith in *Dei Filius*, and one that appeals exclusively to Vatican II's treatment of revelation and faith in *Dei Verbum*, without interpreting the latter council as a creative reception of the former from a new horizon of understanding. Admitting that the two models are not necessarily opposed and indeed can be complementary, the following juxtaposition may be helpful for clarifying positions often taken today in discussion of orthodoxy.

The first model understands orthodoxy primarily from the presupposition of a propositional notion of revelation, and of orthodox faith as primarily assent to those revealed truths. The second model understands orthodoxy primarily from the presupposition of a personalist notion of revelation as God's self-communication, and of orthodox faith as first and foremost a response of the whole human person in loving self-surrender to God. The first model will put an emphasis on faith as *fides quae creditur*; the second on faith as *fides qua creditur*; the first on verbal orthodoxy, the second on lived orthopraxy.

Diverse notions of truth are emphasised in the two models. The first promotes a theory of truth as correspondence; the second understands truth in terms of disclosure. Similarly, differing starting points mark the search for truth in each of the models. The first would tend to have a Christological starting point, with a notion of Christ as the revealer of divine truth whose Spirit is given to the apostles and their successors as the guardians of those truths. The second would tend to have a pneumatological starting point, with a notion of the Spirit of Truth as the one who not only assured the early church of continuity with Christ, but who also continues in the present day to lead the whole community of believers towards the fullness of truth.

Diverse ecclesiologies are preferred in each model. The first tends to highlight a hierarchical ecclesiology in which the church is conceived somewhat as a single diocese, with the pope as its single head. The second tends to highlight a *communio* ecclesiology in which the church is conceived as a communion of churches, with leadership to be exercised collegially and according to the principle of subsidiarity. Similarly, authority is understood differently. The first presupposes a monologic

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and D. Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* 2nd. Ed. Rev. and Enlarged (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 176.

4. On the shift from Vatican I to Vatican II, see Gabriel Daly, "Revelation in the Theology of the Roman Catholic Church", in Paul Avis (ed), *Divine Revelation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997) 23-44.

notion of authority to which the appropriate response is passive obedience. The second presupposes a dialogic notion of authority to which the appropriate response is active obedience.

Orthodoxy is perceived differently in each model of revelation. The first presupposes a *monologic orthodoxy* in which the truth comes from above from a single authority. The second presupposes a *dialogic orthodoxy* in which the truth is discovered "from below" through a process of dialogue.

Closely related to Vatican II's shift in the Catholic approach to revelation is the heated debate over the last 100 years on the question of "nature" and "the supernatural". How should one conceive the mediation of human experience and knowledge of God? The history of Catholic theology from the modernist crisis till Vatican II could well be told as a new phase in the history of this age-old problem. One need only recall the concern of theologians like Blondel and de Lubac, or the debate inside and outside the aula of Vatican II. How one addresses the problem of "the supernatural" will also determine one's approach to orthodoxy. The more one conceives of nature and supernature as being like oil and water, the more the truths of revelation will be understood as extrinsic to history and human processes of understanding.

In summary, revelation is the primary referent, authority and criterion of revelation, but how one models that revelation will determine the approach one takes to orthodoxy.

#### MAXIMALIST AND MINIMALIST APPROACHES TO ORTHODOXY

Still other presuppositions will affect one's approach to orthodoxy. Sometimes those presuppositions seem more related to personality, politics and polemics than to theological issues.

Along with the labels of "right" and "left", "conservative" and "liberal", "reactionary" and "progressive", the labels "orthodox" and "heretical" can easily become tags for pigeonholing "the others". As in the polemics and politics of Paul's Corinth, present day communities often divide themselves between "the party of change" and "the party of restoration".<sup>5</sup>

No doubt the labels used in such debates are inaccurate and unhelpful. However, there are extreme positions which can be no longer be termed Catholic, and indeed, are "unorthodox" in their attitude to orthodoxy. Some of the far right could well be accused of what Sebastian von Drey called "hyper-orthodoxy",<sup>6</sup> and some of the far left could well be accused of dismissing totally questions of truth and

5. Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, "Are Politics of Change Fracturing the Church?", *Origins* 21 (July 18, 1991):137; 139-143.

6. See Bradford E. Hinze, *Narrating History, Developing Doctrine: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Johann Sebastian Drey* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993).

legitimate ecclesial authority. As we will show later, these polemical positions hide deeper confusion among Catholics on a theological level with regard to three vital issues: (1) their understanding of the nature of dogma and church teaching, (2) their understanding of the role of the magisterium and of how the church, according to its own teaching at Vatican II, arrives at a determination of orthodoxy, and (3) their understanding of the complex process of interpreting texts from the past. On each of these issues a spectrum of positions could be named, from a maximalist to a minimalist position.

Among the maximalist positions, three sometimes-overlapping stances can be named.

*Dogmatic maximalism* sees all beliefs defined by the church as of equal weight.<sup>7</sup> To downplay one is to reject the whole of revealed truth. Ecclesial identity and membership is determined by assent to all those truths. Following a propositional notion of revelation, church dogmatic statements are seen to possess eternal truth, even equivalent to revelation itself. In some respects, this position has much in common with that of integralism. Or, like a biblical fundamentalism that sees every verse of the Bible as of equal value for salvation, this position is a dogmatic fundamentalism, indeed a dogmatism. It fails to recognise that dogmas are not equal, since there is a hierarchy among the truths taught by the church. Orthodoxy, for a dogmatic maximalist, is to be judged solely by literal fidelity to the dogmatic formulations.

*Magisterial maximalism* wants to give to the ecclesial magisterium an exclusive authority in the determination of orthodoxy. Such a monologic notion of ecclesial authority sees only one voice in the church as having access to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Often this position reduces the office of “magisterium” to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, along with other sections of the Roman curia, which is seen to assume a “third force” in the authority structure of the church, in addition to the pope in communion with the bishops.<sup>8</sup> Magisterial maximalism downplays collegiality and the teaching authority of local bishops, to the isolation of the pope’s charism of infallibility. Likewise it pushes to the background any notion that the whole community of believers possesses an infallibility that comes through its anointing by the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup> Just as there can be a fundamentalism with regard to one’s attitude to the propositions of church teaching, this position takes a fundamentalist stance with regard to the bearers of authority in the

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7. Anton Houtepen writes of “a typically Roman Catholic maximalism of dogma, which claim[s] that every magisterial pronouncement and every encyclical letter or *breve* ha[s] the character of a revelation.” See Anton Houtepen, “Hierarchia Veritatum and Orthodoxy”, *Concilium* (1987) 192: 42.

8. See Phyllis Zagano and Terrence W. Tilley (eds), *The Exercise of the Primacy: Continuing the Dialogue* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998).

9. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

church. Such fundamentalism is “an ultramontane position, a magisterial maximalism that sees all questions in the contemporary church as resolvable simply by appealing to the papal magisterium”.<sup>10</sup> Orthodoxy, for the magisterial maximalist, is determined monologically and solely on the criterion of one’s passive obedience to the magisterium’s authority.

*Dogmatic ahistoricism*, often underlying the above two positions, downplays the complexity of human knowing in history. For this position, God’s revelation has taken place in history but requires no interpretation; God’s meaning and God’s will are there, clearly to be found in Scripture and the teachings of the church. This position refuses to acknowledge the implications of the historical conditioning of Scripture and of dogmatic statements. Such an approach to magisterial teaching is a fundamentalist position in a different sense, this time not unlike a biblical fundamentalism that sees the meaning of biblical statements as immediately obvious and accessible. Orthodoxy, for the dogmatic ahistoricist, is a timeless benchmark immediately understood and applied in different historical epochs and in diverse cultural situations. It is, what Thomas Rausch has called, a “non-historical orthodoxy”.<sup>11</sup>

Equally unacceptable are three opposite minimalist approaches that are often presupposed in some notions of orthodoxy.

*Dogmatic minimalism* sees all dogmatic statements as equally unimportant. This approach denies to human language the possibility of naming the truths of revelation to any degree. Since God’s mystery cannot be named adequately in human words, it is presumed any naming of belief is illegitimate and deceptive. Some dogmatic minimalists may replace the exclusive recourse to dogmas of the maximalist with appeals to other foundations for theological knowledge, such as individual experience. Given the infinite diversity of Christian experience, it is claimed that ecclesial identity and membership cannot be defined by dogmatic beliefs. The determination of orthodoxy, for the dogmatic minimalist, tends either to be unimportant or grounded in appeals to other criteria.

*Magisterial minimalism* downplays the authority and capacity of the magisterium for determining right belief. Faithful interpretation of revelation throughout history, it is believed, has no need of communal oversight. For some magisterial minimalists, the truth manifested in Christian revelation is universally self-evident; hence, the need for any communal guidance in its interpretation is superfluous. For others, each

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10. Thomas P. Rausch, “Divisions, Dialogue and the Catholicity of the Church”, *America* (January 31, 1998) 22.

11. Rausch, “Divisions, Dialogue and the Catholicity of the Church”. Rausch is quoting Michael Novak.

baptised Christian is believed to be taught by the Holy Spirit who ensures the individual of orthodox belief. For others again, since the Holy Spirit is given to the whole community of believers, no individuals within that community have a teaching role which can claim exclusive authority; infallibility here is either denied to the pope and bishops and located solely in the whole community of believers, or is denied altogether. The determination of orthodoxy, for the magisterial minimalist, either has little or no place for ecclesial authorities, or appeals to other human authorities as equally legitimate.

*Dogmatic historicism* takes a relativist position with regard to human knowledge. All theological statements merely reflect the perspective of the speaker; all statements are equally legitimate. This position so emphasises the historically conditioned nature of doctrinal statements that they are seen to have no ongoing role as truth statements. Dogmatic statements change their meaning in time and therefore are reformable, dispensable and replaceable. Orthodoxy, for the dogmatic historicist, is illusory. What is orthodox for one may not be orthodox for another. Therefore the category can only be relatively applied in different circumstances through time and has no value in the determination of Christian truth.

It is claimed in this essay that a proper approach to orthodoxy is located along a *via media* between the above extreme positions. Their inadequacy is apparent upon examination of three areas of theological inquiry: a critical theology of religious language, a critical theological epistemology, and a critical theological hermeneutics.

#### ORTHODOXY AND THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

Underlying both a maximalist and a minimalist approach to *dogmatic statements* is an inadequate theology of religious language.

All language addressed to God and spoken about God is analogical. Analogical thinking knows three moments: a *via affirmativa* that affirms something of God in terms of human experience; a *via negativa* that acknowledges that God is not human and God's ways are not human ways; finally, a *via eminentiae* which affirms that God and God's ways are far beyond the human in excellence. All dogmatic statements employ language that is necessarily analogical.<sup>12</sup>

At significant points in the church's traditioning of the Gospel throughout history, questions are posed with regard to the meaning and truth of revelation, which demand of the church a precise answer. In the answers that the church has given, parameters have been set to orthodox

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12. I am using the phrase "dogmatic statements" in a broad sense, referring to any formulation of belief of whatever weight in relationship to the foundation of the faith. See Wolfgang Beinert, "Dogma/Dogmatic Statement", in Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (eds), *Handbook of Catholic Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 185-8.

belief within the context of the question posed. Therefore, through dogmas and doctrines, the church formulates statements of belief that have ongoing validity for future generations as true answers to particular questions.<sup>13</sup> However, the enduring validity of doctrinal statements is limited to those questions and the context within which they were posed.<sup>14</sup> (These issues will be further explored later in this essay when we come to examine the need for a critical theological hermeneutics.)

The church does not call the faithful to believe *in* a doctrine or dogma. The person of faith believes *in God*. Doctrinal statements are faith statements and to be received in faith. A doctrine *per se* (that which is believed) is more than the doctrinal or dogmatic statement that attempts to name it. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that articles or propositions of faith are never the ultimate objects of faith, "for the act of the believer does not terminate in the proposition but in the reality [signified by the proposition]".<sup>15</sup> So too, the act of reception of the believer does not terminate in the doctrinal proposition but in the reality of the alluring God of revelation.

This alluring by God takes place in human history, reaching its highpoint in the words and deeds, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we have noted, it is this event, God's Word of address to humanity, God's self-revelation, which is the foundation of the Christian faith, and so constitutes the supreme criterion of the determination of orthodoxy.

A distinction needs to be made when speaking of "the weight" of a church teaching. Firstly, not all statements of the magisterium have the same weight. Although, as we have seen above, all teachings of the

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13. On dogmatic statements, see the series of articles by Karl Rahner, "What is a Dogmatic Statement?", in *Theological Investigations* 5 (New York: Seabury, 1975) 42-66; "Yesterday's History of Dogma and Theology for Tomorrow", *Theological Investigations* 18 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 3-34; Karl Rahner, "Open Questions in Dogma Considered by the Institutional Church as Definitively Answered", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 15 (1978) 211-16; "Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church", *Theological Investigations* 11 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974) 3-23; "Heresies in the Church Today?", *Theological Investigations* 12 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974) 117-141; "The Faith of the Christian and the Doctrine of the Church", *Theological Investigations* 14 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976) 24-46; "A Hierarchy of Truths", *Theological Investigations* 21 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988) 162-7; "The Act of Faith and the Content of Faith", *Theological Investigations* 21 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1988) 151-61; "What the Church Officially Teaches and What the People Actually Believe", *Theological Investigations* 22 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1991) 165-75.

14. For an examination of the enduring validity and limitations of doctrinal statements in terms of Bernard Lonergan's critical realism, see John Thornhill, *Christian Mystery in the Secular Age: The Foundation and Task of Theology* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1991) 97-112.

15. *ST*, II-II, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2. For a discussion of Thomas on this point, see A. Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press) 33-36. See also *ST*, II-II, q. 1, a. 6: "Articulus [fidei] est perceptio divinae veritatis tendens in ipsam [veritatem]".

church point believers to and relate to an element of that fundamental mystery as ultimate referent, they vary however in their relationship to it according to the "hierarchy of truths". The key questions here, we shall see later, are what process and what criteria are to be used in assessing (1) a statement's closeness to the foundation of the faith, and more precisely (2) whether it is to be considered as part of "what" God has revealed.

Furthermore, not all statements of the magisterium *claim* the same authoritative weight. To statements of a particular weight the church requires a particular response. The 1989 Profession of Faith, its codification in *Ad Tuendam Fidem*, along with Cardinal Ratzinger's Commentary on the Profession of Faith, list the authority and response required according to three levels: as divinely revealed (requiring to be believed, *de fide credenda*), as definitively proposed (requiring to be held, *de fide tendenda*), and as non-definitively taught (requiring religious *obsequium* of will and intellect).<sup>16</sup>

Thus their "weight" is to be assessed according to two interrelated criteria: *the specific relationship* of the belief according to the hierarchy of truths and *the specific claim* of the magisterial authority concerning its relationship to the deposit of faith. That the two are the same is not to be presumed. The reception of a claim made by the magisterium is a long process that constitutes a vital dimension in the determination of orthodoxy. The magisterium, as will be seen in the section on theological epistemology, exists in dialogic relationship with (1) the faith of the church as a whole whose faith it teaches and (2) the scholarly research of theologians. Moreover, the weighing of a statement's weight must then be followed by the further process of its interpretation (ie, asking, "what does it mean?"), as will be examined in the section below on theological hermeneutics.<sup>17</sup>

#### ORTHODOXY AND THEOLOGICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Underlying both a maximalist and a minimalist approach to the authority of the magisterium is an inadequate theological epistemology. Theological epistemology is an enquiry into the process through which the church comes to an understanding of God's revelation.<sup>18</sup> Therefore

16. John Paul II, "Ad Tuendam Fidem", *L'Osservatore Romano* (English Edition: 15 July, 1998) 1-2. See also Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Tarcisio Bertone, "Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the 'Profession fidei'", *L'Osservatore Romano* (15 July, 1998) 3-4.

17. It is necessary to distinguish these two phases. See Frances A. Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996).

18. See Wolfgang Beinert, "Theological Epistemology", in *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, 693-6. See also Wolfgang Beinert, "Theologische Erkenntnislehre", in Wolfgang Beinert (ed), *Glaubenszugänge: Lehrbuch der Katholischen Dogmatik*, vol. I. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995) 47-197; Walter Kern, and Franz-Josef Niemann, *Theologische*

one criterion for judging the orthodoxy of a belief would be *its fidelity to that process* which the church teaches should be adhered to in the determination of any belief. Although the Latin adjective *orthodoxa* occurs only once in the documents of Vatican II, and the noun *orthodoxia* never,<sup>19</sup> the most authoritative Catholic teaching on that process can be found implicit throughout Vatican II's dogmatic constitution on divine revelation, *Dei Verbum*, and its dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, as well as passages from other documents.

According to these documents, the church's faithful reception of revelation takes place through an unceasing interplay between five witness to revelation: tradition and Scripture which the church mediates from the past, and the witness to that revelation in the contemporary church by the magisterium, the *sensus fidei fidelium*, and the consensus of theological scholarship. The conciliar event of Vatican II itself, as a dialogic interaction between these five elements, could well be understood as the Council putting into practice its own emerging theological epistemology.

Central to Vatican II's theological epistemology is its *communio* ecclesiology, its notion of living tradition, and its pneumatology. The church catholic is a communion of local churches; tradition is a living process through which the church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, rejuvenates in every age God's offer of salvation; the Holy Spirit, "the living memory of the church",<sup>20</sup> keeps the church faithful to what God has communicated in word and deed. If the Gospel is the ultimate referent, authority and criterion of orthodoxy, then it is the Holy Spirit who is orthodoxy's ultimate guardian. How does the Holy Spirit guarantee orthodox traditioning of the Gospel? According to *Dei Verbum* 8b, "the help of the Holy Spirit" is manifested in the activity of three distinguishable yet overlapping groups of witnesses to the Gospel: the magisterium, the whole people of God, and theologians. The Holy Spirit guides each group of witnesses in different ways and to different degrees; but no one alone has possession of the Spirit of Truth.

Firstly, to the magisterium is given "the sure charism of truth"<sup>21</sup> and "the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition".<sup>22</sup> However, the

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*Erkenntnislehre* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1981); Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "Theologische Erkenntnislehre als kritische Hermeneutik", in *Philosophisch-theologische Grenzfragen*, 199-217.

19. *Lumen Gentium*, 66, states: "The various forms of piety towards the Mother of God which, within the limits of sound and *orthodox* doctrine, the church has approved for various times and places according to the character and temperament of the faithful, ensure that while the mother is honored, the Son through whom all things have their being and in which it has pleased the Father that 'all fullness should dwell' is rightly known, loved and glorified and his commandments are observed."

20. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1099.

21. *Dei Verbum*, 8b.

22. *Dei Verbum*, 10b.

magisterium is “not superior to the word of God, but is rather its servant”.<sup>23</sup> In his Commentary on *Dei Verbum* 10, Joseph Ratzinger makes two vital points, excluding the position of magisterial maximalism as inadequate. Firstly, the function of the magisterium as authentic interpreter of God’s revelation is not to be conceived apart from the whole community of the faithful.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, the servant function of the magisterium in relation to God’s word given to the whole community has often been obscured in practice.<sup>25</sup>

The appropriate response of the faithful to the magisterium is “religious docility of the will and intellect”.<sup>26</sup> Wolfgang Beinert conceives of the necessary *obsequium* to the magisterium in terms of dialogue.<sup>27</sup> Obedience, he says, is to be understood “as dialogue and in dialogue”.<sup>28</sup> Only dialogue mediates the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to whom ultimate obedience is owed. If, as Beinert states, “the dialogue-obedience problem is a pneumatological theme par excellence”,<sup>29</sup> then

23. *Dei Verbum*, 10.b. Concerning the order of the authorities mentioned in DV 8, Walter Kasper observes: “it is no accident that the magisterium is only mentioned in third place. The ecclesiality of faith is not exhausted by an attitude of obedience to the Church’s teaching authority. That authority is situated within the community of believers and under the authority of the word of revelation. It is not a super-criterion ruling over the Church and its common search for truth in lonely Olympian majesty and issuing condemnations.” Walter Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith* (London: Burns & Oates, 1980) 146-7.

24. “[DV10] first makes the point that the preservation and active realization of the word is the business of the whole people of God, not merely of the hierarchy. The ecclesial nature of the word, on which this idea is based, is therefore not simply a question which concerns the teaching office, but embraces the whole community of the faithful. If one compares the text with the corresponding section of the encyclical *Humani Generis* (DS 3886), the progress that has been made is clear... This idea of *solo magisterio* is taken up here in the next paragraph, but the context makes it clear that the function of authentic interpretation which is restricted to the teaching office is a *specific service that does not embrace the whole of the way in which the word is present*, and in which it performs an irreplaceable function precisely for the whole Church, the bishops and laity together.” See Joseph Ratzinger, “Dogmatic Constitution of Divine Revelation: Origin and Background”, in H. Vorgrimler (ed), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder, 1969) 196. My emphasis.

25. Once again, contrasting *Dei Verbum* 10 with *Humani Generis* (DS 3886), Ratzinger notes: “For the first time a text of the teaching office expressly points out the subordination of the teaching office to the word, e.g. its function as a servant. One can say, it is true, there could never have been any serious doubt that this was in fact the case. Nevertheless the actual procedure often tended somewhat to obscure this order of things, though it had always been acknowledged in principle.” Ratzinger, “Dogmatic Constitution of Divine Revelation”, 197.

26. *Lumen Gentium*, 25a (*religiosum voluntatis et intellectus obsequium*). The word *obsequium* is variously translated as obedience, deference, respect, acceptance, submission, or docility (Flannery). On the significant distinction between the Latin words *oboedientia* and *obsequium*, see Hermann J. Pottmeyer, “Reception and Submission”, *The Jurist* 51 (1991) 269-92.

27. See the two articles by Wolfgang Beinert, “Dialog und Gehorsam in der Kirche”, *Stimmen der Zeit* 216 (1998) 313-28; and “Dialog und Gehorsam als geistliches Geschehen”, *Stimmen der Zeit* 216 (1998) 386-98.

28. Beinert, “Dialog und Gehorsam als geistliches Geschehen”, 396.

29. Beinert, “Dialog und Gehorsam als geistliches Geschehen”, 388.

similarly the issue of determining orthodoxy is a pneumatological theme. Only dialogue between the three groups of witnesses to revelation, the three authorities under the Word of God, can ensure the guardianship of the Spirit of truth by means of the magisterium.<sup>30</sup> It is dialogue in the Holy Spirit that guarantees orthodoxy.

Secondly, like the authority of the magisterium and the universal consensus of the faithful in their belief, theology also has its place "in the order of authorities that derive from the Word of God".<sup>31</sup> It too, according to *Dei Verbum* 8b, is given "the help of the Holy Spirit". Theology provides a vital service to the magisterium; ignoring the ongoing research of the theologians would be to fail in its duty.<sup>32</sup>

Thirdly, since it is "the whole body of the faithful who have received an anointing which comes from the holy one", "the entire people's supernatural sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*)"<sup>33</sup> must be attended to in the determination of orthodoxy, along with the work of theologians and the authoritative teaching of the magisterium.<sup>34</sup> It is therefore inadequate to divide the church into teachers (the magisterium) and learners (the rest of the faithful).<sup>35</sup>

Although the significant paragraph *Lumen Gentium* 25 on the teaching authority of the pope and bishops does not mention the role of the laity and the whole body of the faithful in the development, interpretation and presentation of doctrine, other Vatican II documents emphasise the

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30. For a careful exposition of ecclesial reception and the magisterium's relationship to revelation, the *sensus fidelium* and theology, see Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997).

31. International Theological Commission, *Theses on the Relationship between Ecclesiastical Magisterium and Theology*, Thesis 6. For text, see Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) 194.

32. Ratzinger again, on *Dei Verbum* 10: "To reduce the task of theology to the proof of the presence of the statements of the teaching office in the sources is to threaten the primacy of the sources which, (were one to continue logically in this direction) would ultimately destroy the serving character of the teaching office. When seen against this background, the explicit emphasis on the ministerial function of the teaching office must be welcomed as warmly as the statement that its primary service is to listen, that it must constantly take up an attitude of openness towards the sources, which it has continually to consult and consider, in order to be able to interpret them truly and preserve them": Ratzinger, "Dogmatic Constitution of Divine Revelation", 197. On the magisterium and theology, Pope Paul VI teaches: "In the area of divine doctrine, there is but one primacy: the primacy of revealed truth, of faith, which both theology and the church's magisterium desire to support unanimously in their different ways". Quoted in Walter Principe, "Changing Church Teachings", *Grail: An Ecumenical Journal* 6 (1990) 25.

33. Both quotes come from *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

34. On the *sensus fidei fidelium*, see Günther Koch (ed), *Mitsprache im Glauben? Vom Glaubenssinn der Gläubigen* (Würzburg: Echter, 1993); Dietrich Wiederkehr (ed), *Der Glaubenssinn des Gottesvolkes: Konkurrent oder Partner des Lehramts?* (Freiburg: Herder, 1994).

35. On how the division, between the teaching church as the magisterium and the laity as the hearing church, only emerged in recent centuries, receiving formulation at Vatican I, see Ladislav Örsy, *The Church: Learning and Teaching* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987).

need for broad discernment by the whole church, not just by the magisterium. For example, *Lumen Gentium* 44 states:

With the help of the holy Spirit, it is the task of the whole people of God, particularly of its pastors and theologians, to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our time and to interpret them in the light of God's word, in order that the revealed truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and more suitably presented.

This paragraph, along with three other significant passages, provide mutually critical keys for conceiving the determination of orthodoxy in an ecclesiology which would include in practice a significant role for the laity: *Lumen Gentium* 12 on the *sensus fidei fidelium* and the Holy Spirit's guarantee of the indefectibility of the faithful's belief, *Lumen Gentium* 25 on the teaching authority of bishops and the conditions necessary for their teaching infallibly, and *Dei Verbum* 8 on the three means through which the Holy Spirit ensures the progress of the apostolic tradition through history.

The determination of orthodoxy needs to address questions concerning the issue of consensus in each of these three authorities.<sup>36</sup> What constitutes a consensus among theologians and how is it to be ascertained? What constitutes a consensus among the one billion Catholics throughout the world and how is it to be ascertained? What constitutes a *collegial* consensus among the bishops of the world with the pope, and how is that consensus to be ascertained?

A dialogical understanding both of the collegial exercise of magisterial authority among the pope and bishops themselves, and of the interplay between the magisterium, the *sensus fidei fidelium*, and theology, rests on the assumption of a particular model of revelation. A propositional notion of revelation would see only the magisterium as the bearer and mediator of the propositional truths of the faith. The church in this schema is seen to be divided between the magisterium as teachers and the rest of the faithful as learners. Vatican II's more personalist notion of God's revelation in history through words and deeds portrays revelation as divine pedagogy: God is forever teaching humanity in the ways of God.

The church therefore is first and foremost a church forever learning. This learning within the church also follows the structure of a dialogue. If God's word is to be addressed authentically to human beings in their situation, the church's teaching must emerge from a structured process of learning. It is in dialogue that the church learns in order to be able to teach. Indeed, in dialogue the church comes to self-realisation.<sup>37</sup>

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36. See Francis A. Sullivan, "Authority in an Ecclesiology of Communion", *New Theology Review* 10 (1997) 18-30.

37. See the series of articles in Gebhard Fürst (ed), *Dialog as Selbstvollzug der Kirche?* (Freiburg: Herder, 1997).

In conclusion, Vatican II's theological epistemology demands, what Walter Kasper has called, "a new form of ecclesial authority".<sup>38</sup> Between the extremes of a monolithic authority enforcing obedience and a relativistic conversation of the deaf, Kasper considers that "the only alternative is orthodoxy regarded as a process based on dialogue".<sup>39</sup> Orthodoxy is a process based on dialogue. That dialogic process can be further explicated with the help of a hermeneutics of orthodoxy.

#### ORTHODOXY AND THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

Underlying both a non-historical and an historicist approach to dogmatic statements is an inadequate theological hermeneutics. The discipline of philosophical hermeneutics is concerned with general problems of understanding, interpreting and applying the meaning of texts, actions, and events. Appropriating relevant insights from philosophical hermeneutics, theological hermeneutics attends to the process of *faith* seeking understanding, interpretation and application from different horizons throughout history.

We examined above the preliminary stage of weighing the authority of a church teaching in terms of the authority claimed for the statement (*its weight*), and in terms of the belief's *ranking* according to the hierarchy of truths. A separate issue is the interpretation of a statement's meaning for Christian living, whatever its authoritative weight or ranking according to the hierarchy of truths. What does this mean for me, for us? It is the task of theological hermeneutics to examine the complex process of interpreting the meaning of dogmatic statements.<sup>40</sup> If an inadequate theological hermeneutics is at play, then the meaning attributed to a belief may be inadequate, and the orthodoxy of the interpretation questionable. A critical theological hermeneutics aims to ensure faithful reception of God's revelation in human history.

Faith's seeking of understanding through interpretation and application can never find a standpoint outside of the God-given constraints of human history. Both a non-historical and an historicist approach to orthodoxy raise the problem of history for human understanding. Since the rise of "historical consciousness" in European cultures, the church has struggled with the relationship of truth and history.<sup>41</sup> After decades of tortuous debate, a new understanding of the historical nature of biblical texts has now been received by the official

38. Walter Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith* (London: Burns & Oates, 1980) 149.

39. Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith*, 149.

40. See Ormond Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine: An Appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss' Reception Aesthetics and Literary Hermeneutics* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1997) 277-364.

41. See Ignace de la Potterie, "History and Truth", in René Latourelle and Gerald O'Collins (eds), *Problems and Perspectives of Fundamental Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) 87-104.

magisterium. Peter Hünemann has remarked that, just as the process of recognising the full human character and historicity of the Bible has taken a long time in the Catholic church, so too it will be a long process towards recognising the full humanity and historicity of the church's teachings on faith and morals.<sup>42</sup>

A non-historical orthodoxy presumes meaning and truth (and orthodoxy) to be some eternal essence floating above human history, immediately accessible to human understanding. An historicist orthodoxy presumes meaning and truth (and orthodoxy) to be relative to one's perspective in history, different for each person. A critical theological hermeneutics highlights that human understanding of divine truth is able to comprehend something of that truth as disclosed in human history. Nevertheless it does so inadequately and always from within a particular horizon of understanding.<sup>43</sup> Human beings must struggle and search for the truth within the limits of language, culture, and moment in history. They do not possess the truth as if it were information requiring no interpretation; they must continually rediscover it and re-reveal it through the help of the Spirit of Truth who will lead them to the fullness of truth at the end of human time.<sup>44</sup> The paradox of Christian truth is that it is both already given in revelation, and yet, still to be discovered.<sup>45</sup> This discovery of the truth already given in Christ is nevertheless forever to be received and interpreted.

The patristic scholar Rowan Williams speaks of "orthodoxy as always lying in the future".<sup>46</sup> The determination of orthodoxy, as it did in the

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42. "The questions relative to a theological epistemology need to be discussed urgently in depth and to be newly clarified on the conceptual level. The direction is clear. Just as a long process was necessary in the church in order to arrive at the recognition of the full human character of the Old and New Testaments, so too an analogous process will be necessary to understand the full humanity and historicity of the teaching of the church." Peter Hünemann, "A difesa della fede?", *Il Regno: Quindicinale di documenti e attualità* (1 October, 1998) 568.

43. See Janet Martin Soskice, "'The Truth Looks Different From Here' or On Seeking the Unity of Truth from a Diversity of Perspectives", *New Blackfriars* 73 (1992) 528-42.

44. The Spirit preserves identity and fidelity to revelation precisely by ensuring innovative interpretation. On the danger of falsely contrasting continuity over against discontinuity, Richard Lennan rightly states: "An approach which focuses only on the developmental dynamism of the Spirit, on the 'not yet' dimension of God's reign as it is experienced in the Church, can issue ultimately in the conviction that the Spirit is absent from whatever is claimed to be a permanent feature of life in the Church. This would mean that the Church would not grow from settled foundations, but could only ever be spoken of in terms of the 'not yet'. In effect, it would mean that the 'ever new' dimensions of the Church would come about by superseding whatever was old and therefore, could no longer be regarded as an authentic expression of the life of the Spirit." See "The Authority of the Spirit in the Church", unpublished talk presented in July 1998 to the Australian Catholic Theological Association in Melbourne.

45. See Avery Dulles, "Revelation and Discovery", in *Theology and Discovery* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980) 1-29.

46. The phrase comes from an audiotape of a talk Williams gave in Melbourne in a series of lectures on the Holy Spirit. Williams goes on to say: "When one looks at any major moment of Christian self-understanding and self-discovery in history, the moments

fourth century, follows the pattern of a dialogue, with the past, with the present, towards a new future. According to the philosophical hermeneutical tradition, all human understanding takes place through the dialogue of question and answer. A specifically theological hermeneutics outlines the way *faith* comes to understanding. Faith too comes to understanding through the dialogue of question and answer.

Whether it be dialogue with the past or dialogue in the present, the most helpful way of understanding the search for meaning and truth is to see it as an ongoing conversation generated by *questions*. A dogmatic statement emerging from an ecumenical council, for example, is an answer to a particular question posed in a particular way, within a particular horizon of understanding the subject matter under discussion. A truth defined by that council, and promulgated as binding on believers, is to be considered true in the sense that it is *a true answer to that particular question at that time, given the conditions for what constitutes a valid truth claim in that context*.<sup>47</sup> However, its meaning and validity as a truth claim is not confined to that original context. It can be a meaningful and a true statement also for now and can have continuing validity.<sup>48</sup> But such a statement is limited; both its *meaning* and its *truth claim* for now must be re-interpreted.<sup>49</sup> Its meaning and truth endures only through its re-interpretation.

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when classical formulations and credal formulations come to concretion, as in the fourth century, one realises how, at any given moment in that process, nobody yet knew what it would mean to be orthodox. And it is worth putting ourselves in analogy to that position. The church's divisions and uncertainties over a whole range of issues at the moment are not wholly unlike the situation of the church in the middle of the fourth century. The average bishop, struggling in a small market town in Asia Minor in about 350, did not know (I mean, really, did not know) what it would mean to accept the Nicene creed; did not know what it would mean to be orthodox by the definitions of even a few decades later on. It doesn't mean that fidelity was not important to him; it doesn't mean that the formulations that emerged were somehow accidental or marginal or unnecessary. Far from it. But that imaginary, rural bishop in 350, is a figure I return to constantly in my own imagining. I feel for him. I suspect he feels for me. And for all of us. For him, orthodoxy, in the sense I now mean it, lay in the future."

47. On the complex hermeneutical issues that need to be addressed in any discussion of the interpretation of meaning and truth claims, see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 289-96.

48. For an appropriation of Bernard Lonergan's notion of "critical realism" for understanding the ongoing validity of doctrinal statements, see Thornhill, *Christian Mystery in the Secular Age*, 97-112. See Bernard Lonergan, "The Origins of Christian Realism", in William F. J. Ryan and B. J. Tyrrell (eds), *A Second Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) 239-61.

49. Thornhill writes: "Properly defined questions, 'intending' reality, and the answers given to them constitute the procedure which must be used by all inquirers after truth; it is a procedure which is limited by its very nature, pretending to answer only the questions which have been asked. This is the procedure which critical realism must employ to reaffirm the revealed truth. When this realism claims that doctrinal assertions can have a lasting validity, therefore, this claim is very modest indeed. These assertions do no more than answer particular questions which have been faced by the believing community.... Lonergan's critical realism, therefore, in contrast to a naive realism, recognizes the severe limitations which are inherent to doctrinal statements. As answers to questions concerning

According to a critical theological hermeneutics, the interpretation of a past teaching of the church takes place by re-engaging the question and answer dynamic which first generated the teaching. To correctly interpret the meaning and truth claim of a past text is to reconstruct the intended meaning of the original authors in terms of *the question* they set out to answer, and then attempt to reconstruct, with present-day categories of thought, the answer they proposed. This reconstructed answer is not “the eternal meaning” of the teaching. We have no direct access into the minds of those in the past; their expression of the truth must be constantly re-interpreted.

Consequently, it is not helpful to see the meaning of a past teaching as some eternal essence that can simply “change its clothes” and be re-expressed differently in different horizons. Rather, “the meaning” is its re-interpretation. *Retrospectively*, we can make a distinction between “the content” of a teaching from “the way it is expressed”.<sup>50</sup> However, we cannot do that with our own formulations. We cannot stand outside our own historical situation of knowing. Only future generations will be able to stand back and see the way our re-interpretation of the past has or has not maintained continuity with that past. In that sense, too, orthodoxy lies always in the future. As Maurice Blondel stated concerning the historical process of tradition, “with the help of the past [the church] liberates the future from the unconscious limitations and illusions of the present”.<sup>51</sup>

The determination of orthodoxy therefore is an historical process that, *mutatis mutandis*, follows the dynamic of all human understanding. Faith seeks understanding within the limited horizons of human history. Sometimes a particular question has never been posed before in the history of the church. If the question has never been posed, then the tradition has not given an answer. On such issues, the search for truth must continue as a dialogue between the magisterium, the whole people

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the truth embodied in the Christ-event, these statements are capable of a realism which has an enduring validity. But their capacity to mediate the reality of the Christ-event is severely limited on several scores.” See *Christian Mystery in the Secular Age*, 109,111.

50. On the problematic nature of the content/form schema, see Edward Schillebeeckx, “The Problem of the Infallibility of the Church’s Office: A Theological Reflection”, *Concilium* 3 (1977) 77-94; Edward Schillebeeckx, “The Role of History in What is Called the New Paradigm”, in Hans Küng and David Tracy (eds), *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 307-19; Paul Ricoeur, “Response to Josef Blank”, in *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, 283-86.

51. Maurice Blondel, “History and Dogma”, in *Letter on Apologetics and History of Dogma* (London: Harvill Press, 1964), 282. Blondel goes on to state: “After having fought for so long against various forms of a dissolving *latitudinarianism*, [the church] will realize, in the plenitude of her power, and in her need for self-expansion, that to be too broadminded and to minimize Revelation is not the only way of departing from orthodoxy, that it is equally possible to be too narrow-minded and to restrict the Redemption: *that is also a heresy*, and one which has been the least effective in breaking up Christian society.” (Italics mine).

of God, and theologians, as together they seek to understand, interpret and apply God's revelation and God's will.

Having highlighted the relevant issues that need to be addressed in any proposal concerning orthodoxy, we need now to answer the question: how may the determination of orthodoxy be best understood?

#### THE DETERMINATION OF ORTHODOXY AS A PROCESS OF RECEPTION

The discovery of orthodoxy is a *process of reception* in the church.<sup>52</sup> This process involves both diachronic reception (from the past) and synchronic reception (in the present) on the part of the various authorities under the Word of God.

Firstly, the search for orthodoxy is a *diachronic* process, which involves the church's continuous re-appropriation (reception) of the primary, and secondary witnesses to revelation: Scripture and tradition. These two witnesses constitute the primary and secondary norms of orthodoxy.<sup>53</sup> Both witness in different ways to the ultimate referent, authority and criterion of orthodoxy, revelation itself. This revelation event continues to be experienced as salvific and revelatory only through its creative reception by the church in every age in history. In this sense, one can speak of foundational and dependent revelation.<sup>54</sup> Revelation becomes a present reality only in its reception.

Secondly, the discovery of orthodoxy is, at the same time, a *synchronic* process. A significant element in the reception of past revelation is the dialogue between three groups of voices in the church, as we saw above: the authoritative magisterium, the whole people of God and their experience of salvific revelation in the present day, along with the scholarly research of theologians. Given the nature of the church as a communion of churches of varying cultures, the determination of orthodoxy must be a worldwide dialogue of a world church.<sup>55</sup>

In this reception of past and present from diverse horizons, apostolicity through time and catholicity across the worldwide church find expression in a rejuvenated orthodoxy. This rejuvenation is a process of dialogue among the many voices within the Catholic Church

52. I am using the word reception, not in its narrower sense of a canonical reception of another church, but as a theological and spiritual process of receiving the Gospel in different contexts. On reception in this broader sense, see Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*: Wolfgang Beinert (ed), *Glaube als Zustimmung: Zur Interpretation kirchlicher Rezeptionsvorgänge* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991); G. R. Evans, *The Reception of the Faith: Reinterpreting the Gospel for Today* (London: SPCK, 1997).

53. See Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "Tradition", in René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (eds), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (Middlegreen, Slough, UK: St Pauls, 1994) 1119-26.

54. Gerald O'Collins, "Revelation Past and Present", in René Latourelle (ed), *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) 125-37.

55. Karl Rahner, "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council", *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 20 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981) 77-89.

today.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, reception by the whole body of the faithful ideally takes place before and after official formulations by the magisterium on any issue related to faith and morals. When the magisterium speaks forth the faith, it is the faith of the whole community, who must recognise it as their own.<sup>57</sup>

If "authority can be described as the quality of leadership which elicits and justifies the willingness of others to be led by it",<sup>58</sup> a particular determination of orthodoxy by the magisterium will be authoritative, and be received as such, not only because of its collegial demonstration of fidelity to Scripture and tradition, but also because the process of demonstration it has adopted has been one in which the magisterium has dialogically received the other authorities under the Word of God (the *sensus fidei fidelium* and the consensus of theologians) who also enjoy, if not "the sure charism of truth", then "the help of the Holy Spirit".<sup>59</sup> The surety of the charism of truth and the surety of orthodoxy are grounded on assistance from the Holy Spirit who is The Dialogue between God the Father and God the Son.

Definite parameters to belief can and must always be given. In its traditioning of the Gospel through history, there have been defining moments when the church has formulated its belief in ways that continue to be valid formulations of divine truth. But orthodoxy is at once a definitive achievement and a work in progress. Orthodoxy is the coming together of *ressourcement* of the past and *aggiornamento* in the present. The tradition of the past requires creative reception in order that it may be passed on to the future as a living tradition. While church teachings mark out the meaning and truth for particular questions at this time, their formulation remains, in a certain sense, provisional, requiring constant rejuvenation, lest a new generation of believers

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56. On at least twelve *loci receptionis* in this testing of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity, see Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, 326-58.

57. Joseph Ratzinger, writing on the reception of church teaching states: "Conversely, criticism of papal declarations will be possible and necessary to the degree that they do not correspond with Scripture and the Creed, that is, with the belief of the Church. Where there is neither unanimity within the Church nor clear testimony of the sources, then no binding decision is possible; if one is formally made, then its preconditions are lacking, and therefore the question of its legitimacy must be raised." Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes: Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1969) 144. Quoted in Pottmeyer, *Reception and Submission*, 281. On the same point, Pottmeyer goes on to quote Walter Kasper: "The pope can only be infallible as far as the Church recognises him as the voice and testimony of its own infallibility. If it withholds this recognition (which is not to be confused with the subsequent agreement to an ex cathedra declaration as a required condition for its juridical binding force which was rejected by Vatican I), then the pope would, in an extreme case, be heretical or schismatic: he would no longer be pope." Walter Kasper, "Zur Diskussion um das Problem der Unfehlbarkeit", in Hans Küng (ed), *Fehlbar? Eine Bilanz* (Zürich: Benziger, 1973) 84.

58. Francis A. Sullivan, "Authority in an Ecclesiology of Communion", *New Theology Review* 10 (1997) 18.

59. *Dei Verbum*, 8b.

*misinterpret* their meaning and truth. Continuity and discontinuity, identity and change, tradition and innovation, the same and the different, the old and the new, are not inimical categories. There must be a constant rejuvenation of doctrine to maintain orthodox proclamation of belief. As St Irenaeus wrote:

The preaching of the Church presents in every respect an unshakeable stability, remains identical to itself and benefits, as we have shown, from the witness of the prophets, apostles and all their disciples, a witness which embraces "the beginning, the middle and the end", in brief, the totality of the "economy" of God and his operation infallibly ordained for the salvation of man and establishing our faith. From then on, this faith, which we have received from the Church, we preserve it with care, for unceasingly, through the action of the Spirit of God, such a deposit of great price enclosed in an excellent vessel, *rejuvenates and causes a rejuvenation of the very vessel which contains it.*<sup>60</sup>

Mathematicians talk of an asymptotic line that continually approaches a given curve but does not meet it at a finite distance. Somewhat like those two lines, *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* never meet; the meeting point always lies ahead of the church as it moves forward in history. Orthodoxy, in that sense, lies always in the future. Christian truth is eschatological truth. The church must continually wait on the Holy Spirit to lead it to the fullness of truth. *Ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* will only finally meet at that point when history ends at the fullness of time. "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." (1 Cor 13:12)

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60. *Adv. Haer.* III, 24, 1. My italics. Quoted in J. M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991) 144.