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Warranted Catholic Belief

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Abstract. Extending Alvin Plantinga's model of warranted belief to the beliefs of groups as a whole, I argue that if the dogmatic beliefs of the Catholic Church are true, they are also warranted. Catholic dogmas are warranted because they meet the three conditions of my model: they are formed (1) by ministers functioning properly (2) in accordance with a design plan that is oriented towards truth and reliable (3) in a social environment sufficiently similar to that for which they were designed. I show that according to Catholic doctrine the authoritative spokespersons of the Church—ecumenical councils and popes—meet these conditions when defining dogmas. I also respond to the objection that the warrant of Catholic dogmas is defeated by the plurality of non-Catholic Christian sects that deny Catholic dogmas.

I.   Introduction

In *Warranted Christian Belief*, Alvin Plantinga argues that if the basic tenets of Christianity are true, then the individual Christian is warranted in believing them.[1] Thus if critics of Christianity are to present a cogent argument against the warrant of an individual Christian's belief, they must first argue against the truth of the claims Christianity makes. I argue for a

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[1] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); hereafter *WCB*. I will discuss what warrant is at greater length in the following section, but Plantinga provides both a functional and substantive analysis of warrant. On the functional analysis, warrant just is whatever quality distinguishes mere true belief from knowledge. On the substantive analysis, warrant is a quality beliefs possess in virtue of being formed by properly functioning faculties in appropriate conditions (which Plantinga further specifies). Plantinga's claim is that this latter quality just is the quality that distinguishes true belief from knowledge. For the distinction between the two analyses, see Andrew Bailey, "Warrant is Unique," *Philosophical Studies* 149 (2010): 297–304, at 298.

similar conditional in favor of Catholicism: if the dogmas of Catholicism are true, then the Catholic Church is warranted in believing them. As in the case of an individual Christian, critics of Catholicism must first show that its dogmas are false before they can show that the Catholic Church lacks warrant for them.

The achievement of Plantinga's work is twofold: first, he provides an account of the conditions for an individual's belief to be warranted, and second he shows how on the supposition that the basic tenets of Christianity are true, it follows that a Christian's beliefs in these tenets meet these conditions for warrant.[2] Plantinga is able to make the argument for this conditional conclusion because of a particular feature of some of the claims included among these basic Christian tenets: they are claims about how Christians form their beliefs in the basic tenets. In particular, Christians form their beliefs in the basic tenets of Christianity by the Holy Spirit's dwelling in them and illuminating their minds, which ensures their proper functioning. Likewise, I am able to argue for my own conditional about the warrant of the Catholic Church's beliefs because so many Catholic dogmas are claims about how the Catholic Church forms its beliefs (e.g., papal infallibility, the infallibility of ecumenical councils, Christ's foundation of the Church's teaching offices).

Despite its achievement, any Catholic reader of *Warranted Christian Belief* must acknowledge its shortcomings. Like much of contemporary religious epistemology, Plantinga's account of the warrant of Christian belief is entirely in terms of the individual Christian, and

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[2] I use the phrase "basic tenets of Christianity" to refer particularly to the set of beliefs Plantinga includes in his preface, "that we human beings are somehow mired in rebellion and sin, that we consequently require deliverance and salvation, and that God has arranged for that deliverance through the sacrificial suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who was both a man and also the second member of the Trinity, the uniquely divine son of God" (*WCB*, vii).

there is almost no discussion of the Church.[3] But as Linda Zagzebski points out, in the Catholic tradition, "the possessor of warrant is fundamentally the Church, not the individual, so the conditions for justification of a belief are conditions that the Church must satisfy, not Francis or Jane or Edward."[4] Zagzebski's criticism of the individualism of the epistemological accounts of Plantinga and other Reformed Epistemologists indicates that they not only fail to give an account for the warrant of the beliefs of the Church itself but that this failure in turn impairs their ability to account for the warrant of an individual Christian's beliefs.[5]

The ambiguities in Plantinga's statement of basic Christian tenets in the preface of *Warranted Christian Belief* manifest the defects of his individualistic approach. He mentions the mire of sin, the sacrificial death of Christ, and Christ's being both man and the Son of God in the Trinity, but nothing in the statement rules out Pelagianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism or

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[3] Indeed, the only entry in *WCB*'s index for "the church" is a discussion of why a purely historical line of reasoning on the basis of the Church's teaching central Christian claims cannot succeed in warranting anything more than the claim that those claims are "not terribly unlikely" (268–80 and 277–8 in particular).

[4] Linda Zagzebski, "Religious Knowledge and the Virtues" in *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*, ed. Zagzebski (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1993), 208.

[5] John Greco criticizes religious epistemology more generally for its individualism in "Transmitting Faith (and Garbage)," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10 (2018): 85–104, at 88–92. He suggests a social turn for religious epistemology just like the one in epistemology more generally. The "social turn" Greco suggests primarily consists in a greater philosophical emphasis on and attention to the transmission of knowledge through testimony and the various ways in which an individual's epistemic states are dependent on the epistemic states of others (for instance, the "social epistemic anti-individualism" of Duncan Pritchard, "Epistemic Dependence," *Philosophical Perspectives* 29 (2015): 305–24). Both Greco in "Social Religious Epistemology" in *The Transmission of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) and Zagzebski in "Religious Authority" in *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) make progress on this social turn. The present paper instead proposes a "collective turn" in religious epistemology. I follow Margaret Gilbert in distinguishing between social epistemology and collective epistemology. Collective epistemology concerns the epistemic states of groups ("Collective Epistemology," *Episteme* 1 (2004): 95–107). In subsequent work, I intend to combine the two "turns," showing how the epistemic states of individual Catholics depend on the epistemic states of the Catholic Church as a group. Deborah Tollefsen examines this phenomenon of group *testimony* more generally in the suitably titled "Group Testimony," *Social Epistemology* 21 (2007): 299–311. The social turn and collective turn in religious epistemology are merely the application and attendant revision of religious epistemology in light of social epistemology and collective epistemology, respectively.

even Arianism. It lacks the theological precision of the Nicene Creed or the canons of the ecumenical councils, and so leaves many theological questions unanswered. Yet not only is it essential for the individual Christian to have true beliefs on both theological and moral matters so as to believe the Gospel correctly and lead a Christian life, but it is also essential to have *warranted* true beliefs on these matters. Whether or not warrant suffices as a norm for action and assertion, it is a necessary condition of it, and the Christian can only fulfill these norms in the details of his Christian life and witness if he has warrant in a wide range of theological and moral beliefs.[6]

Plantinga's work must be supplemented with the notion of *group warrant*, i.e., the warrant of a belief held by a group. These sorts of difficult theological and moral questions are exactly what the Catholic Church as a group claims warrant in believing. If that's correct, then individuals could be warranted in believing its claims on the basis of the Church's testimony.[7] Additionally, rather than speaking of the "basic tenets of Christianity" and hypothesizing that

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[6] In defense of the knowledge norm of assertion, see Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 243; Jason Stanley, *Knowledge and Practical Interests* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10–1; Keith DeRose, "Assertion, Knowledge, and Context," *The Philosophical Review* 111 (2002): 167–203, at 179–81; John Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 22–3. In defense of the knowledge norm of action, see Hawthorne and Stanley, "Knowledge and Action," *The Journal of Philosophy* 105 (2008): 571–90.

[7] There are different accounts of how testimony confers warrant on a belief, but I favor a "non-reductive" account of testimony. As John Greco points out though, there are various ways of characterizing a "non-reductive" account of testimony ("Recent Work on Testimonial Knowledge," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (2012): 15–28). I agree with Greco that testimony transmits rather than generates knowledge and that this distinction is fundamental to epistemology. See his *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 2.

these are true, I will speak of the "dogmas of the Catholic Church" or "Catholic dogmas," which

refer to a certain class of propositions that the Catholic Church teaches authoritatively.[8] [9]

My aim in this paper is to argue for the following thesis:

False or Warranted: Some Catholic dogma is false or the Catholic Church's beliefs in

all Catholic dogmas are warranted.

False or Warranted is not a trivial result. Imagine a skeptic who admits the following:

"Of course, for all I know everything the Catholic Church teaches is true. It asserts so many

different things though on so many different topics—issues in biology, physics, history, morality,

theology, philosophy, the interpretation of Scripture, the proper organization of both itself and

political society, and so on. It's certainly possible even if massively improbable that everything

the Church teaches is true, but that doesn't mean it's warranted in believing what it teaches or

that anybody would be warranted in accepting its teaching. That circumstance would be just like

my guessing the correct lottery number. Even if we suppose papal infallibility is true, that

doesn't entail that *we know* that papal infallibility is true. Supposing the pope really is infallible,

he'd be just like a random number generator that happened to always get the right lottery

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[8] In particular, following Ludwig Ott commenting on the explanation of the First Vatican Council, I take the council to refer to dogmas in its assertion, "All those things are to be believed by divine and Catholic faith which are contained in the Word of God written or handed down and which are proposed for our belief by the Church either in a solemn definition or in its ordinary and universal authoritative teaching," Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch (Rockford, Ill.: TAN, 1974), 4. Accessed at: https://archive.org/details/fundamentals-of-catholic-dogma-ludwig-ott/page/n1/mode/2up.
[9] Throughout this paper, I will speak of the "dogmas" of the Catholic Church. Properly speaking, I should say "dogmas and definitive doctrines." Definitive doctrines and dogmas are both preserved from error by the charism of infallibility, but while dogmas pertain directly to something revealed by God, definitive doctrines are not divinely revealed. Rather, definitive doctrines are "*necessary for safeguarding and expounding divine revelation*" as Richard Gaillardetz explains in *By What Authority?: A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium, and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003), 99.

number. I could never be warranted in my belief that the random number generator is infallible."[10]

To defend **False or Warranted** I must do two things. First, I must provide an account of warranted group beliefs. Second, I must show that given what the Catholic Church teaches about itself, it is warranted in its beliefs if its teachings are true.

One clarification of the thesis is in order. **False or Warranted** is a claim about the status of the beliefs of the Catholic Church itself, as a group, rather than the beliefs of its individual members. When I speak of the Catholic Church as having a belief or being warranted in its beliefs or asserting some proposition or having any such intentional attitude, I take these expressions to be intelligible all on their own without needing to paraphrase them in terms of claims about individual Catholics. Many important facts about the Church seem irreducible to facts about its individual members. St. Paul's description of the Church as the mystical body of Christ rather suggests that there are facts about individual members of the Church that can only be explained with reference to the Church as a whole.[11]

In order to argue for **False or Warranted**, I will assume that all Catholic dogmas are true:

Truth of Catholic Dogma: All Catholic dogmas are true.

What I want to show in this paper is that if we assume the truth of Catholic dogmas, those dogmas will also be warranted. I do not assume that **Truth of Catholic Dogma** is warranted, only that it is true. What I hope to show is that in virtue of what those dogmas entail, they must

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[10] I assume here that more than mere reliability in getting the right answer is necessary for warrant. On a purely reliabilist account of warrant, it is incredibly easy to argue for **False or Warranted**. As we'll see, the infallibility of popes and ecumenical councils about Catholic dogmas entails 100% objective reliability.

[11] Ephesians 4; 1 Corinthians 12.

in turn be warranted. In other words, in order to argue against the warrant of the Catholic Church's dogmatic beliefs, one must provide "de facto" objections. There can be no "de jure" objection to them.[12] One cannot critique these dogmas on epistemological grounds independent of whether they are true or false. Catholic dogmas are distinctive because they not only give a precise statement of Christian doctrines such as those of the Trinity and Incarnation, they also describe the source of warrant for those beliefs.

The paper is divided into the following sections. First, in Section II, "Warranted Group Belief," I summarize and briefly defend my account of what constitutes a warranted group belief in general. Briefly, a group's belief is warranted if and only if it meets three conditions: (*a*) the design plan governing the belief's production is aimed at truth and would if implemented reliably produce true beliefs; (*b*) the group members (or other parts of the group) producing the belief are working in a social environment sufficiently similar to that envisaged by the design plan; (*c*) the group members producing the belief are *functioning properly*, i.e., in accordance with the design plan. In Section III, I apply this account to the dogmatic beliefs of the Catholic Church and show that on the assumption of **Truth of Catholic Dogma**, it follows that the Church is warranted in its dogmatic beliefs. This section consists in showing how the Catholic Church—according to its own teaching—meets each of the three conditions in Section II. Finally, in Section IV, I present and respond to a potential defeater for the Catholic Church's warrant: group peer disagreement. There are many non-Catholic Christian sects that disagree with the Catholic Church on any number of its dogmatic beliefs, and it would decrease the warrant of the Catholic Church's beliefs were it to remain steadfast in its beliefs in the face of peer disagreement. In the

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[12] For this distinction, see Plantinga, *WCB*, viii–xi where he also frames the entire book in terms of these two sorts of objections.

concluding section, I consider two directions in which to continue the project begun in this paper.

II. Warranted Group Belief

In this section, I outline my account of the conditions for a group's beliefs to be warranted and give two reasons to accept it.[13] In particular, I intend to show that someone who accepts Plantinga's account of warranted individual belief should accept my account of warranted group belief, which exactly parallels his. Before providing my account of warranted group belief, I first discuss what warrant is and set out the presuppositions of any account of warranted group belief.

First, Plantinga describes warrant as the "elusive quality or quantity enough of which, together with truth and belief, is sufficient for knowledge."[14] He considers the word "justification" to be too closely associated with *epistemic deontologism*, which is the view that fulfilling one's epistemic duties is essential to knowledge, so he prefers the term "warrant."[15] I follow Plantinga in his use of "warrant." I will also only use "warrant" to refer to "knowledge-level warrant"—the quantity of warrant that "fills the gap between true belief and knowledge."[16]

In Plantinga's work, we can distinguish between a functional and a substantive analysis of warrant.[17] On the functional analysis, warrant is what distinguishes true belief from knowledge. In this light, having warrant is important for beliefs because of the importance of

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[13] In my paper "Warranted Group Belief," I provided a third reason which I do not go into here: **Warranted Group Belief** can explain the Specialization Criterion, which sets out a necessary condition for warranted group belief. A group loses warrant in a belief on a topic insofar as it ignores the experts in the group specifically tasked with producing beliefs on that topic.

[14] Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), v. Hereafter *WPF*.

[15] Plantinga, *WPF*, v–vi.

[16] Andrew Bailey, "Warrant is Unique," *Philosophical Studies* 149 (2010): 297–304, at 298.

[17] Ibid.

knowledge. So, for instance, if both knowledge norms (i.e., the knowledge norm of assertion and the knowledge norm of action) are actually in force, then in order to meet these norms one must have warrant.[18] Hence, I can neither make assertions nor act in a non-defective manner unless the belief I assert or act in light of is warranted. On the substantive analysis, warrant is essentially a quality beliefs have in virtue of being formed by properly functioning faculties.[19] The substantive analysis of warrant also indicates why it is an important quality, since proper functioning would be at the very least a necessary condition for knowledge even if Plantinga were wrong to think of it (along with truth) as sufficient for knowledge. More generally, the proper functioning of one's epistemic faculties is a reasonable epistemic goal.

My account of warranted group belief presupposes two theses:

Group Belief: Groups have beliefs.[20] [21]

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[18] The knowledge norm of assertion is in force if and only if one should assert that *p* only if one knows that *p*. See Jennifer Lackey, "Norms of Assertion," *Nous* 41 (2007): 594–626, at 594 for this formulation.

[19] For more recent defenses of proper functionalism, see Kenneth Boyce and Alvin Plantinga, "Proper Functionalism" in *Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Andrew Cullison (New York City, N.Y.: Continuum Press, 2012), 124–40; Kenneth Boyce and Andrew Moon, "In Defense of Proper Functionalism: Cognitive Science Takes on Swampman," *Synthese* 193 (2016): 2987–3001; Tyler Dalton McNabb, *Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[20] There is a controversy about whether groups have beliefs or acceptances (I will use "doxastic attitude" to refer to both beliefs and acceptances). In any case, both camps accept a *nonsummative* account of group doxastic attitudes, i.e., a group's having a doxastic attitude consists in something other than a certain proportion of the group's members' having that doxastic attitude. If indeed groups do not believe propositions but instead accept propositions as true, then I would have to restate my thesis **False or Warranted** in terms of acceptances. Acceptances can be warranted or unwarranted, though, just like beliefs, and warranted true acceptances would be knowledge just like warranted true beliefs. Kay Mathiesen provides a helpful overview of the debate regarding group belief vs. group acceptances in "The Epistemic Features of Group Belief," *Episteme* 2 (2006): 161–75. Margaret Gilbert is one of the main proponents of **Group Belief**, which she defends in several places, such as *On Social Facts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 288–314, and more recently "Belief and Acceptance as Features of Groups," *Protosociology* 16 (2002): 35–69 and "Collective Epistemology" *Episteme* 1 (2004): 95–107. The work of Christian List and Philip Pettit in establishing that the beliefs and desires of groups do not supervene on the beliefs and desires of their individual members and in arguing that hence groups can be genuine agents is also important for **Group Belief**, especially *Group Agency: The Possibility, Design, and Status of Corporate Agents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[21] By accepting that groups have beliefs, I do not mean to assert that "belief" is synonymous in the phrases "group belief" and "individual belief," but if the term "belief" is not synonymous in these cases their use is at least analogous. Alexander Bird contends, plausibly, that group knowledge (and

Group Epistemic Faculties: Groups have epistemic faculties.

One way to motivate these theses is to appeal to the functional analogy between a group's knowledge and an individual's knowledge.[22] Knowledge will do for groups what it does for individuals: guide their decisions, provide them with reasons for their actions, and make their assertions credible. If groups can know propositions, then they must also be able to believe or accept propositions. The group structure that enables the group to know propositions is functionally analogous to the mental and biological structure of an individual that enables an individual to know propositions, and in either case these structures constitute the epistemic faculties of the knower. For instance, the river authority operating a dam needs to be able to protect its critical infrastructure from a cyberattack, so it establishes a cybersecurity team, develops certain goals and procedures for the team, and provides it with the resources it needs to be able to detect cyberattacks. This cybersecurity team, which not only consists of the individual members but the way their team is structured, its interrelations with the rest of the dam operations, and its resources constitute the river authority's epistemic faculty to know about certain propositions, those dealing with cyberattacks. The cybersecurity team might be compared to the visual faculty of a human being which allows him to know propositions about visual facts and which is constituted not only by organs like the eyes but also by the relation of the eyes to the rest of the body and other cognitive faculties.

On the account I defend elsewhere, a group is warranted in a belief if and only if three conditions are met, which exactly parallel Plantinga's three conditions for the warrant of an individual's belief:[23]

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presumably, group belief) bears a functional analogy to individual knowledge; see his "Social Knowing: The Social Sense of 'Scientific Knowledge'" *Philosophical Perspectives* 24 (2010): 24–56, at 41–6.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Plantinga, *WPF*, 19.

Warranted Group Belief: A belief *B* has warrant for group agent *S* if and only if the

relevant members and other parts of *S* (i.e., those involved in the production of *B*) are

functioning properly in a social environment sufficiently similar to that for which *S*'s

faculties are designed and the modules of the design plan governing the production of *B*

are aimed at truth and such that there is a high objective probability that a belief formed

in accordance with those modules (in that sort of social environment) is true.

For ease of exposition in the next section, I will reverse the order of these three conditions and

label them (1) Good Design Plan, (2) Similar Social Environment, and (3) Properly Functioning

Parts.

My account of warranted group beliefs is *Nonsummativist* rather than *Summativist*.[24] On a

Summativist view, a group's belief that *P* is warranted in virtue of a high proportion of group

members' being warranted in their belief that *P*, while on a Nonsummativist view a group's

belief is warranted in virtue of something else.[25] Hence, on a Summativist view of warranted

group belief, the only real questions are what the warrant of an individual's belief consists in and

how high the proportion of members with warranted beliefs needs to be for the group's belief to

be warranted.

This brings me to my two reasons for accepting **Warranted Group Belief:**

First, **Warranted Group Belief** meets the following criterion for accounts of warranted

group belief:

Similarity of Definition Criterion: It is a mark of defective presumptive definitions d_g

of a property P_g of some group intentional attitude a_g and d_i of a property P_i of some

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[24] I follow Jennifer Lackey's way of drawing the distinction between Summativism and Nonsummativism in "What is Justified Group Belief?," *Philosophical Review* 125 (2016): 341–96, at 346, 358. Hereafter, "JGB."

[25] Hence, Nonsummativism is a very loosely related set of views.

individual intentional attitude a_i if (*i*) a_g's being P_g and a_i's being P_i are analogous or synonymous while (*ii*) d_g and d_i are dissimilar.[26]

This criterion is a sort of application of the more general principle that when there is an analogy between four items such that what *A* is to *X*, *B* is to *Y*, there should also be some similarity between the definitions of *A* and *B*. Otherwise, it is difficult to see in what sense *A* and *B* could stand in analogous relations to *X* and *Y*. The dissimilarity of definitions might consist in (1) their having different numbers of conditions, (2) their conditions' employing different terms, or (3) their conditions' employing the same terms in equivocal and non-analogous senses. My definition of the warrant of a group's beliefs and Plantinga's definition of the warrant of an individual's belief are not dissimilar, since they have the same number of conditions, use the same terms, and apply these terms in analogous senses.

Besides my proper functionalist account of warranted group belief, there are only two other extant accounts of warranted group belief that meet the **Similarity of Definition Criterion**. First, there is Jeffrey Dunn's Simple Group Reliabilism, which is a Nonsummativist reliabilist account of warranted group belief.[27] On Dunn's view, "a group belief is justified iff it is produced by a group belief-forming procedure that is reliable," which exactly parallels the reliabilist definition of the justification of an individual's belief.[28] Besides Dunn's reliabilist account of group warrant, Brian Hedden provides an evidentialist account of group rationality, which exactly parallels his account of the rationality of an individual, which also meets the

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[26] This principle is apparently at play in *Republic* IV when Socrates proceeds from his definitions of the four cardinal virtues in the city to his definitions of the four cardinal virtues in the individual.

[27] Since Plantinga's and my accounts of warranted belief include a reliabilist component, my arguments in Section III for the warrant of Catholic dogmas would also establish that these dogmas are warranted on a purely reliabilist account like Jeffrey Dunn's.

[28] Jeffrey Dunn, "Reliable Group Belief," *Synthese* 198, Supplement 23 (2021): S5653–77, at S5661.

Similarity of Definition Criterion.[29] Reza Lahroodi proposes a virtue epistemological account

of group warrant but ultimately rejects it.[30] Every other account of group warrant fails the

Similarity of Definition Criterion. No Summativist accounts of warranted group belief can

meet this criterion, since all of them must define group warrant in terms of proportions of

individual believers, and obviously individual warrant will not be defined in terms of proportions

of individual believers (or anything analogous to such proportions). Similarly, Jennifer Lackey's

Group Epistemic Agent Account does not correspond to any account of individual warrant,

partially because she also includes as a necessary but not sufficient condition that a high

proportion of the group's members be warranted in the relevant belief.[31]

Second, like Plantinga's proper functionalist account of individual warrant **Warranted**

Group Belief does well in giving the intuitively correct judgment on a number of cases

involving warranted group belief. In another paper, I go through different cases for each

condition, showing the importance of each.[32] For this paper, I will merely point to a single case

showing the importance of one condition in particular—Similar Social Environment. Here's the

case:

> **Telephone Polling:** A polling company Pollsters founded in 1946 conducts its
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> polling exclusively by calling landlines just as it has done since its founding, and
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> in 1946 its methods for polling were groundbreaking. Imagine though that in some

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[29] Brian Hedden, "Reasons, Coherence, and Group Rationality" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 99 (2019): 581–604, at 582.

[30] Reza Lahroodi, "Collective Epistemic Virtues," *Social Epistemology* 21 (2007): 281–97.

[31] Lackey, "JGB," 381.

[32] Here are some other cases that show the necessity of the other conditions for warrant. Lackey's *Illegitimate Manipulation of Evidence* shows that the design plan must be oriented towards truth ("JGB," 350–4), while my case *Siloed Weatherman* shows that the design plan must reliable as well ("Warranted Group Belief"). Lackey's *Group Normative Obligations* shows the necessity of Properly Functioning Parts ("JGB," 350–4).

distant future age, very few people have landlines, and that the few who do have

political views which are not representative of the rest of likely voters. Pollsters

comes to learn about this fact. Up to now, it has found its polling highly

accurate and reliable for predicting elections, but looking at the present social trend

of people ditching landlines, Pollsters decides it needs to modify its polling

techniques.

I take it that Pollsters is rational to modify its polling techniques because its 1946 design plan did

not envisage the sorts of social changes the company now finds itself in. By modifying

techniques, it modifies its design plan such that it takes into account these social changes, and so

it will be able to continue to have warranted group beliefs. **Telephone Polling** is a problem for

Social Group Reliabilism, in particular, because that view doesn't individuate group procedures

on the basis of any environmental factors. Procedures can be reliable in one social environment

that are not reliable in another social environment, but on Dunn's view one would have to judge

a procedure's reliability across all social environments (presumably both those it has operated in

and those it will or could operate in).

The **Similarity of Definition Criterion** along with the cases I provide elsewhere give

some reason to accept **Warranted Group Belief** as an account of what warrant consists in for

group beliefs, though that reason is far from conclusive. Yet there is very good reason for those

who accept Plantinga's account of warrant of individuals' beliefs and who accept **Group Belief**

and **Group Epistemic Faculties** to accept **Warranted Group Belief** as well. **Warranted

Group Belief** also shows that while Plantinga's work is framed in individualistic terms

(something some authors in *Rational Faith* criticized him for[33]), there is nothing preventing the extension of his work to the collective sphere.

III. Warranted Catholic Dogmas

Granted that **Warranted Group Belief** provides the sufficient conditions for a group's belief to be warranted, the task of showing that Catholic dogmas are warranted if true is relatively simple. All I need to do is point to dogmas the Church teaches about itself that would entail that its dogmatic beliefs are warranted. For ease of reference, I rely predominantly on catechisms such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*CCC*) and the *Catechism of St. Pius X* (*CPX*), which provide reliable evidence for the Catholic Church's authoritative teachings on Christ and the nature of the Church itself and its offices.[34]

To begin with, the following answer in the *CPX* serves as an apt summary of the contention of this section: *"We are certain that the doctrine which we receive from the Holy Catholic Church is true, because Jesus Christ, the divine Author of this doctrine, committed it through his Apostles to the Church, which he founded and made the infallible teacher of all men, promising her his divine assistance until the end of time."*[35] This brief statement about the

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[33] For instance, Linda Zagzebski, "Religious Knowledge and the Virtues," 205–6, 215–6, 220–2, and James Ross, "Cognitive Finality," 229.

[34] As the *CCC* asserts about itself, "This catechism aims at presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church's Tradition. Its principal sources are the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, and the Church's Magisterium" (*CCC* 11). Recent changes to the *CCC* on capital punishment have been controversial (see for instance Steven Long, "Magisterial Irresponsibility," *First Things* (October 2018) and the "Letters" in response (December 2018)) and have thrown into doubt the reliability of the *CCC* as a witness to authoritative Catholic Church teaching on this question. I do not cite any claims from the *CCC* related to moral theology more generally, though, and the *CCC*'s reliability in representing authoritative Church teaching on the sorts of issues I discuss is not controversial.

[35] *Catechism of St. Pius X*, "Preliminary Lesson," Question 8, "How are we certain that the Christian Doctrine which we receive from the Holy Catholic Church is really true?" (Accessed at: https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/catechism-of-st-pius-x-1286).

grounds for an individual Catholic's certainty in the Christian doctrine received from the Catholic Church encapsulates the three conditions for warrant, and it also points to the warrant of the Catholic Church's beliefs as the grounds for the warrant of the individual Catholic's beliefs. In this answer, *CPX* teaches that the Catholic Church's assertions are warranted because (1) the Church is founded by a divine author Jesus Christ for the purpose of teaching his doctrine (Good Design Plan); (2) he founded the Church so as to teach *all people* until the end of time, i.e. across all social environments in different regions and times (Similar Social Environment); (3) he gives divine assistance to the Church to accomplish this teaching purpose even to the point of its being infallible (Properly Functioning Parts).

In what follows, I will go through each of the conditions, showing that according to the Catholic Church it meets each of the three conditions from **Warranted Group Belief**. For the final condition (Properly Functioning Parts), I include an excursus about the conditions for when exactly the Catholic Church asserts some proposition.

III.A. Condition 1: Good Design Plan

It is easiest to show that the Church's dogmatic beliefs meet the first condition—Good Design Plan. Jesus Christ, whom the Church teaches to be God incarnate, founded the Catholic Church and provided it with its design plan, at least in broad outline.[36] The rest of the design plan of the Church—at least those parts of its design which are constitutive of the Church and irreformable—were determined by the apostles acting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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[36] As *Lumen Gentium* 18 teaches, "This Sacred Council, following closely in the footsteps of the First Vatican Council, with that Council teaches and declares that Jesus Christ, the eternal Shepherd, established his holy Church, having sent forth the apostles as He Himself had been sent by the Father; and He willed that their successors, namely the bishops, should be shepherds in his Church even to the consummation of the world. And in order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, He placed Blessed Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and communion."

Granted that all of this is true, it should be no surprise that the Church's design plan meets the two conditions I mentioned for a good design plan: *(a)* it is aimed at truth and (*b*) beliefs produced in accordance with the design plan have a high objective probability of being true.

The *CCC* witnesses to the Magisterium's orientation towards truth, which is the first feature of a good design plan. "It is this Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church's shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals" (*CCC* 890–1). Christ designed the office of bishops for the express purpose that they might teach a certain set of true beliefs.

Besides being truth-oriented, the design plan is maximally reliable at producing true beliefs because dogmatic beliefs have a 100% objective probability of being true. Moreover, when it comes to dogmatic beliefs, we can maintain their 100% objective probability without trying to determine whether they were produced in accordance with the design plan. We can show all this by merely pointing to the Church's dogmatic teaching at the First Vatican Council on the infallibility of the pope when he defines a dogma and the infallibility of an ecumenical council when it does the same.[37]

III.B. Condition 2: Similar Social Environment

The second condition on group warrant is that the Catholic Church produces beliefs in a social environment sufficiently similar to that in which it was designed to operate. For this condition, I must show that according to Catholic dogma the set of social environments Christ designed the Catholic Church to operate in includes all of the actual social environments it has, does, and will operate in. Thus I need to argue for the following thesis:

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[37] "First Vatican Council," Session 4, Chapter 4 (Accessed at: https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/first-vatican-council-1505).

Comprehensive Design: Christ designed the Catholic Church to operate in all of the social environments it ever has, does, or will operate in.

To defend **Comprehensive Design**, I can point to two Catholic dogmas: first, Christ's perfect foreknowledge of all future events and second, Christ's designing the Catholic Church to be indefectible. Granted that Christ had perfect foreknowledge of all future events, he would foreknow all the social environments the Church would operate in. Hence, granted that Christ also designed the Church to operate so that it would exist for all time (or at least until his Second Coming), Christ's design plan for the Church would include all actual social environments the Church would operate in.

The two suppositions—that Christ has infallible foreknowledge of all future events and that Christ designed the Church to be indefectible—are either dogmatic beliefs or entailed by dogmatic beliefs. Christ foreknows all future events both by his divine foreknowledge and by the infused knowledge in his human soul. As the Catechism teaches about the latter, "Christ enjoyed in his human knowledge the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans he had come to reveal" (*CCC* 474).

For the second supposition, not only does the Church teach that Christ designed the Church to be indefectible, but it teaches that he promised that it would be indefectible. In answering whether the Church may perish, the *Catechism of St. Pius X* replies, "No; the Catholic Church may be persecuted, but she can never be destroyed or perish. She will last till the end of the world, because Jesus Christ, as he promised, will be with her till the end of time."[38] The First Vatican Council teaches the indefectibility of the Catholic Church as well, making this indefectibility consist in the indefectibility of the see of St. Peter, "That which our lord Jesus

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[38] *CPX*, "The Ninth Article of the Creed," Question 35.

Christ, the prince of shepherds and great shepherd of the sheep, established in the blessed apostle

Peter, for the continual salvation and permanent benefit of the Church, must of necessity remain

forever, by Christ's authority, in the Church which, founded as it is upon a rock, will stand firm

until the end of time."[39]

So Christ founded the Church using his infallible foreknowledge of future social

environments and designed it such that it would operate in every such social environment.

Hence, on the assumption of **Truth of Catholic Dogma**, **Comprehensive Design** is true because

there is no social environment the Catholic Church operates in that wasn't envisioned in the

design plan Christ had for it.

III.C. Condition 3: Properly Functioning Parts

Finally, for the third condition, I must show that when producing dogmatic beliefs, the

parts of the group producing such beliefs (i.e., popes and ecumenical councils) are functioning

properly. To show that Catholic dogmatic beliefs meet this condition, I will first consider what it

is for the dogma-producing parts of the Catholic Church to function properly according to the

design plan Christ gave to the Church, and second, I will show how this proper functioning is

entailed by the Catholic Church's teaching on the infallibility of the pope and ecumenical

councils in defining dogmas. So, for this subsection, I must argue for the following claim:

> **Properly Functioning Magisterium**: If an ecumenical council of bishops or the pope
>
> teach some belief authoritatively, they are fulfilling their teaching office in accordance
>
> with Christ's design plan for bishops and popes.

What then is it for either an ecumenical council or a pope to fulfill their teaching offices?

According to the *CCC*, the task of the Magisterium (i.e., those with teaching offices) is "to

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[39] "First Vatican Council," Session 4, Chapter 2, Section 1.

preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error."[40] This points to two criteria for the proper functioning of the teaching office: first, does it preserve the faithful from deviations?[41] Second, does it allow the faithful to profess the true faith? Both of these are conditions on what the teaching office prevents the faithful from doing or enables them to do. A third criterion for the proper functioning of the teaching offices is that what they teach is not some new doctrine but a part of the deposit of the faith transmitted by the apostles, which the First Vatican Council expresses thus: "For the Holy Spirit was promised to the successors of Peter not so that they might, by his revelation, make known some new doctrine, but that, by his assistance, they might religiously guard and faithfully expound the revelation or deposit of faith transmitted by the apostles."[42] [43]

Hence, there are three criteria for the teaching offices of the Church to be properly functioning. I take these three criteria to be sufficient for proper functioning as well, since if the teaching offices should meet the first two criteria they would accomplish the purpose for which they were designed. The First Vatican Council points to the salvation of the faithful as the reason God conferred infallibility on the pope, "This gift of truth and never-failing faith was therefore divinely conferred on Peter and his successors in this See so that they might discharge their exalted office for the salvation of all, and so that the whole flock of Christ might be kept away by

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[40] *CCC* 890.

[41] Here, I use the phrase "the faithful" to refer to what the *Catechism of St. Pius X* helpfully calls the "Taught Church" as opposed to the "Teaching Church," which consists primarily of the pope and bishops ("The Ninth Article of the Creed," Questions 39–44).

[42] Session 4, Chapter 4, Section 6.

[43] I follow the First Vatican Council in using "faith and morals" and "apostolic deposit of the faith" as synonymous. For a theological defense of the very concept of a deposit of faith as doctrines with propositional content, see Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2014), 159–72.

them from the poisonous food of error and be nourished with the sustenance of heavenly doctrine."[44] If the teaching office functions so as to allow the faithful to profess the true faith and avoid deviations from that faith, then the faithful are able to be saved in virtue of that true faith.

In producing dogmatic beliefs, though, ecumenical councils and popes do meet these three criteria. For the *CCC* teaches, "To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church's shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The exercise of this charism takes several forms." It then goes on to list two such forms: (1) when the bishop of Rome "as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful–who confirms his brethren in the faith […] proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals" or (2) "when, together with Peter's successor, [the body of bishops] exercise the supreme Magisterium, above all in an Ecumenical Council."[45]

What explains the infallibility of the popes and ecumenical councils, though? Here, what the *CCC* calls the "charism of infallibility" is pertinent.[46] In order to guarantee proper functioning of the popes and ecumenical councils, Christ grants special graces to these parts of the Church when they are defining dogmatic beliefs.[47] These special graces are not for the sake of sanctifying the men who receive them but for enabling them to transmit and produce true beliefs about the revelation of Christ and to avoid producing false beliefs about this revelation.

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[44] Session 4, Chapter 4, Section 7.

[45] *CCC* 891.

[46] Kevin Vanhoozer objects on theological grounds that the charism of infallibility threatens to undermine the distinction between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Church; Matthew Levering responds to this objection in *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation*, 142.

[47] In his discussion of this issue, Gaillardetz rightly notes, "A proper respect for the mysterious activity of God's grace precludes any schematic development of precisely how the Spirit is thought to work through these human processes," *Teaching with Authority* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1997), 147.

The *CPX* provides a similar explanation of papal infallibility as the *CCC*: "The Pope is infallible because of the promise of Jesus Christ, and of the unfailing assistance of the Holy Ghost."[48]

III.D. Excursus on Condition 3: Church Assertions and Faith and Morals

What about the third criterion, though, of proper functioning? The First Vatican Council in defining papal infallibility declared that the pope is infallible when "defining doctrine concerning faith or morals."[49] This apparently allows the possibility that the pope might teach something on a topic besides faith or morals, and that in such a case the pope would not be infallible and could teach something false. Likewise, the First Vatican Council teaches that the Holy Spirit's assistance is given to the popes so that they can "religiously guard and faithfully expound" the apostolic deposit of the faith, i.e., that they might function properly in regard to transmitting that deposit and teaching about it, which again leaves open the possibility that the Holy Spirit will not assist popes to function properly with regard to propositions that do not relate to the apostolic deposit of faith.

For instance, imagine that a pope or ecumenical council were to begin making claims about scientific questions (e.g., about astronomy or climate science) and that actually popes and ecumenical councils were pretty unreliable on such questions. Moreover, even if popes and ecumenical councils were somehow reliable on such questions, they would not be reliable in virtue of their functioning properly in accordance with the design plan of the Church. They wouldn't be reliable in virtue of the Holy Spirit's assistance to them as teachers of the Church.

There are really two problems lurking here: one is that such scientific pronouncements would lower the reliability of popes and ecumenical councils in producing true beliefs and that in making such pronouncements they would not be functioning properly as the Church's teaching

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[48] "The Ninth Article of the Creed," Question 56.
[49] Session 4, Chapter 4, Section 9.

office. The second is an instance of what John Greco calls the "garbage problem." The garbage

problem is that (1) experts transmit knowledge to laypeople, (2) experts also transmit "garbage"

(i.e., unwarranted information) to laypeople, (3) laypeople don't have evidence that discriminates

between the cases when the experts are transmitting garbage and when they are transmitting

knowledge, but (4) experts successfully transmit knowledge to the laypeople anyway.[50] The

garbage problem, then, consists in explaining how the garbage doesn't prevent the successful

transmission of knowledge. The garbage problem is only pressing when trying to explain how

Catholic laypeople can know propositions on the basis of the testimony of popes and ecumenical

councils when these experts transmit both garbage and knowledge, but my concern in the present

paper is more limited. I only want to show that the Catholic Church is warranted in its group

beliefs in the first place.

To solve the first problem, then, which threatens the warrant of Catholic dogmas, I can

appeal to the work of Jennifer Lackey on group assertions more generally.[51] According to

Lackey, there are two ways for a group to assert a proposition—either by the group acting in a

coordinated manner to assert it or by means of a spokesperson authorized by the group. For the

second kind of group assertion, she gives the following three conditions:

> A group *G* asserts that *p* in the authority-based way if and only if that *p* belongs to a
>
> domain *d*, and a spokesperson(s) *S* (i) reasonably intends to convey the information that *p*
>
> in virtue of the communicable content of an individual act (or individual acts) of

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[50] John Greco, "Transmitting Faith (and Garbage)," 94–5.

[51] Lackey's work can be used to show that the sorts of distinctions the Church itself makes when it does and does not assert propositions are not *ad hoc* moves and that the Church is not guilty of "Humpty-Dumptyism."

communication, (ii) has the authority to convey the information in *d*, and (iii) acts in this way in virtue of *S*'s authority as a representative of *G*.[52]

Condition (ii) restricts the spokesperson's ability to assert some proposition on behalf of the group. Lackey provides a domain-specific restriction on the spokesperson's ability, which suits my purposes perfectly. The spokespersons of the Catholic Church (the bishops and pope) speak for the Church only when they assert propositions in the domain of faith and morals. Assertions by a bishop or pope in other domains do not constitute group assertions of the Catholic Church. No bishop is authorized to assert on behalf of the Catholic Church that Thales thought everything was water or that the jar at the fair has 256 balls in it.[53] [54]

Lackey draws an important distinction between "rogue spokespersons" and "bad spokespersons" on the basis of her three conditions for group assertion, which is useful in cases where it might be difficult to determine whether the Catholic Church does or does not assert some proposition.[55] A rogue spokesperson is someone who intends to assert some proposition on behalf of a group but fails to for one of two reasons. Either he asserts some proposition that falls outside the domain in which he is authorized to speak on the group's behalf (a failure of her

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[52] Jennifer Lackey, "Group Assertion," *Erkenntnis* 83 (2018): 21–42, at 30–1.

[53] Any vagueness about what falls under the domain of faith and morals is irrelevant to my paper, since all of the dogmas I appeal to clearly fall under that domain. For instance, it is clear that the Church's teaching that it was founded by Jesus Christ who is God incarnate and its teaching that ecumenical councils and the pope when defining dogmas are infallible both fall under the domain of faith. Vague borderline cases (e.g., questions about the best economic or political system or about cosmological theories on the universe's origins) are an issue when considering how warrant in believing some proposition gets transmitted from the Catholic Church to an individual Catholic.

[54] Condition (iii) is another restriction on the spokesperson's ability to assert some proposition on the group's behalf, but it is about the way the spokesperson asserts the proposition rather than what sort of proposition he asserts. The spokesperson needs to assert the proposition in virtue of his authority as a spokesperson for the group in order for him to successfully make a group assertion. This condition is precisely what is conveyed by the restriction in the First Vatican Council's definition of papal infallibility. The council only asserts that the pope is infallible "when he speaks *ex cathedra*, i.e., when fulfilling his office of pastor and teacher of all Christians." Thus it is only assertions that the pope makes when acting from his office as supreme teacher that the council claims to be infallible.

[55] Lackey "Group Assertion," 32.

condition (ii)) or he does not assert the proposition *as a representative* of the group (a failure of

condition (iii)). Lackey speaks of individuals acting *as* representatives of the group, but with

regard to the Catholic Church we can speak more precisely of individuals acting in virtue of their

office.[56] In the context of Catholic history, Lackey's two kinds of rogue spokespersons can show

why the Catholic Church never asserted certain propositions even though popes and bishops did

assert these propositions.[57] The Galileo affair is an instance of the first kind of rogue

spokesperson, since the controversy between heliocentrism and geocentrism is not a matter of

faith or morals.[58] As an instance of the second kind of rogue spokesperson one may mention

Pope John XXII, who asserted privately that souls do not enjoy the beatific vision until the

Resurrection. This was an erroneous view but one that he never asserted in virtue of his office as

teacher of all Christians. One can say the same about the case of Pope Honorius' Monothelitism.

These cases of rogue spokespersons are not a concern for my thesis that the

authoritatively taught beliefs of the Catholic Church are warranted if true. Propositions asserted

by a rogue spokesperson do not constitute group assertions, so for any case in which a bishop or

pope acts as a rogue spokesperson his assertion is not asserted by the Catholic Church. Of greater

concern is the possibility of bad spokespersons. A bad spokesperson is one who asserts a

proposition on behalf of the group within a domain he is authorized to make assertions in and

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[56] For instance, the First Vatican Council speaks of the pope's defining dogmas "in the exercise of his office as pastor and teacher of all Christians."

[57] In using the following examples, I do not mean to assert categorically that a given historical papal or episcopal statement was in fact a case of a rogue spokesperson or bad spokesperson but to show that the distinction provides guidance in making sense of these cases. Examination of historical cases may be left to Catholic historians and apologists. For further consideration of some relevant historical cases, see the *Catholic Encyclopedia*'s entries "Pope John XXII" and "Infallibility."

[58] Here the teaching of Pope Leo XIII about the intent of the writers of the Bible is relevant: "they did not seek to penetrate the secrets of nature, but rather described and dealt with things in more or less figurative language, or in terms which were commonly used at the time, and which in many instances are in daily use at this day, even by the most eminent men of science" (*Providentissimus Deus* 18).

who asserts it as a representative of the group, but who fails to assert the proposition that the group wishes him to assert. An example of this might be Nestorius' assertion as patriarch of Constantinople that the Blessed Virgin Mary was not the *Theotokos*. Lackey points out that while the assertions of a rogue spokesperson merely need to be disavowed by the group, those of a bad spokesperson must be retracted. If we look to Catholic history, we often find ecumenical councils (especially the earlier ones) being called in response to the assertions of bad spokespersons rather than rogue spokespersons. There is a sense that while the assertions of a rogue spokesperson can be readily disavowed without causing any serious damage to the integrity of the Magisterium, the assertions of a bad spokesperson require a clear denial and retraction by the highest authorities in the Church acting in the full capacity of their office.[59]

With this distinction between rogue and bad spokespersons in hand, I can now show that the popes and ecumenical councils always fulfill the third criterion for proper functioning—that what they teach is the apostolic deposit of the faith, i.e., faith and morals. For there are two ways someone might assert something not belonging to the apostolic deposit. First, he might assert some propositions that contradict or entail a contradiction of some proposition in the apostolic deposit, e.g., that Mary is not the Mother of God. I'll call this scenario **Contradiction**. Second, he might assert some propositions that are irrelevant to the apostolic deposit, e.g., that Thales believed everything is water. I'll call this second scenario **Irrelevance**.

Contradiction is already ruled out as a possible scenario by the infallibility of the pope and ecumenical councils when asserting some proposition relevant to the apostolic deposit. **Contradiction**, then, presents no problem for the third criterion.

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[59] One can see this in how many heresies condemned by the first seven ecumenical councils either originated with a bishop or were held by a number of bishops.

Irrelevance, though, also presents no problem for the third criterion, because the situation it describes is that of a rogue spokesperson, i.e., someone who attempts but fails to make an assertion on behalf of the group. It fails to do so because these spokespersons are only authorized to assert propositions in a certain domain, i.e., the domain of the apostolic deposit. Hence, when these spokespersons make assertions that are irrelevant to the apostolic deposit, they do not make a group assertion. Since the Catholic Church itself does not assert the proposition in question, either nobody asserts the proposition (because assertions must have assertors) or the spokespersons are making these assertions in their own person, in which case these are merely individual assertions. In any case, the Catholic Church makes no group assertion in such cases, and so the warrant of the Catholic Church's beliefs is not threatened even if the warrant of the beliefs of the individuals who happen to be its spokespersons is threatened.

IV. A Defeater: Non-Catholic Christian Sects

So far I have argued that the Catholic Church's beliefs in its dogmatic teachings are warranted if those teachings are in fact true. Yet there is still the question of whether this warrant withstands an array of potential defeaters. A defeater for some person's belief in proposition *P* just is a proposition *Q* that (*a*) the person either believes or should believe[60] and (*b*) which (*i*) provides evidence for Not-*P* or (*ii*) which provides evidence that the person was mistaken to come to believe in *P*. In order to make the more robust claim that the Catholic Church's beliefs in its dogmatic teachings have undefeated warrant, I would need to make it plausible that no potential defeater successfully defeats that warrant or that if it does the defeater is itself subject to another defeater. The number of potential defeaters for Catholic dogmas is rather large, so I must settle for showing that these dogmas only have defeasible warrant. In this section, though, I

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[60] Propositions of this sort that one believes in are psychological defeaters, while propositions of this sort that one *should* believe in are normative defeaters.

consider at least one potential defeater (and to my mind, the most powerful one): the widespread

denial of these dogmas by many non-Catholic Christian groups.[61]

Peer disagreement has been a burgeoning field in epistemology for the last twenty years,

so for the sake of simplicity I will merely assume the most difficult position for my view:

conciliarism and, specifically, the Equal Weight View.[62] On a conciliarist view, in a case in

which some set of epistemic peers learn about their disagreement on some proposition it is

unreasonable for any peer to retain his previous credence. The Equal Weight View goes even

further and claims that when revising their credences, all of the peers should converge on a

single credence that represents the average of their ex ante credences.

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[61] I am aware of no Protestant critique of the Catholic Church that makes explicit mention of the term "peer disagreement," likely because of the term's relative novelty. On the other hand, recent critiques of the Catholic Church rely upon sectarian disagreement as an argument against the warrant of Catholic claims. For instance, see Kenneth Collins and Jerry Walls, *Roman but not Catholic* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2017). Collins and Walls first make the point that the Catholic tradition is just one of many traditions on various theological questions (30). They later argue that because Catholic dogmas lack "universal consent" from non-Catholic Christian groups its dogmas are "provincial" and hence not "catholic" (83).

[62] For an overview of the various positions on peer disagreement, see Jonathan Matheson, "Disagreement and Epistemic Peers," *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2015), Accessed at: https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935314.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935314-e-13. See also Bryan Frances and Jonathan Matheson, "Disagreement," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, Accessed at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/disagreement/. For defenses of the Equal Weight View, see David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News," *Philosophical Review* 116 (2007): 187–217; Christensen, "Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy," *Philosophy Compass* 4 (2009): 756–67; Adam Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement," *Nous* 41 (2007): 478–502. For criticisms of the Equal Weight View and alternative views on peer disagreement, see Jennifer Lackey, "A Justificationist View of Disagreement's Epistemic Significance," in *Social Epistemology*, ed. Adrian Haddock, Alan Millar, and Duncan Pritchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 298–325; Thomas Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence" in *Disagreement*, ed. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield (New York City, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2010), 183–217. Another alternative view is the Steadfast View Plantinga defends in the context of religious disagreement in "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism" in *The Philosophical Challenges of Religious Diversity*, ed. Philip Quinn and Kevin Meeker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 172–92. Richard Feldman challenges Plantinga's Steadfast View in "Plantinga on Exclusivism," *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003): 85–90.

Here's the potential defeater: the Catholic Church believes some proposition, e.g., that the pope is infallible on matters of faith and morals defined *ex cathedra*. The Catholic Church, though, comes to learn that all of its peer groups—non-Catholic Christian sects—disagree about this claim.[63] Ergo, assuming the Equal Weight View, the Catholic Church along with its peer groups should converge on some single credence that represents the average of the groups' ex ante credence. Granted that only the Catholic Church believes in papal infallibility and that several non-Catholic Christian sects exist and all of them deny it, the Catholic Church should revise its present credence of 1.0 in papal infallibility to some credence below 0.5.[64] The Catholic Church's present failure to revise downward its credences in its dogmatic beliefs is an epistemic defect, then, and reduces the warrant of the Catholic Church's beliefs. So goes the defeater.

My response to the peer disagreement defeater is to sidestep the whole issue by denying that there is any peer disagreement at all in this case. On the assumption that Catholic dogma is in fact true, the Catholic Church isn't and shouldn't believe itself to be an epistemic peer of these non-Catholic sects. No peers, no peer disagreement. If the Catholic Church is not an epistemic peer with these Christian sects, then it is reasonable for the Catholic Church to retain its previous credence in the face of such disagreement. An expert can reasonably retain his belief in the face of learning that a non-expert disagrees. Hence, I contend that given **Truth of Catholic Dogma** the following thesis is true:

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[63] J. Adam Carter, "Group Peer Disagreement," *Ratio* 29 (2016): 11–28 raises and then resolves problems for how to apply conciliationism to the case of group peer disagreement.

[64] So long as there are more than two non-Catholic Christian sects each having a low credence (0.25 or under) in papal infallibility, it will follow on the Equal Weight View that the peer groups' credences should all converge on some value under 0.5.

Peerless Group: The Catholic Church has no epistemic peers on matters of faith and

morals, and it doesn't believe that it has epistemic peers on these matters.

Peerless Group has two parts. First, there is the contention that as a matter of fact, the Catholic

Church has no epistemic peers. This means that the Catholic Church is actually better off

epistemically on propositions concerning faith and morals than other groups, whether the

Catholic Church believes this or not. If the Catholic Church has no epistemic peer, then there is

no normative defeater for its belief coming from peer disagreement. Second, there is the

contention that the Catholic Church doesn't believe it has any epistemic peers on such

propositions, which eliminates the psychological defeater.

In order to defend **Peerless Group**, I present a necessary condition for epistemic peerage:

two groups are epistemic peers only if on average their beliefs are roughly equally warranted. I

then argue that given this condition, the Catholic Church is not the epistemic peer of any non-

Catholic Christian sect on the propositions under dispute concerning faith and morals. In

addition, I consider another way of considering epistemic peerage in terms of qualifications and

show how the Catholic Church has no epistemic peer in this sense either.

To show that the Catholic Church is not the epistemic peer of any other Christian group, I

can appeal to my account of warranted group belief to show that such groups are inferior to the

Catholic Church in one of the three conditions. There are two relevant kinds of non-Catholic

Christian groups: those that have validly ordained bishops and those that do not. I'll call the first

group "episcopal sects" and the second "non-episcopal sects."[65]

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[65] The document *Dominus Iesus* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith makes the same
distinction (section 17). It calls the episcopal sects "true particular Churches" but denies that they are in
"full communion" with the Catholic Church. On the other hand, it calls non-episcopal sects "ecclesial
communities."

Episcopal sects, which are most clearly represented by the Old Catholic Church but may also include certain conclavist groups, some Anglican dioceses, and Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches, fail to have as much warrant as the Catholic Church because while the bishops who produce their beliefs are part of the design plan of the Catholic Church they do not function properly, i.e., these sects fail to meet Condition 3 of **Warranted Group Belief**. This is because part of what it is for an individual bishop to function properly is to maintain unanimity with the dogmatic beliefs of the pope and ecumenical councils. Insofar as an individual bishop produces or transmits beliefs that are contrary to the dogmatic beliefs of the Catholic Church, he is not functioning properly in accordance with the design plan.[66] Insofar as such a bishop produces such beliefs and asserts them on behalf of some non-Catholic sect, those group's beliefs have less warrant than the dogmatic beliefs of the Catholic Church, and hence disagreement over such beliefs doesn't defeat the warrant of Catholic beliefs. Moreover, given that the Catholic Church itself teaches that those who disagree with its dogmatic beliefs are committing at least material heresy, it has no reason to believe that such heretical beliefs have equal warrant with dogmatic beliefs.[67]

The non-episcopal sects lack as much warrant as the Catholic Church mainly because of Condition 1—their design plan isn't as good as the one Christ made for the Catholic Church— and sometimes because of Condition 2—they operate in a social environment radically different from that envisioned by their designers. For Condition 1, the Catholic Church teaches that it is

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[66] *Lumen Gentium* 22–5. For instance, the council teaches, "But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head" (*LG* 22). It goes on to assert, "Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly whenever, even though dispersed through the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter, and authentically teaching matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement on one position as definitively to be held" (*LG* 25).

[67] *CPX*, "The Ninth Article of the Creed," Question 34.

the only group founded by Christ, so every non-Catholic Christian group must have some other designer and some other design plan.[68] Given that only Christ is without sin and only he is God incarnate, his design plan for the Catholic Church will be better than any design plan a sinful non-divine person could come up with. Likewise, for Condition 2, the design plans for such groups will be made by humans unable to foreknow all future social environments. Hence, even if a non-Catholic sect has a relatively good design plan at its founding and its ministers remain faithful to that design plan, increasingly radical changes in the social environment over time will make the group's beliefs less and less warranted. On the other hand, if a non-Catholic sect tries to be "relevant" and "keep up with the times," its ministers will generally be acting in ways contrary to the original design plan of the group. Protestant groups often fall into one or another of these traps over time, and this makes their beliefs not just less warranted than Catholic dogmatic beliefs but also increasingly less warranted as time passes.

Therefore, on this account of epistemic peerage, the Catholic Church is not the epistemic peer of any episcopal or non-episcopal sect. For the second part of **Peerless Group**, we need to show that the Catholic Church doesn't believe that it is the epistemic peer of any non-Catholic Christian groups. To show this, I show that the Catholic Church believes it has no such epistemic peer. On the supposition that the Church's beliefs are logically consistent, this entails the second part of **Peerless Group**.

The Catholic Church clearly believes it isn't the epistemic peer of any non-Catholic group. This is especially clear in statements by the Catholic Church about non-Catholic groups before the Second Vatican Council. For instance, the *CPX* teaches, "the Catholic Church is

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[68] As *Lumen Gentium* 8 asserts, "This is the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Saviour, after His Resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd, and him and the other apostles to extend and direct with authority, which He erected for all ages as 'the pillar and mainstay of the truth.'"

infallible, and hence those who reject her definitions lose the faith and become heretics."[69]

Elsewhere it asserts, "He who refuses to accept the solemn definitions of the Pope, or who even

doubts them, sins against faith; and should he remain obstinate in this unbelief, he would no

longer be a Catholic, but a heretic."[70] Clearly, if the Catholic Church believes that those who

reject its dogmatic beliefs are heretics, it does not consider them its epistemic peers.

While the Second Vatican Council avoided describing these non-Catholic Christian sects

as "heretics" or "schismatics," it still teaches that the Catholic Church is in a superior epistemic

position to these sects. In *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the decree on ecumenism, the council asserts,

"It follows that the separated Churches and Communities as such, though we believe them to be

deficient in some respects, have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in

the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of

salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the

Church."[71] Thus even if such non-Catholic sects have some warrant for their beliefs, the Council

believes that these communities are deficient in ways that the Catholic Church is not and that the

warrant these sects have is derived from the warrant of the beliefs of the Catholic Church.

Up to now I have assumed epistemic positions were equal only if the warrant for each

person's belief is equal. What if we instead thought about epistemic peerage in terms of

qualifications and took the paradigm of peer disagreement to be two equally qualified experts

disagreeing about some matter that falls within their expertise? Theological disputes might seem

to match such a paradigm. Different Christian sects arguing about difficult matters of theology in

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[69] "The Ninth Article of the Creed," Question 34.
[70] "The Ninth Article of the Creed," Question 58.
[71] *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3.

often highly technical language might look like experts disagreeing on some inextricable puzzle in their field. Such a characterization seems mistaken for the following reason.

The difficulty and long standing of theological disputes inclines some to give up on either position's ever coming to be warranted: almost all matters of controversy become *adiaphora*. Such an inclination has its dangers. Over time as one finds that not only are there disputes about issues like infant baptism or glossolalia or the Immaculate Conception but that some brilliant, highly educated theologians disbelieve in the historical reality of the Resurrection, deny that Christ was divine, or consider Sabellianism a perfectly reasonable Trinitarian view, the set of things one must believe in order to count as a Christian becomes vanishingly small. What leads one down the road to a milquetoast latitudinarianism is an excessively credentialed understanding of what qualifies someone as an expert in matters of faith and morals. Once I allow that anyone holding a doctorate from a top theology faculty is the epistemic peer of the Catholic magisterium, then the warrant of my Christian beliefs is a hostage to the fortunes of academic theology.

Thus we must be careful about extending to matters of faith and morals the common academic practice of judging epistemic peerage by equality of academic qualifications. When thinking about expertise in these matters it is good to begin by reflecting on how, in particular, Christ revealed this faith. Since the field of Christian belief is what Christ revealed, it makes most sense, when determining qualifications, to look to Christ's own choice about whom to authorize as experts on such matters. He did not select the most learned men of his day or even the Jews who had studied the Torah under the best teachers. Instead, he chose simple men, the apostles, and authorized them to teach what he had revealed. This qualification to teach—the authorization of Christ—was handed down in a line of succession from the apostles to the

bishops of today. The *CCC* makes this same point, indicating that the authority to teach Christ's Gospel is passed down by Christ through the Church by means of sacramental orders (at least in part).

> No one can give himself the mandate and the mission to proclaim the Gospel. The one sent by the Lord does not speak and act on his own authority, but by virtue of Christ's authority; not as a member of the community, but speaking to it in the name of Christ. No one can bestow grace on himself; it must be given and offered. This fact presupposes ministers of grace, authorized and empowered by Christ. From him, they receive the mission and faculty ("the sacred power") to act *in persona Christi Capitis*. The ministry in which Christ's emissaries do and give by God's grace what they cannot do and give by their own powers, is called a "sacrament" by the Church's tradition. Indeed, the ministry of the Church is conferred by a special sacrament.[72]

Yet showing that bishops are in a better epistemic position in regard to the revelation of Christ is insufficient as a response to the objection, because even validly ordained bishops in the apostolic succession can disagree about matters of faith and morals. A further point is necessary, which is that while any individual bishop is the epistemic peer of any other bishop, no individual bishop is the epistemic peer either of the pope or an ecumenical council on matters of faith and morals.

The arguments of this section reaffirm an essentially Plantingian point I made in the Introduction: there can be no *de jure* objections to the warrant of Catholic dogmas. To point to the disagreement of other Christian groups with the Catholic Church is to present a kind of *de jure* objection to the warrant of the Catholic Church's dogmatic beliefs. One would need to argue

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[72] *CCC* 875.

that the Catholic Church is wrong about what it claims to be before one can even say it has any epistemic peers.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued for the thesis **False or Warranted**: if the dogmatic beliefs of the Catholic Church are true, then they are also warranted, and they can only be unwarranted if some of them are false. This involved first providing my general account of what it is for a group's belief to be warranted: **Warranted Group Belief**, which made use of three conditions: (1) Good Design Plan, (2) Similar Social Environment, (3) Properly Functioning Parts. **Warranted Group Belief** is a contentious account of group warrant, but the adherent of Plantinga's account of the conditions on warrant for an individual's beliefs should find **Warranted Group Belief** amenable. With this account of group warrant in hand, I showed that according to the Catholic Church's own teachings, its dogmatic beliefs meet the three conditions for group warrant. Then I considered one potential defeater for the warrant of the Catholic Church's dogmatic beliefs: the plurality of non-Catholic Christian sects which disagree with it about these dogmatic beliefs. I responded to this defeater by showing that if all Catholic dogmatic beliefs are true then the Catholic Church is not the epistemic peer of any other Christian group regarding the apostolic deposit of faith. Hence, it is reasonable for the Catholic Church to remain stalwart in the face of disagreement with groups in a worse epistemic position.

There are two directions in which this notion of *warranted Catholic belief* could be taken. First, I could tackle a wider range of potential defeaters for the warrant of the Catholic Church's group beliefs. Such potential defeaters might include the following: apparent inconsistency between biblical statements and Catholic doctrinal statements, allegedly heretical statements by popes, apparent doctrinal inconsistency between the Second Vatican Council and previous

authoritative Catholic teaching, dissent from Catholic dogma by prominent Catholic theologians and wide swaths of the lay faithful, the wickedness and corruption of many popes, the coercion of bishops at ecumenical councils. These are all important topics, but they are better suited to apologetics than to philosophy.

Second, I could show how the group warrant of the Catholic Church is transmitted to individual Catholics. This transmission occurs by means of group testimony. The Catholic Church through its authorized spokespersons from the pope down to the parish priest provides testimony about Catholic dogmas. On the basis of this testimony, individual Catholics are warranted in believing Catholic dogmas. That's the model in brief, but what view of testimony does one have to hold to allow warrant transmission to take place? How do we respond to defeaters for the warrant of individual Catholics' beliefs? How does the virtue of faith and the grace each Catholic receives fit into this picture of warrant transmission by means of testimony? These are pressing questions, which I hope to answer in future work.[73]

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