

HENRI DE LUBAC ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE

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“It is in the Eucharist that the Bride receives a share in the Lord’s ‘traditioning,’ whose unity of completeness and newness, in turn, enables development of doctrine while distinguishing it from arbitrary innovation.”



“Dear Master and Friend,” wrote Hans Urs von Balthasar on the occasion of Henri de Lubac’s ninetieth birthday:

It remains only for me to say that I learned from you from my years of study in Lyon until today: something about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, you taught us, can unite much more than we are accustomed to think.¹

Balthasar also learned from de Lubac that the Holy Spirit’s surprising capacity to unite flows from, and leads back to, the sacramental mystery of Christ’s flesh and blood.² The writings of

1. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Il Padre de Lubac* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1986), 1–2.

2. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Spirit and Institution,” in *Spirit and Institution*, vol. 4, *Explorations in Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 237–38: “there can be nothing of the Spirit in the Church that does not also

Henri de Lubac are an enduring testimony to the unity of the threefold gift of spirit, water, and blood (1 Jn 5:8) as the abiding source of the Church. In his own letter of dedication on the occasion of de Lubac's ninetieth birthday, Fr. Joseph Fessio noted that de Lubac is "above all else a man of the Church, *homo ecclesiasticus*. . . . He has received all from the Church. He has returned all to the Church."³ For de Lubac, the task of thinking with the Church called for a style of theology devoted to exploring and defending the deep and permanent unity of the Church's faith across the centuries:

Without claiming to open up new avenues of thought, I have sought rather, without any antiquarianism, to make known some of the great common areas of Catholic tradition. I wanted to make it loved, to show its ever-present fruitfulness. Such a task called more for a reading across the centuries than for a critical application to specific points; it excluded any overly preferential attachment to one school, system, or definite age; it demanded more attention to the deep and permanent unity of the faith, to the mysterious relationship (which escapes so many specialized scholars) of all those who invoke the name of Christ.⁴

The vocation to make the Catholic tradition better known and loved in light of the "the deep and permanent unity of faith" also called for thinking about the idea of the development of doctrine.

In 1948, amidst the growing controversy provoked by the publication of his *Surnaturel, Études historiques* (1946), de Lubac published an important essay entitled "The Problem of the Development of Dogma."⁵ He later described the essay as "a sur-

coincide with Christ's reality, christologically, that does not let itself be translated into the language of the Eucharist—the surrender of Christ's own flesh and blood, the streaming outward from Christ's self up to the very point of his heart being pierced and his side flowing with water and blood."

3. Joseph Fessio, dedication to *Splendor of the Church*, by Henri de Lubac (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

4. Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 143–44.

5. Henri de Lubac, "The Problem of the Development of Dogma," in *Theology in History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 274 ["Le prob-

vey of current theories concerning the development of doctrine” that “took Newman’s principles as its basis.”⁶ One of the principal targets of the essay, Charles Boyer, SJ, had written a sharply critical review of *Surnaturel*.⁷ De Lubac’s article on the development of doctrine provided an opportunity to reply indirectly to the accusation that he was fostering a “new theology” that tended toward modernism. The Jesuit from Lyon turned the tables on Boyer, showing how the latter’s rationalistic theory of doctrinal development represented a misreading of Thomas Aquinas and a departure from the Catholic tradition. At a deeper level, de Lubac’s reflection on the development of doctrine refocused the Church’s attention on the mystery of Jesus Christ as the source and fullness of divine revelation. Presupposing Newman’s brilliant account of development, de Lubac brings to light the concrete and personal form of the *depositum fidei*, which is summed up in the Person of Christ, whom de Lubac describes as “the whole of dogma.”⁸

My aim in what follows is to show how de Lubac’s christocentric understanding of the form and content of divine revelation sheds light on the idea of the development of doctrine. As noted above, de Lubac takes Newman’s theory of development as the basis of his own reflections. Accordingly, I briefly present Newman’s theory of development before turning to the contribution of de Lubac. The final part of my essay considers the nature and limits of doctrinal development in light of the current debate surrounding the interpretation of Pope Francis’s Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*.

lème du développement du dogme,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948): 130–60].

6. De Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 64.

7. Charles Boyer, “Nature pure et surnaturel dans le *Surnaturel* du P. de Lubac,” *Gregorianum* 28 (1947): 379–95. In a footnote at the end of his article on the development of doctrine, de Lubac writes: “These pages had already been drafted when another article by Father Boyer (*Gregorianum*, 1947) reached us, an article devoted to our *Surnaturel*, in which several of the problems raised here were indirectly touched upon. We hope to be able to return to this later.” At the request of the Father General of the Jesuits, de Lubac refrained from a public response to criticism of *Surnaturel*. Some years later, in his memoirs (*At the Service of the Church*, 63), de Lubac published a personal letter to Fr. Joseph Huby that Boyer’s 1947 article had elicited.

8. De Lubac, “The Problem of the Development of Dogma,” 274.

1. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

In 1834, while still an Anglican, John Henry Newman wrote as follows:

Considering the high gifts, and the strong claims of the Church of Rome on our admiration, reverence, love, and gratitude, how could we withstand her, as we do; how could we refrain from being melted into tenderness, and rushing into communion with her, but for the words of Truth, which bid us prefer Itself to the whole world? 'He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of me.' How could we learn to be severe, and execute judgment, but for the warning of Moses against even a divinely-gifted teacher who should preach new gods, and the anathema of St. Paul against even Angels and Apostles who should bring in a new doctrine.⁹

As Newman saw it at the time, the Catholic Church had compromised the integrity of the Gospel by adding new doctrines such as Transubstantiation and the Immaculate Conception. Some ten years later, after an intensive study of the trinitarian and christological controversies in the early Church, Newman changed his position. He began to see the importance of an organic development of the Church's devotion, faith, and doctrine. While still an Anglican he wrote his masterpiece *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.¹⁰ Before the book was printed, he entered the Catholic Church.

The central thesis of Newman's book is that "the Christianity of the second, fourth, seventh, twelfth, sixteenth, and intermediate centuries is in its substance the very religion which

9. John Henry Newman, *Records of the Church*, xxiv. p. 7, in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), ix.

10. For the publication history of Newman's *Essay*, including a comparison between the 1845 and the revised 1878 edition, see Nicholas Lash, *Newman on Development: The Search for an Explanation in History* (Shepherdstown, WV: Patmos Press, 1975). See also Ian Ker, "Newman's Theory: Development of Continuing Revelation?," in *Newman and Gladstone: Centennial Essays* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1978).

Christ and his Apostles taught in the first.”¹¹ He acknowledges, of course, that there have been significant developments in the Church’s understanding and teaching, even “apparent inconsistencies and alterations in its doctrine and worship.”¹² However, Newman shows that these apparent variations are best understood as an organic unfolding and growth of the original gift of revelation. As a good teacher, God is mindful of our historical nature and of our limited capacity to receive the fullness of revelation. “The highest and most wonderful truths,” he writes, “though communicated to the world once and for all by inspired teachers, could not be comprehended all at once by the recipients, but, as being received and transmitted by minds not inspired and through media which were human, have required only long time and deeper thought for their full elucidation.”¹³ The gift of divine revelation requires time to be received and to unfold. New historical circumstances and new controversies will cause the same truth to be expressed in different terms, or an implicit idea to be explicated and unfolded.

Throughout his *Essay on Development*, Newman emphasizes the original fullness or completeness of God’s revelation to the Apostles. The development of doctrine cannot be understood as continuing revelation or as the addition of new content to the original deposit of faith. As Newman writes: “the Church [today] does not know more than the Apostles knew.”¹⁴ Having received the gift of revelation in its integral completeness, the Apostles had “implicit” knowledge of the fullness of faith. Newman’s point, then, is that it is this implicit knowledge that has unfolded and developed in the subsequent life of the Church:

[T]he Apostles had the fullness of revealed knowledge, a fullness which they could as little realize to themselves, as the human mind, as such, can have all its thoughts

11. Newman, *Development of Doctrine*, 5.

12. *Ibid.*, 9.

13. *Ibid.*, 29–30.

14. John Henry Newman, “Letter to R. F. Hutton,” October 20, 1871, in *The Vatican Council: January 1870 to December 1871*, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain and Thomas Gornall, vol. 25, *Letters and Diaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 418.

present before it at once. They are elicited according to the occasion. A man of genius cannot go about with his genius in his hand: in an Apostle's mind great part of his knowledge is from the nature of the case latent or implicit.¹⁵

According to Newman, the development of doctrine implies and requires a Church that possesses an infallible charism of discrimination between true and false developments. "A revelation is not given," he writes, "if there be no authority to decide what is given."¹⁶ Note the connection between infallibility and discernment. Infallible teaching comes into play in the context of discerning which developments do and do not unfold the implications of the original deposit of faith. What are the criteria of this discernment? Reviewing the historical record, Newman identifies seven "notes" that characterize the Church's discernment of authentic doctrinal developments. The "notes" are preservation of type, continuity of principle, power of assimilation, logical sequence, anticipation of its future, conservative action upon its past, and chronic vigor. As Matthew Levering observes, "these 'notes' have to do with the coherence of the whole body of doctrine, not with establishing an easily traceable path for any particular doctrine."¹⁷ Taken together, the seven notes bear witness to the essential unity of the Church's faith that develops over time in response to new situations, in fidelity to the original fullness of God's revelation in Christ.

As his emphasis on organic continuity suggests, Newman's understanding of the development of doctrine precludes any break or rupture with what the Church has taught in the past. In the words of Paul Misner, "Newman regarded every development, once received by the Church, as a 'definitive and irreversible acquisition which could not be abandoned.'"¹⁸ For Newman

15. John Henry Newman, unpublished manuscript (1868), cited in Ian Ker, foreword to *Development of Doctrine*, xxiv.

16. Newman, *Development of Doctrine*, 40.

17. Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation: The Mediation of the Gospel through Church and Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 183.

18. Paul Misner, *Papacy and Development. Newman and the Primacy of the Pope* (Leiden: Brill Academic, 1976), 68.

the deepest source of the substantial unity of the Church's faith and the development of her doctrine is the one mystery of Christ as presented in the gospels: "What Catholics, what Church doctors, as well as Apostles, have ever lived on, is not any number of theological canons or decrees, but, we repeat, the Christ himself, as He is represented in concrete existence in the gospels."¹⁹ This fundamental claim that dogma is Christ himself leads us into the heart of de Lubac's account of doctrinal development, to which we now turn.

2. HENRI DE LUBAC ON THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST AS SOURCE AND FULLNESS OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

De Lubac's 1948 essay, "The Problem of the Development of Dogma," begins with a survey of then recent literature on the concept of doctrinal development by authors such as Ambroise Gardeil, Léonce de Grandmaison, and Marin Sola. The initial focus of the essay is the theory advanced by the Louvain Dominican Marcolinus Tuyaerts in 1919 and rehabilitated by the Roman Jesuit Charles Boyer in his 1940 essay "Qu'est-ce que la théologie? Réflexions sur une controverse."²⁰ According to this theory, the development of doctrine is essentially a matter of rational or logical deduction from explicit premises within the deposit of faith. Boyer writes:

I do not see that one can deny the logical connection, which not only exists in itself but which can be traced by our means of investigation, between the progressive precision of dogma and the greatest indefiniteness of origins. The development of a truth can only follow a logic, and this path, at least at the point of arrival, must be perceptible. . . . The Church, assisted by the Holy Spirit, places her authority on the side of true logic. If it were otherwise, it would not be of development that we would have to speak, when a dogma is defined, but of radical innovation and

19. John Henry Newman, *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (London: Longmans, 1907), 388.

20. Cf. Marcolinus Maria Tuyaerts, *L'Évolution du dogme. Étude théologique* (Louvain: 1919); Charles Boyer, "Qu'est-ce que la théologie? Réflexions sur une controverse," *Gregorianum* 21 (1940): 255–66.

creation. How could we say that revelation was closed at the death of the last of the apostles if a subsequent belief were not connected to it by a truly rational and logical bond.²¹

Conceived in response to the errors of modernism, this “logicist” theory of development secures the homogeneity of Catholic doctrine. Nevertheless, de Lubac detected in it what he saw as a fatal disregard of the supernatural and mysterious character of divine revelation and the *sensus fidei* of the whole Church. De Lubac concurs with the judgment of Ambroise Gardeil:

[Tuyaerts’s account of development] is too narrow, too inclined to measure the divine word (which has been given us, after all, to lead us to heaven) according to sole demands of a reasoning that is given us to instruct us about earth, too generous with regard to logic and not enough with regard to the freedom of divine initiatives and the unknown ways and means of men that divine providence employs.²²

De Lubac illustrated this critique with the case of the dogma of Mary’s Immaculate Conception. It is simply not true, he argues, that this teaching was declared on the basis of a logical demonstration from explicit premises of faith. Or that in pronouncing this doctrine, “the Magisterium has, so to speak, only guaranteed by its authority the value of a logical operation.”²³ In this context, de Lubac cites his teacher Léon de Grandmaison, who in his view offers a more historically accurate and theologically-nuanced account of the grounds for the proclamation of this dogma in 1854:

There were texts, theological reasons, expedencies in particular, and a profound instinct of the Christ people *for*, [and] texts and theological reasons apparently *against* the dogma; humanly, the solution was undetermined, or only probable, let us say, infinitely probable, in the affirmative

21. Boyer, “Qu’est-ce que la théologie?” 264–65, cited in de Lubac, “The Problem of the Development of Dogma,” 255.

22. Ambroise Gardeil, “Bulletin d’introduction à la théologie,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 9 (1920): 658, cited in de Lubac, “The Problem of the Development of Dogma,” 249.

23. De Lubac, “The Problem of the Development of Dogma,” 262.

sense. But the Church knows, better than the beloved disciple, how to recognize her Lord, she has the power to discern the voice of her Bridegroom there where the human ear perceives only a weak or indistinct echo.²⁴

This authority to go beyond in certain cases the natural scope of the historical and logical “discourse” that prepares the definition; this superior gift of intuition that makes the Church clearly aware of truths that no demonstrative argument has shown obviously present in the deposit of revelation; this kind of prophetic instinct that gradually inclines the ecclesiastical Magisterium in the direction of an analogy, of an agreement of faith, of a warm propensity of the Christian people, and then makes it find the necessary distinctions and triumphant responses—this is the work of the Holy Spirit . . . the driving force of dogmatic development.²⁵

Commenting on these texts of Grandmaison, de Lubac writes:

Without doubt, theologians have a role to play, and a very important one. The Church is served by them; she is attentive to their opinions; but she is never content simply to record her opinions. While consulting theologians, she examines them, she is not bound by the reasons they bring to her. In whatever she decides, she does not mean, moreover to make a pronouncement on the value of these reasons. *What she seeks to find is not if such a proposition is or is not correctly deduced but if such an assertion is or is not contained in her faith.*²⁶

For Grandmaison and de Lubac, the driving force of doctrinal development is not logical analysis or demonstration, although both affirm the indispensable role of theological arguments. When, in response to a crisis or a new historical situation, the Church articulates her faith anew, she enters more deeply into the original fullness of revelation.

24. Léonce de Grandmaison, *Le Dogma chrétien. Sa nature, ses formules, son développement* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1928), 259–60, cited in de Lubac, “The Problem of the Development of Dogma,” 262.

25. *Ibid.*, 251.

26. De Lubac, “The Problem of the Development of Dogma,” 262 (emphasis mine).

After showing the limitations of the “logician” theory of doctrinal development, de Lubac considers a basic objection raised by Tuyaerts and Boyer: “How could one say that revelation was closed at the death of the last apostles if a later believer were not connected to it by a truly rational and logical bond?”²⁷ De Lubac notes that this objection is based on a legitimate concern. Together with Newman, de Lubac firmly upholds the completeness of divine revelation. The development of doctrine is not a new revelation: “All truth,” he writes, “has been given us by Christ and in Christ, and revelation, according to the traditional formula recalled by a proposition of the decree *Lamentabili*, was closed at the death of the last apostles.”²⁸ How, then, is it possible to hold together the completeness of revelation and the genuine novelty entailed by doctrinal development?

In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to have an adequate understanding of the nature of divine revelation. Too often, de Lubac notes, accounts of the idea of the development of doctrine presupposes an abstract and misleading idea of Christian revelation. For example, “Tuyaerts declared that his study rested entirely ‘on the definition of dogma, which is nothing else but a truth revealed by God and defined by the Church’; and, from the fact this dogma ‘is a logical reality adapted to our human intelligence,’ he concluded . . . that ‘it could evolve only with the aid of a logical process, the only thing our mind can use.’”²⁹ The mistake here, de Lubac notes, is to neglect the original source and content of God’s self-communication in Christ. It is here that de Lubac displays his kinship with Newman’s account of doctrinal development.

Before its articulation into distinct propositions or articles or dogmas, de Lubac says, the gift of revelation is summed up and concretized in the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. The formulation and teaching of doctrine begins already with the Apostles. “The apostles,” he writes, “were already catechists, and our ‘New Testament’ contains several passages that are true formularies of faith.” But it is important to note, de Lubac continues, “that if the

27. *Ibid.*, 267.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, 272.

apostles were already catechists, they were more fundamentally witnesses.”³⁰ It is mistake to think of the content of revelation as a “series of propositions detached from that unique mystery and thereby separated from each other, like ‘major premises,’ wholly ready for our future reasoning.”³¹ At this point in the article, de Lubac introduces the seminal idea that will inform the Second Vatican Council’s teaching on divine revelation.³² He writes:

In reality, concretely, what is first and that from which one must start without ever leaving—what is first and last—is the redemptive Action; it is the gift that God makes us of himself in his Son; it is the definitive accomplishment of that great design hidden in himself since the beginning and now revealed: “Our gratuitous vocation to eternal life through Christ and in Christ, or, in other words, Christ, the fullness of God’s gift and the unique source for men of eternal salvation.” And it is at the same time the revelation of all that. For it is all that which in Jesus Christ, is revealed to us. It is all that which, at first undivided, forms the total Object, the incredible rich Object of revelation. We can call it, to use an equivalent expression, “the Whole of Dogma.” And this “Whole of Dogma” is, as its name indicates, is not susceptible to any increase. It, too, like the Whole of the redemptive Action, is at once first and last. It is unsurpassable. . . . It is an abstraction to separate from this total revelation or this “Whole of Dogma” certain particular truths, enunciated in separate propositions, which will concern respectively the Trinity, the incarnate Word, baptism, grace, and so on. Legitimate and necessary, we repeat—for the mind can only preserve the total truth by actively exercising itself on it and according to its own laws—but on the condition that we be aware of it and that we not fail to understand the concrete “Whole” whose contents we will never exhaust.³³

30. *Ibid.*, 273.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Cf. *Dei verbum*, 2: “Intima autem per hanc revelationem tam de Deo quam de hominis salute veritas nobis in Christo illucescit, qui mediator simul et plenitudo totius revelationis existit.”

33. *Ibid.*, 274–75. As Aidan Nichols notes in *From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), a key source for de Lubac’s christocentric understanding of Christian doctrine was an unpublished manuscript of Pierre

Let me briefly note four consequences that follow from de Lubac's understanding of the mystery of Jesus Christ as the source and fullness of Christian doctrine.

1) The first point concerns the completeness of Christian revelation. This revelation is primarily the very life of the Son of God made man. This gift is a perfect, complete, and inexhaustible self-disclosure of God and his purposes. As John of the Cross says, in giving us his Incarnate Word, God "spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word—and he has no more to say."³⁴ Given this fact, it follows that the growth or development of doctrine cannot consist in the addition of new content, nor is it the case (as might be implied from the analogy to organic growth) of a seed growing into maturity. "The case of revealed truth," writes de Lubac, "is unique."³⁵ There is a perfection and inexhaustible fullness at the beginning.

2) The Church's reception of Christian revelation must be in a certain sense complete and perfect from the beginning. Nevertheless, there is also a sense in which the Church expresses and enacts its perfect reception of the deposit of faith in time. Accordingly, her reception of the *depositum* involves a temporal unfolding that finds expression in the development of doctrine. It is important to stress that for both Newman and de Lubac, this

Rousselot titled "Petite théorie du développement du dogme." De Lubac edited and published this text on the fiftieth anniversary of Rousselot's death in *Recherches de science religieuse* 53 (1965): 355–90. In words that anticipate de Lubac, Rousselot writes:

The whole dogmatics of the Church, even in its most abstract concepts and judgments, is nothing other than the explication of the concrete personal knowledge which the apostles had of the man Jesus, and which they transmitted, as they were able, to their disciples. . . . The whole of Tradition issues in a catechesis about Jesus Christ, because all the saving truths were in Jesus Christ. His person is not an object of doctrine. His person is the source, goal, reality, truth, of all doctrine.

See also Henri de Lubac, "Commentaire du préambule et du Chapitre 1 de la Constitution dogmatique Dei Verbum," in *La Révélation divine* (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 159–302.

34. Cf. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* 2, 22, 3–5, in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), 179–80.

35. De Lubac, "The Problem of the Development of Dogma," 276.

unfolding includes a propositional aspect, since part of explicating the original gift is to express it in words, indeed, in binding propositions. Indeed, the propositional aspect also corresponds to the form of revelation itself, inasmuch as Christ is the Word made flesh: God's own eternal, personal self-utterance stepping forth to declare itself once and for all in space and time.

The mystery of God's descent into the flesh, then, includes the humility of human words and dogmatic formulae. The precise formulation of doctrine—*homoousis* instead of *homoiousios*—safeguards and mediates the gift of divine love. The organic coherence and continuity of such propositions over time will be an expression and criterion of fidelity to the task of receiving and transmitting the gift of faith. The purpose of development is to conserve and faithfully transmit what the Church has always believed. Authentic development can never contradict or depart from a doctrine that has been proclaimed by the Church.

3) For de Lubac, then, the weakness of the "logicist" theory of development is not its valorization of propositions or of logic, but its tendency to reduce doctrinal development to logical deduction from a *depositum fidei* conceived primarily (or even simply) as an ensemble of contextless propositions. De Lubac's own alternative to logicism, however, is not a "modernist" disjunction between religious experience and dogmatic formulation. On the contrary, the burden of his position was to restore dogma to the original form of revelation itself—not, however, by reducing revelation to propositions, but by reinserting propositions within the a properly Christian conception of truth. Before dogma is something the Church formulates, dogma is something Christ himself *is*; dogma is first and foremost Christ himself as incarnate Word and enfleshed truth.

Christian revelation is from the beginning and remains so forever the manifestation of a Person, of the Truth in Person. Christ is simultaneously the medium and the object of the divine message. The Word [*Parole*] of God, in his unique and absolute plenitude, is the Word [*Verbe*] made flesh. It does not follow from this that revelation can avoid being expressed in concepts, nor that the passage of time acquits this conceptual expression of the need continually to be defined more precisely and enlarged with fresh details, nor that Christian revelation, as transcending

our concepts, should seek shelter in a pragmatic order that lacks the value of truth properly speaking. To those who, because of some scruple or some ill-conceived thoughts, would be led to doubt the human intelligence's aptitude for truth, the Incarnation of the Word, to the contrary, provides new reasons for confidence in it. But it follows that Catholic truth will always exceed its conceptual expression, especially its scientific formulation in an organized system. This is what Christian thinkers of every age have always instinctively known. This, more than just a pure spirit of charity, is what enabled a Saint Bonaventure and a Saint Thomas, without denying their differences, to converge.³⁶

In its most original meaning, then, dogma is Truth-made-flesh in the person of Jesus himself. Jesus, in his turn, is the "pattern of doctrine" (Rom 6:17) into which Christians are baptized and which is expressed in the Church's confession of faith. This confession, in its turn, is inseparable from the visible life of the Church, which, it goes without saying, includes dogma in the narrower sense. Yet it is no accident that this dogmatic formulation is bound up with the lives of the martyrs (and other saints) who proclaim it in an inseparable unity of word and deed—to the point of becoming living canonical exhibitions of the truth of Catholic doctrine.

4) A fourth point is that the key to reconciling the completeness of the deposit of faith and the newness involved in development of doctrine lies in mystery of Christ's Eucharist. Consider the mystery of Transubstantiation, which makes present Jesus' own "*traditio*," his handing himself over to death for the life of the world. To be sure, Transubstantiation presupposes the completeness of Jesus' "*traditioning*," which happened once and for all in the Paschal Mystery. But it does something else, too: it reenacts or reactualizes the Lord's traditioning in its original performance ("On the night he was betrayed, he took bread . . ."). Put another way, Transubstantiation reactualizes Jesus' traditioning, not only *in facto esse*, but also *in fieri*, thus reconciling completeness and newness in one simple form.

36. The Jesuits of Fourvière, "La théologie et ses sources: Réponse aux Études critique de la *Revue Thomiste* (Mai-Août 1946)," *Recherches de science religieuse* 33 (1946): 385-401.

Now, the *depositum fidei* is most of all the fruit of Jesus' "traditioning." Consequently, what Transubstantiation does for the latter, it does for the former as well. It makes the deposit present in its completeness once and for all, to be sure, but it also discloses the deposit's event-like freshness for all times. This disclosure, moreover, is not simply a matter of exhortation. Rather, it is most essentially an act of the Holy Spirit who leads the eucharistic Bride into all (enfleshed) truth. In the Eucharist, the Spirit draws the Bride into Jesus' "traditioning" so as to involve her, not only in receiving its completed fruit—the deposit of faith in *facto esse*—but also in receptively cogenerating the fruit, which is to say: in bringing forth deposit *in fieri*. Put another way, the mystery of the Eucharist assures the synthesis of completeness and newness in the Church's reception of the deposit of faith, thus providing the source, measure, and end of her development of doctrine, which, it bears stressing, is marked by the same form of enfleshed truth characterizing the *depositum* as the fruit of Jesus' primordial "traditioning" in flesh and blood.

3. THE IDEA OF DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE INTERPRETATION OF *AMORIS LAETITIA*

In order to better appreciate the common teaching of Newman and de Lubac, it is helpful to consider a concrete case of doctrinal development. During the 2014 and 2015 Synods of Bishops on the Family, the question of pastoral care for civilly divorced and remarried Catholics emerged as an important, though contentious, theological and pastoral question. In terms of the development of doctrine, the relevant issue concerned the significance and further unfolding of John Paul II's teaching in *Familiaris consortio*—a teaching which was confirmed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and further developed in Benedict XVI's *Sacramentum caritatis*. In response to the tragic situation of civil divorce and remarriage, John Paul II called for a "careful discernment of situations" and an effort on the part of the whole community of the faithful "to make sure that [civilly remarried Catholics] do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can, and indeed must, share in her life. . . . Let the Church pray for them, encourage them and show herself

a merciful mother.”³⁷ At the same time, John Paul II recalled and reaffirmed the practice of the Church, “which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried.”³⁸

The question raised in during the two synods on the family is whether a development in the Church’s teaching and pastoral care might warrant a change in this sacramental discipline. Since the publication of Pope Francis’s Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, the question has become more acute: has *Amoris laetitia* changed or “developed” the teaching set forth in *Familiaris consortio*? Theologians such as Cardinal Christoph Schönborn and Rocco Buttiglione argue that there has indeed been a change in sacramental discipline, and they argue that this change represents an organic development of John Paul II’s teaching. Other theologians such as Cardinal Gerhard Müller appeal to the unity of the Church’s faith and the nature of authentic doctrinal development to argue that *Amoris laetitia* has not changed the sacramental discipline of the Church. I will briefly present these respective arguments before considering the underlying question of doctrinal development.

During the official press conference for the presentation of *Amoris laetitia* on April 8, 2016, Cardinal Schönborn was asked about the relationship between *Amoris laetitia* and section 84 of *Familiaris consortio*. He answered as follows:

[C]ertainly there is a development, just as Pope John Paul developed doctrine . . . John Henry Newman explained to us how the organic development of doctrine works. Pope Francis is developing things in this way. . . . There is continuity in teaching here, but there is also something really new. There’s a real development, not a rupture.³⁹

In an interview with Jesuit Antonio Spadaro, published in *La Civiltà Cattolica* in July 2016, Schönborn returned to the idea of *Amoris laetitia* as a development of doctrine:

37. John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 84.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Vatican News, “Presentation of the Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*,” April 8, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9k79PKhP3I>.

“The Joy of Love” is an act of the magisterium that makes the teaching of the Church present and relevant today. Just as we read the Council of Nicaea in the light of the Council of Constantinople, and Vatican I in the light of Vatican II, so now we must read the previous statements of the magisterium about the family in the light of the contribution made by “The Joy of Love.” We are led in a living manner to draw a distinction between the continuity of the doctrinal principles and the discontinuity of perspectives or of historically conditioned expressions. This is the function that belongs to the living magisterium: to interpret authentically the word of God, whether written or handed down.⁴⁰

Later in the interview Schönborn explains in more detail how *Amoris laetitia* is an organic unfolding or development of *Familiaris consortio*:

St. John Paul II did indeed distinguish a variety of situations. He saw a difference between those who had tried sincerely to salvage their first marriage and were abandoned unjustly and those who had destroyed a canonically valid marriage through their grave fault. He then spoke of those who have entered a second marital union for the sake of bringing up their children and who sometimes are subjectively certain in their consciences that the first marriage, now irreparably destroyed, was never valid. Each one of these cases thus constitutes the object of a differentiated moral evaluation. There are very many different starting points in an ever-deeper sharing in the life of the church, to which everyone is called. St. John Paul II already presupposes implicitly that one cannot simply say that every situation of a divorced and remarried person is the equivalent of a life in mortal sin, separated from the communion of love between Christ and the church. Accordingly, he was opening the door to a broader understanding by means of the discernment of the various situations that are not objectively identical.⁴¹

40. This is the English translation of the interview with Antonio Spadaro, “Cardinal Schönborn on ‘The Joy of Love’: the full conversation,” *America: The Jesuit Review of Faith & Culture*, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/richness-love>.

41. *Ibid.*

In an important lecture to seminarians in Oviedo, Spain on May 4, 2016, “Was dürfen wir von der Familie erwarten?,” Cardinal Gerhard Müller offered a different interpretation of the relationship between *Amoris laetitia* and *Familiaris consortio*.⁴² For Müller, the organic development of the Church’s doctrine precludes an interpretation of *Amoris laetitia* that authorizes a change in the Church’s deeply rooted sacramental discipline. Müller’s text is worth citing at length:

The key for the path of accompaniment is the harmony between the celebration of the sacraments and Christian life. Herein lie the reasons for the discipline with regard to the Eucharist, as it has always been preserved by the Church. Thanks to it, the Church can be a community which accompanies the sinner and welcomes him, without thereby approving the sin. Thus, she offers the foundation for a possible path of discernment and of integration. John Paul II has confirmed this discipline in *Familiaris consortio* 84 and *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia* 34. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has also confirmed it in its document of 1994; Benedict XVI has deepened it in *Sacramentum Caritatis* 29. We are dealing here with the consolidated teaching of the Magisterium which is based upon Holy Scripture, as well as upon the Church’s teaching: namely, the harmony of the sacraments necessary for the salvation of souls, the heart of the “culture of the bond” as it is lived by the Church. There have been different claims that *Amoris laetitia* has rescinded this discipline, because it allows, at least in certain cases, the reception of the Eucharist by remarried divorcees without requiring that they change their way of life in accord with *Familiaris consortio* 84 (namely, by giving up their new bond or by living as brothers and sisters). The following has to be said in this regard: if *Amoris laetitia* had intended to rescind such a deeply rooted and such a weighty discipline, it would have expressed itself in a clear manner and it would have given the reasons for it. However, such a statement with such a meaning is not to be found in it. Nowhere does the pope put into question the arguments of his predecessors. They are not based upon the subjective guilt of these our

42. The full German text of Cardinal Müller’s “Was dürfen wir von der Familie erwarten?” was published in *Die Tagespost* on May 6, 2016. The text is also available online at <http://www.collationes.org/component/k2/item/2310-was-duerfen-wir-von-der-familie-erwarten>.

brothers and sisters, but, rather, upon the visible, objective way of life which is in opposition to the words of Christ.⁴³

Muller goes on to consider the counterargument based on a reading of footnote 351 in section 305 of *Amoris laetitia*:

Without entering into this question in a deeper way, it is sufficient to point out that this footnote refers in a general way to objective situations of sin, and not to the specific cases of the civilly remarried divorcees. Because this latter situation has its own distinctive characteristics which differentiate it from other situations. . . . Footnote 351 does not touch upon the earlier discipline. The norms of *FC 84* and *SC 29* and their application in all cases continue to remain valid. The principle is that no one can really want to receive a Sacrament—the Eucharist—without at the same time having the will to live according to all the other Sacraments, among them the Sacrament of Marriage. Whoever lives in a way that contradicts the marital bond opposes the visible sign of the Sacrament of Marriage. With regard to his bodily existence, he turns himself into a “counter-sign” of the indissolubility, even if he is not subjectively guilty. Exactly because his carnal life is in opposition to the sign, he cannot be part of the higher eucharistic sign—in which the incarnate Love of Christ is manifest—by thus receiving Holy Communion. If the Church were to admit such a person to Holy Communion, she would be then committing that act which Thomas Aquinas calls “a falseness in the sacred sacramental signs.” This is not an exaggerated conclusion drawn from the teaching, but, rather, the foundation itself of the Sacramental Constitution of the Church, which we have compared to the architecture of Noah’s Ark. The Church cannot change this architecture because it stems from Jesus himself and because the Church was created in it and is supported by it in order to swim upon the waters of the deluge. To change the discipline in this specific point and to admit a contradiction between the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Marriage would necessarily mean to change the Profession of Faith of the Church. The blood of the martyrs has been shed for faith in the indissolubility of marriage—not as a distant ideal, but as a concrete way of conduct.⁴⁴

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

Müller's argument, in short, is that the unity of the Church's faith and the authentic development of doctrine require that we interpret *Amoris laetitia* in continuity with *Familiaris consortio* in the sense that what the Church has received from Christ regarding the indissolubility of marriage, and the sacramental discipline that is based on this teaching, is fully preserved.⁴⁵

Let me return to Schönborn's double claim that 1) *Amoris laetitia* has changed the sacramental discipline of the Church; and 2) this change is an authentic development of John Paul II's teaching in *Familiaris consortio*. There are two issues or questions that call for further elaboration and qualification. First, according to Schönborn, "Just as we read the Council of Nicaea in the light of the Council of Constantinople, and Vatican I in the light of Vatican II, so now we must read the previous statements of the magisterium about the family in the light of the contribution made by *Amoris laetitia*." This statement is one sided. While it is true that we read previous statements of the Magisterium in

45. After this essay was drafted, Cardinal Müller published "Development or Corruption" in *First Things*, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/02/development-or-corruption>. In this essay, Müller summarizes Newman's account of the idea of the development of doctrine and applies several of Newman's "notes" to the question of how to interpret chapter eight of *Amoris laetitia*. He concludes:

[I]t is impossible for a Catholic to receive the sacraments in a worthy manner, unless he or she resolves to abandon a way of life that is in opposition to the teachings of Christ. Indeed, for Newman the sacramental principle is among the central principles of Christianity, which cannot change. . . . In his fourth note, Newman speaks of the necessity of a "Logical Sequence" among the different steps of a development. For a development to be healthy, it must proceed in logical continuity with the teachings of the past. Is there any logical continuity between John Paul II's *Familiaris consortio* n. 84—which teaches that the divorced living in a new union must resolve to live in continence or else refrain from approaching the sacraments—and the change of this selfsame discipline that some are proposing? There are only two options. One could explicitly deny the validity of *Familiaris consortio* n. 84, thus denying by the same token Newman's sixth note, "Conservative Action upon the Past." Or one could attempt to show that *Familiaris consortio* n. 84 implicitly anticipated the reversal of the discipline that it explicitly set out to teach. On any honest reading of John Paul II's text, however, such a procedure would have to violate the basic rules of logic, such as the principle of non-contradiction. When "pastoral change" becomes a term by which some express their agenda to sweep aside the Church's teaching as if doctrine were an obstacle to pastoral care, then speaking up in opposition is a duty of conscience.

light of more recent pronouncements, the converse is also true. It is necessary to interpret current magisterial teaching in light of the living tradition of the Church. Given the organic nature of development, the prior tradition has a certain priority. The aim of development is to preserve and hand on the gift of faith. Newman links his defense of doctrinal development to the metaphor of an organism, and the key feature of an organism is that, at each moment of its growth in time, it “remembers” its essential ordering principles *as this organism* (an acorn that failed to remember its essential order *qua* acorn would grow into what would be an oak tree only in an equivocal sense). This principle can be demonstrated both theologically and historically. For example, the fathers at Constantinople demonstrated a profound reverence for, and memory of, the Council of Nicaea’s confessional ordering of faith. Unless further qualified, Schönborn’s account of reading prior teaching in light of more recent statements is one sided and crucially ambiguous.

Secondly, Schönborn claims that *Amoris laetitia* extends and unfolds the principle set forth by John Paul II that pastors “are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations. There is in fact a difference between those who have sincerely tried to save their first marriage and have been unjustly abandoned, and those who through their own grave fault have destroyed a canonically valid marriage.” Developing this idea of a case by case discernment and highlighting the factors that mitigate subjective culpability, *Amoris laetitia*—Schönborn argues—opens a door for the discernment that some remarried Catholics can approach the Eucharist without the commitment to live as brother and sister. This line of argument overlooks or obfuscates an essential point: John Paul II’s exhortation to pastors to exercise discernment regarding different marital situations does not allow for exceptions in terms of receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist. The simple reason, as John Paul II explains, is that the Church’s discipline is based on the objective situation of living *more coniugale* with one who is not one’s spouse. Varying degrees of subjective culpability do not change the objective countersign, or what Cardinal Müller, citing Aquinas, describes as “a falseness in the sacred sacramental signs.”

In this sense, Müller’s interpretation of *Amoris laetitia* is more in keeping with the Church’s understanding of doctrinal

development as understood by Newman and de Lubac. Perhaps the most important difference between these two representative interpretations of *Amoris laetitia* is that, whereas Schönborn apparently overlooks the pastoral significance of the perduring bond of marriage, Müller conceives the indissoluble bond as a sure guide and light for the faithful because it is the fruit and sign of Christ's undying faithfulness to the Church.

In conclusion, it is important to stress once again that Müller's interpretation of *Amoris laetitia* expresses neither a legalistic understanding of morality nor a denigration of the goodness of sex. As Müller himself makes clear, if civilly divorced and remarried persons not living as brother and sister cannot receive the Eucharist, it is precisely because their first marriage remains intact—as a covenant whose indissolubility objectively signifies, and communicates, the indissoluble bond uniting Christ and his Church. Clearly, such persons cannot receive the Eucharist without violating the truth, but the truth in question is primarily that truth which is synonymous (in English at least) with fidelity: the lifelong fidelity between man and woman, but also the everlasting fidelity between Christ and the Church. This kind of truth, i.e., truth as fidelity, is not opposed to, or even in tension with, Christ's liberating love. On the contrary, it is a central expression of that love—an expression, moreover, that reaches all the way down into the sphere of sexual intimacy between husband and wife. What Cardinal Müller is trying to protect, then, is not some abstract “norm” unable to do justice to the complexity of concrete situations; rather it is the capacity of human love to image forth, and share in, Christ's loving self-gift, which is the substance both of the Church's Eucharist and of her faith. The point is simply that, in order to be faithful to the spousal covenant it is innately called to symbolize, sex has to be an expressive enactment of an indissoluble marriage—which, absent a declaration of nullity, still binds civilly divorced and remarried people with the spouses they first said “Yes” to at the altar. Looked at from this point of view, John Paul II's and Benedict XVI's teaching about the conditions for the reception of Communion is not some external yoke laid upon struggling couples. On the contrary, it is a faithful articulation of that indissoluble fidelity which turns the existential realization of their mutual love into an act of

ecclesial faith, indeed, into a developmental unfolding of faith's contents in the concreteness of their very flesh and blood.

It is significant that the current debate about Communion for the civilly divorced and remarried should raise questions about both doctrinal development and the relationship between the Eucharist and the indissolubility of marriage. For, as we saw at the end of the previous section, these realities are intimately interconnected. It is in the Eucharist that the Bride receives a share in the Lord's "traditioning," whose unity of completeness and newness, in turn, enables development of doctrine while distinguishing it from arbitrary innovation. If the common teaching of Newman and de Lubac traced here is a promising resource in our post-*Amoris laetitia* context, this is because it reminds us of what is most deeply at stake in the current discussion: the Church's fidelity to the form of truth embodied in her divine Spouse, the form of truth exhibited in the "traditioning" of his own flesh and blood in the Holy Spirit.* □

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* This article is an expanded version of my earlier "The Light of Faith and the Development of Doctrine," *Anthropotes* 33 (2017): 197–214.