

## Article

# Church as One: A Doctrinal Analysis of Augustine's Notion of Charity as a Fundamental Element of the Church's Unity

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## Abstract

*In today's world, where technological advancements and cultural shifts are constant, the Church frequently faces criticism for being traditional and conservative. There was even a pressing demand from the progressive individuals expressing their desire for the Church to evolve and adapt her doctrines and teachings to better resonate with the contemporary experiences of her followers. While it is true that the Church is called to proclaim God's message in the context of the people, this does not mean a distortion of the message to make it more appealing and palatable to people. The Church has the mission to be faithful to the revealed datum, which is the source of authentic catholic doctrines and dogmas. As such, it is essential to put into context what it means to be 'traditional' and/or 'conservative' within the context of the Church's constitution. Strikingly, the evolution and development of doctrines and dogmas in the Catholic Church have specific parameters that are faithful to Divine Revelation. Employing a critical analysis approach, this paper aims to discuss the Thomistic understanding of evolution and development as applied in the evolution and development of doctrines and dogmas in the Catholic Church. To demonstrate the application of the Thomistic understanding of evolution and development, this paper illustrates the homogeneous evolution and development of St. Augustine's notion of charity as a fundamental element of the Church's unity. The overall objective of this paper is to guide the faithful in the Church to critically evaluate ideas that can deviate from the Church's authentic teachings.*

**Keywords:** Charity, Development, Doctrines, Dogmas, Evolution, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas

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## Introduction

Evolution and development are common phenomena in Christian theology. Doctrines evolve and develop over time. Such development and evolution could lead to explicative, diverse, and contrary concepts of the Church's doctrines. The nature of the evolution and development of Catholic doctrines is measured by their faithfulness to the revealed datum entrusted to the Church. In every development and evolution, changes are inevitable; however, in the developments and evolutions of doctrines, changes are limited to being merely organic and accidental. In this regard, this paper aims to discuss the nature of evolutions and developments of doctrines that might happen in Catholic theology. This paper seeks to discuss evolution and development in Thomistic understanding. Thus, this study would like to explore Thomas Aquinas's understanding of evolution and development as applied to the Church's doctrines.

This study will apply the Thomistic understanding of evolution to Augustine's notion of charity as a fundamental component in the Church's unity as a form of evolution from the doctrine of the Church as one. Thus, the second part of this study will explore the mark of the Church as one, and the third part will expose Augustine's Notion of charity as fundamental to the Church's unity. The Church's mark as one will form a basis for evaluating the nature of the development and evolution of St. Augustine's notion of charity as a fundamental component in the Church's unity. In this paper, I will argue that St. Augustine's notion of charity is a homogeneous evolution from the doctrine of the Church as one. Therefore, this study will use the Thomistic understanding of evolution as a framework or method in evaluating St. Augustine's notion of charity as fundamental and necessary to the Church's unity.

## Discussions

### *Understanding the Broken Pipeline Phenomenon (BPP)*

Revealed datum comprises all "truths or propositions explicitly revealed by God to the Apostles and subsequently handed down to the Church."<sup>1</sup> The apostles were the immediate recipients of the revealed datum because God revealed Himself to them in the person of Jesus Christ. In turn, the college of the apostles handed down to the Church what they had received from God. Our knowledge of God is only mediated because we are not the primary recipients of God's revelation. Instead, we only received our faith through the apostles and the Church. The revealed datum serves as the fundamental basis of dogmas and the evolution or development of doctrines of the Church.

A dogma is supposed to be explicitly or implicitly revealed by God in the Sacred Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> According to Fr. Marin-Sola, dogma comprises "all truths or propositions,

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<sup>1</sup> Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., *The Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*, translated by Antonio T. Piñon, O.P. (Manila, Philippines: Santo Tomas University Press, 1988), 134.

<sup>2</sup> see Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, edited by James Canon Bastible, translated by Patrick Lynch (Forth Collins, Colorado: Roman Catholic Books, 1954), 4.

which the Church has solemnly defined as divinely revealed.”<sup>3</sup> The church must prohibit herself from declaring a teaching as a dogma if it is neither explicitly nor implicitly found in the bible. “The Catholic Church stresses that dogma, according to its content, is of truly Divine origin, that is. It is the expression of a truth, and its content is immutable.”<sup>4</sup> By its very nature, dogma is unchangeable since it originates from God. The mind of God is made known to us through His revelation, inscribed by God in the Sacred Scriptures. Since dogma directly or indirectly manifests the mind of God and God is immutable, then it cannot be changed through all the ages. Edward Schillebeeckx defines dogma as “Christian teaching of the faith in so far as that cannot be given up, because it goes back to the word of God.”<sup>5</sup> “The ground for the immutability of dogmas lies in the Divine origin of the 'froths which they express. Divine Truth is as immutable as God Himself.”<sup>6</sup> Only the Church, through its magisterium, can declare and officially pronounce that a particular teaching can be raised into a dogmatic status since the Church is the official authority to interpret divine revelation. In this sense, dogma can be referred to as a teaching immediately revealed by God and pronounced by the Church as such.<sup>7</sup> In short, dogma is revealed by God and pronounced by the Church through her magisterium.

Infallible truths are “truths or propositions, which the Church has defined as infallible but are not defined as expressly revealed.”<sup>8</sup> Infallible truths differ from dogma in terms of their foundation. Dogmas are founded on the explicit revelation of God, while infallible truths are not. Though not explicitly revealed by God, infallible truths by their very name are free from error. In addition, infallible truths differ in dogmas because dogmas are immutable, while infallible truths are mutable. Infallible truths can develop over time. However, one should not view this development as a manifestation of error in the previous. In this manner, development should be understood as homogeneous and mere organic development.

According to Marin-Sola, the evolution of a material being can happen in two ways- homogeneous and transformistic. In homogeneous evolution, the material being evolves only in terms of quantity but not in quality. There is no substantial change, only an accidental change in homogeneous evolution. The growth and change in the homogeneous evolution are organic and external factors. Homogeneous evolution means “avoiding growth that fails to adhere to the substance of the original meaning or judgment. It means avoiding evolution that is heterogeneous.”<sup>9</sup> In transformistic evolution, on the other hand, involves the change of meaning or quality of the material object. Transformistic evolution produces not only accidental change, but also

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<sup>3</sup> Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., *The Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*, translated by Antonio T. Piñon, O.P., 134.

<sup>4</sup> Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Theologisch Testament: Notarieel nog niet verleden* (Baarn, Netherlands: H. Nelissen, 1994) 73 cited in Daniel P. Thompson, “Schillebeeckx on the Development of Doctrine.” *Theological Studies* 62, no. 2 (May 2001): 313.

<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., *The Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*, 134.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas G. Guarino, “Tradition and Doctrinal Development: Can Vincent of Lérins still teach the church?” *Theological Studies* 67, no. 1 (February 2006): 53.

substantial change in the material being. Transformistic evolution changes the entire meaning or original structure of the material being.<sup>10</sup>

When applied to the development of doctrines, the Church only permits homogeneous development of doctrines while condemning transformistic development of doctrines. Homogeneous development of doctrines does not change the meaning of doctrines as expressed in the revealed datum. On the other hand, transformistic development of doctrines distorts entirely the meaning and nature of the revealed datum.

### *Development of Doctrine as Inevitable*

According to John Henry Newman, the development of doctrine is always possible in the people's minds. The doctrines of the Church are open to changes and evolution as necessary events in the life of the Church.<sup>11</sup> The context of the people and the Church shapes the application of the Church's doctrines. The Church always needs to read "the sign of the times" for her doctrine to be relevant to the life of the faithful and the Church. Applying the Church's doctrines "requires a very various application according as persons and circumstances vary, and must be thrown into new shapes according to the form of society which they are to influence."<sup>12</sup> the development of doctrine [can be understood] as reformulations of church teaching in each age to reflect the needs, concerns, and outlooks of each age."<sup>13</sup>

The doctrines of the Church are to be believed by the faithful. The Church has the authority to pronounce and interpret the sacred deposit of our faith. In return, the members of the Church show their obedience and adherence to the Church's teachings by deepening the Church's doctrines in their reflection and scholarly research. The faithful's reflection and academic research should aim to aid the understanding of the general members of the Church and apply it to a specific context of a particular church. However, it is also a fact that some receive the doctrines of the Church with hesitation and are even attacked by heresy. In cases where a specific doctrine or dogma of the Church is being attacked by heresy, the Church must engage in dialogue to clarify any confusion that might enter the minds of the faithful. The Church is not just a teacher but also a guardian and defender of the doctrines of the Church. It is not new for the Church to encounter dissent regarding doctrines and dogmas. Dissents on dogma could be an opportune time for the Church to develop and expound her teachings. Newman states that "no one doctrine can be named which starts complete at first, and gains nothing afterwards from the investigations of faith and the attacks of heresy."<sup>14</sup> The Church could anticipate further explanations and developments brought by different theological investigations and dissents of people.

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<sup>10</sup> Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., *The Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*, 145.

<sup>11</sup> see John Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, sixth edition (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1878), Chapter 2, Section 2.

<sup>12</sup> John Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter 2, Section 3.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Kaczor, "Thomas Aquinas on the Development of Doctrine." *Theological Studies* 62, no. 2 (May 2001): 286.

<sup>14</sup> John Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter 2, Section 12.

Doctrine can be likened to a seed that develops and matures into a full-grown tree. Developing the seed into a full-grown tree does not destroy or contradict its nature as a tree. No substantial changes happened in the seed's development into a full-grown tree because everything in the tree is already present, potentially in the seed. The seed only develops accidentally in terms of its physical structure, such as the leaves, stems, trunk, branches, roots, and others. "Developments are added without deforming original teachings, indicating organic growth."<sup>15</sup> All these accidental developments do not contradict the nature of the seed.

In the same way, the development of the doctrines of the Church does not mean a substantial change in the early doctrines. These developments should not change the meaning and substance of the early doctrines of the Church. Instead, the development of doctrine is within the limits of articulating further the meaning of the doctrines so that these become clear and understandable to the people, and not to change the meaning of doctrines contrary to the interpretation of the official teaching office of the Church. "Christian doctrine admits of formal, legitimate, and true developments, that is, of developments contemplated by its Divine Author."<sup>16</sup> Although all the faithful have the mission to become defenders and guardians of the Church's doctrines, the magisterium of the Church remains the official interpreter and pronouncer of the true and faithful development of doctrines.

Since the development of doctrine is inevitable, it is, therefore, necessary to set the rules and boundaries in determining the authenticity, inerrancy, and faithfulness of doctrinal developments to the revealed datum. The revealed datum and the doctrines of the Church are rich and vast in scope, which expose themselves to possible subjective and misleading interpretations by the people. "If this be true, certainly some rule is necessary for arranging and authenticating these various expressions and results of Christian doctrine. No one will maintain that all points of belief are of equal importance."<sup>17</sup> The Church plays her role as teacher and guardian of the faith by setting clear and concise guidelines in judging the authenticity and inerrancy of doctrinal developments. "The crucial theological point was to ensure that any change was legitimate, allowing for an organic development of Christian truth."<sup>18</sup> In this way, the faithful will not be easily swayed by some groups and organizations that spread false interpretations and teachings regarding the doctrines of the Church. The Church has the authority to decide on matters of faith and morals in the Church. It is within the infallibility of the Church to determine whether a "theological or ethical statement is true."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas G. Guarino, "Tradition and Doctrinal Development: Can Vincent of Lérins still teach the church?," 57.

<sup>16</sup> John Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter 2, Section 17.

<sup>17</sup> John Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter 2, Section 2.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas G. Guarino, "Tradition and Doctrinal Development: Can Vincent of Lérins still teach the church?," 40.

<sup>19</sup> John Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter 2, Section 2.

*Development as Manifestation Towards the Discovery of Truth*

The actual development of the dogma should lead us to the discovery of the ultimate truth. Development does not mean distorting the revealed truth, manifesting in the Sacred Scriptures. The Sacred Scriptures are the ultimate judge of authentic development in the teachings of the Church.<sup>20</sup> Every development should manifest the truth newly discovered in the Sacred Scriptures. The development of doctrines does not imply the absence of the truth in the Sacred Scriptures. Developments of doctrines should fill in the gap in the proper understanding of the word of God. It simply means that what is implicitly revealed in the scriptures is being explicitly explained and manifested in the development of the doctrines of the Church through the help of the Holy Spirit.

The revealed truth is so great to be contained in one writing and understood in one setting. God as the ultimate truth is full of mysteries that human minds cannot fully comprehend and explain in one treatise. For this reason, the Church continues to open her door to the discovery of truth that God gives from the beginning. Still, it lies implicitly hidden in the Church, yet the gradual discovery of truth in our understanding and reflection on the revelation is recognized.<sup>21</sup> God fully revealed himself and the truth of our salvation to the apostles, yet this truth about God has yet to unfold in the understanding of the Church. God's revelation of Himself is full of mysteries that no human mind can fully comprehend. However, the mysteries of God's revelation do not mean that the Church could not articulate and explain God to people. Since the object of the Church's articulations is God, the Church's articulations cannot always be final, yet we cannot judge them as erroneous and heterogeneous. The Church is always open to developing her doctrines as the truth unfolds. With the assistance and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church grows in her understanding of God's revelation in the Sacred Scriptures. The Church is not a static institution that does not grow and mature in her relationship with God. The Church is on a constant journey towards unveiling and discovering the truth in God's written word. Development of doctrines indicates that progress in the theological investigations and contemplations of divine revelation points people towards the reality of the infinite wisdom that God revealed in the Sacred Scriptures.

*Dogma as Authentic Progress*

St. Vincent of Lerins distinguishes progress from alteration. He views progress as an "enlargement," while alteration is a "transformation" of the thing.<sup>22</sup> In progress, the thing grows and develops while maintaining its original nature. No substantial changes happen in the progression of the thing. When applied to doctrine, progress can be equated with the development of doctrine. Thus, noting St. Vincent of Lerins'

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<sup>20</sup> see John Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter 2, Section 3.

<sup>21</sup> see John Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Chapter 2, Section 9.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas G. Guarino, "St. Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine," *Logos* Vol. 17 no. 3 (Summer 2014): 106.

idea of progress, one can also say that progressions of doctrines are valid and acceptable in the Catholic Church. To avoid confusion on the real meaning of progress of doctrine, St. Vincent of Lerins said that the "progress made must be according to its type, that is, in accord with the same doctrine, the same meaning, and the same judgment."<sup>23</sup> The change of meaning of doctrine cannot be considered as progress since progress should be consistent with the original meaning of doctrine. Doctrine can develop if it preserves the magisterium's authentic, original, and official meanings and interpretations. There is a change in the progress of doctrine, but this change is not a change of meaning. St. Vincent of Lerins distinguishes an "authentic" change from a "corrosive" one. According to him, authentic change leads "to proper growth," while corrosive change produces an adulterated version of the Christian truth.<sup>24</sup> Progress aids people in understanding the true meaning of the doctrines, but it can never be a vehicle for distorting the true essence of the doctrine.

On the other hand, alteration is different from progress because "alteration implies that one thing is transformed into something else entirely."<sup>25</sup> Alteration of doctrines can never be valid and acceptable since it distorts and eventually destroys the real meaning of doctrines. People, such as theologians, who alter doctrines can never be tolerated in the Catholic Church. They should be silenced or even declared heretics if they do not listen to the magisterium. Alteration of doctrines threatens the entire body of the Church's doctrines since this can promote a wrong understanding of the true nature of the revealed datum, which is the very foundation of the Church's teachings. As guardian and teacher of the faith, the Church must ensure that "proper growth can never mean the reversal or distortion of fundamental teachings because the same substantial truth must be maintained from age to age."<sup>26</sup> As mother and teacher, the Church should only teach what is consistent with revelation and reprimand people who sow distorted and contorted interpretations and meanings into the hearts and minds of the faithful.

Indeed, authentic development does not change the fundamental meaning of doctrines. Changes in the development of doctrines are accepted and tolerated as long as they do not distort the original essence and meaning of the revealed datum. "In other words, an authentic development preserves the stability and material continuity of the ancient faith with its essential nature remaining intact. In a corruption, however, one thing is transformed into something else entirely, resulting in an alteration of its essence as a rosebed becoming mere thorns and thistles."<sup>27</sup> The Church welcomes homogenous development of doctrines because it does not substantially change them.

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas G. Guarino, "St. Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine", 106-107.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas G. Guarino, "St. Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine", 107.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas G. Guarino, "St. Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine", 106.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas G. Guarino, "St. Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine", 108.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas G. Guarino, "St. Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine", 107-108.

### *The Church: United Yet Diverse*

The Catholic Church is the visible manifestation of the unity of God and humanity. As the people of God, the Church should gather the faithful in unity with Christ. The Church becomes the “sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.”<sup>28</sup> The mark of the Church as one becomes concrete in the unity of the people with Christ. The Church’s mission is to bring unity among her members and with Christ, as her founder, and the ultimate origin of the Church’s mark as one. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “the Church’s first purpose is to be the sacrament of the inner union of men with God. Furthermore, it adds that “the Church is also the sacrament of the unity of the human race.”<sup>29</sup> Following the teachings of the Church in the magisterium, the Church has two fundamental missions: to promote unity between her members and God, and among her members. The Church as one unites the people with God and among themselves. Unity with Christ and among the faithful are the fundamental manifestations of the Church of Christ. Hence, to speak of the Church’s oneness refers to the unity of the members with God and among themselves.

God’s unending love for humanity includes gathering all the people in the Church. God’s love for humankind is reflected in his desire to call the entire human race into His Church. The word Church means an assembly of God or a convocation.<sup>30</sup> The Church is the gathering of the people as a form of the love of God. God intends for all the people to gather in His Church. The Church “is the visible plan of God’s love for humanity, because God desires that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>31</sup> God calls a community of people into His Church.

In this community, as a sign of His great love, He desires to save all the members. In the Church, all the members, as being called and gathered by God, are offered communal salvation.<sup>32</sup> God desires to save the community of believers, not the individual persons. God’s love encompasses the whole human race in the world. God’s salvation is offered to all regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, and status in life. Since the Church is God’s instrument of unity and salvation, the Church welcomes all people who desire to attain salvation through the Church of Christ. The Church does not give salvation to people since Christ only gives salvation. However, the Church is necessary for the salvation of the people since Christ entrusts all the means necessary for salvation to the Church. The Church is God’s instrument for the salvation of the

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<sup>28</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), in *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Marianne L. Trouve (Boston: Pauline Books, 1999), § 1 cited in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 775.

<sup>29</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 775.

<sup>30</sup> Peter J. Vaghi, *The Faith We Profess: A Catholic Guide to the Apostles’ Creed* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria press, 2008), 160 also in CCC, 777.

<sup>31</sup> Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes* in *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Marianne L. Trouve (Boston: Pauline Books, 1999), 7 § 2 cited in CCC, 776.

<sup>32</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 781.



people. God loved the whole human race so much that He did not leave us helpless in attaining our salvation. He instituted the Church to assist us towards our salvation.

The unity of the members with Christ and their unity among themselves do not mean uniformity in all aspects and dimensions. The Church respects the uniqueness and individuality of her members. The Church can promote unity or oneness amidst the diversity of her members. As the body of Christ, the Church has one head, Jesus Christ, and is composed of different parts, yet functions as one body. In short, “the body’s unity does not do away with the diversity of its members: In the building up of Christ’s Body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions.”<sup>33</sup> The Church’s members’ unique charisms and role can contribute to building up Christ’s body here on earth. Every member can become an indispensable tool in building the foundation of the mission of the Church to gather and unite all the people in the world. The diversity of the members can function harmoniously in attaining salvation for all through the Church, the sacrament of salvation.

The Church is one, yet many. Vatican II teaches that the Church of Christ *subsists in* the Catholic Church, thereby recognizing that the elements of sanctification are also present in other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities. The most significant source and origin of the Church’s characteristic as one yet distinct is the mystery of the unity in the Trinity of Persons, “of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>34</sup> The Trinity explains that God is one in three divine persons, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is only one God in three distinct persons. They have one and equal substance yet play a distinct role in the life of the Church and the people. The Trinity maintains unity and oneness without losing their distinct characteristics as creator, savior, and sanctifier.

In the same way, the Church of Christ maintains unity among the Christian Churches and ecclesial communities amidst the diversity of their contexts and cultures in different places in the world. Every member of the Church can play a distinct role in building God’s kingdom here on earth. All the Churches in the world, though dispersed into different localities, are united in one founder, Jesus Christ, bringing the message of God into their unique milieu concerning the cultures and traditions of the place without compromising the substance and content of the deposit of faith or revealed datum. “The Church is one because of her founder: for ‘the Word made flesh, the prince of peace, reconciled all men to God by the cross...restoring the unity of all-in-one people and one body’.”<sup>35</sup> The Church cannot be truthfully called the Church of Christ without unity. “Unity is the essence of the Church.”<sup>36</sup> The Church cannot and should not exist without unity as her primary characteristic. The Church of Christ

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<sup>33</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 791.

<sup>34</sup> Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio in The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Marianne L. Trouve (Boston: Pauline Books, 1999), 2 § 5 cited in CCC, 813.

<sup>35</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, *Gaudium Et Spes*, (7 December 1965), in “The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II,” ed. Marianne L. Trouve (Boston: Pauline Books, 1999), 78 § 3 cited in CCC, 813.

<sup>36</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 813.

mirrors the unity of the Trinity<sup>37</sup> in her members. The Church is one because of Jesus Christ, yet distinct and many in functions and missions regarding her members.

*Faith, Worship, and Life: Manifestations of the Church's Unity*

According to Fr. Yves Congar, the unity of the Church is manifested in three aspects: one faith, one sacrament, and one social life. Congar called them the three bondings.<sup>38</sup> The three bondings are the concrete internal manifestations of the Church's unity. It means that all the Churches in the world, in their context, must have the same creed, sacraments, and social life. Every Church should proclaim the same faith, celebrate the same sacraments, and apply the same social life. The Acts of the Apostles describes the unity of the first local church, the church of Jerusalem, by saying: "And they held steadfastly to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers."<sup>39</sup> The unity of the Church is mirrored in the unity of faith, prayer, worship, and fraternal life. Aidan Nichols said that:

*The unity of the Church is a unity in obedient listening to the apostolic preaching, and therefore a unity in faith. It is a unity in the offering of prayers and the Holy Eucharist, and therefore a unity in cult and the celebration of the sacraments. It is a unity in fraternal communion and therefore a unity in social life, with charity as its regulating principle and goal.*<sup>40</sup>

The Church receives her faith from the apostles, the successors of Jesus Christ, to whom Christ entrusted the teachings of the Church. The Church expresses her faith in God by celebrating the same sacraments and showing charity to all people. Thus, every member of the Church must share the same faith, sacraments, and social life. "Among the medieval Scholastics, probably the single most common brief formula for speaking of the Church was *congregatio fidelium*, the 'assembly of those who have faith'."<sup>41</sup> To speak of the Church means to speak of the members who shared a common faith. In this sense, the Church can rightly be called an assembly of believers of the teachings of Christ, which is handed down to the apostles and the bishops as successors of the apostles. The unity of the Church becomes obvious when all the members proclaim the same creed. Aidan Nichols would add that "in the Church this unifying principle is faith itself. Receiving by obedient attention the apostolic teaching is the very first thing people will have in common in the Church, to be made there into a unity,"<sup>42</sup> having the same faith in Christ and His apostles, which must be common to all members of the Church. Also, our common faith in the Church should first bond us as people of God.

The Church's unity is also manifested in her worship and prayers. The liturgy of the Church unites all her members in the common celebration of the sacraments.

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<sup>37</sup> Peter J. Vaghi, *The Faith We Profess: A Catholic Guide to the Apostles' Creed*, 167.

<sup>38</sup> Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Figuring out the Church: Her Marks and Her Masters* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013), 19.

<sup>39</sup> New American Standard Bible, Acts 2:42

<sup>40</sup> Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Figuring out the Church: Her Marks and Her Masters*, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Figuring out the Church: Her Marks and Her Masters*, 18.

<sup>42</sup> Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Figuring out the Church: Her Marks and Her Masters*, 18.

The liturgy symbolizes the second aspect of the unity of the Church. "For ecclesiology, this will mean that the Church's members, in receiving the same sacraments, are joined to each other by sharing in the supernatural life that flows from these embodied continuations of the work of Christ."<sup>43</sup> The members are not only bound by the same sacraments but are, more importantly, bound to continue the mission of Christ here on earth. Worship and prayer must reflect in the members' and the Church's life and mission. This will lead us into the third manifestation of the Church's unity, the common life.

The Church is united in the common service to the people, especially the poor, the needy, the oppressed, the marginalized, and the orphans. The Church cannot look the other way towards them since her founder, Jesus Christ, offered service and performed miracles for them. The Church's members should follow their founder's footsteps in proclaiming liberty to the oppressed and giving food to the hungry. The Church does not side with injustices and the oppressors. The Charity that Christ showed to the people must still radiate to the present through the Church, which Christ entrusts to continue His mission. Thus, "charity as service is about meeting the needs of others in the Church."<sup>44</sup> The Church's response to the needs of the people and their cry for justice can be considered a form of charity and love for the people.

The social unity of the Church invites all members to be sensitive to the needs and sufferings of the other members. In the Church, the members are called to have mutual service to one another. "Saint Thomas speaks of the social unity of the Church as the 'reciprocal sub-ministration' (*mutua subministratio*) of a vast range of services we can do for each other."<sup>45</sup> Social unity means a reciprocal ministry to one another. It echoes our social responsibility to all people within and outside the Church. The Church's mission is inclusive and encompassing, just like the love of God for humanity. The ministry of the Church transcends cultural, religious, and ethnic barriers. Again, the Church's social unity is motivated by Christ's unconditional and selfless love on the cross. Thus, the Church's ministry to serve the people is also beyond boundaries and without limitations.

Indeed, the unity of the Church is concretely manifested in the common faith that the members proclaimed, the common sacraments that the members celebrated, and the shared social responsibility of the members to one another. The unity and oneness of the universal Church do not mean uniformity. The church's oneness and unity respect the diversity of the members and the context of every local Church in the diocese. Unity and oneness in the Church are internal rather than external. The inner life of the Church represents the unity of the Church. Common faith, sacraments, and social unity can be lived by any Church dispersed into the world, according to their cultures in a particular place.

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<sup>43</sup> Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Figuring out the Church: Her Marks and Her Masters*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Figuring out the Church: Her Marks and Her Masters*, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IIa. IIae., q. 183, a. 3 cited in Aidan Nichols, *Figuring Out the Church*, 26.

### *Augustine's notion of Charity as Fundamental to the Unity of the Church*

For Augustine, love is the spirit that binds people together. Charity unites the members of the Church as the body of Christ. "Love, for him, is first and foremost a movement or a striving towards something beyond the individual person."<sup>46</sup> Love is the motivation that allows people of God to live in unity and community. "Charity constitutes the church as one. The harmony of charity makes the church one. The unity of the church is constituted by the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and this bond of peace is charity."<sup>47</sup> Charity transcends the myopic perspectives of people which focuses only on themselves. "The followers of Christ are therefore distinguished from everyone else above all by their love for one another."<sup>48</sup> Love is the inner force that unites people in the Church.

As disciples and followers of Christ in the Church, we are not only united by our common faith, sacraments, and social life, but more so, we are united by our shared love with one another and, above all, our love with God. "Unity in the sacraments is not an end in itself; unity in the sacraments is a sign and instrument of unity in the Spirit and charity."<sup>49</sup> As members of the Catholic Church, we are not only required to confess the same faith, celebrate the same sacraments, and live an everyday social life, but we are also bound to show love to all members since God is a God of love. St. John the Evangelist said that "God is love."<sup>50</sup> "Knowing that God is love also motivates one to love in order to seek union with God. To be united with one who is love requires the reciprocal action of loving."<sup>51</sup> Union with God and the members of the Church is possible when there is mutual love. "But since love has to begin somewhere, we must start by giving to those in need."<sup>52</sup> The love of God impels all of us to love God and our neighbor, especially the oppressed, the needy, and the poor in the community. "Care for the less fortunate [what we might call charity] is thus an important element of Christian love. We must help carry one another's burdens to fulfil Christ's law of love."<sup>53</sup> Our love for God should translate into our concern and kindness to everyone regardless of religion, race, and gender. "All the members of the Church share a common inheritance as the children of God, and we must therefore love one another without exception as brothers and sisters."<sup>54</sup> Love should be our common language that unites and includes everyone.

Understandably, the unity of the Church does not end with common faith; it includes also the sacraments and common social life. Every day social life indicates

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<sup>46</sup> Tarsicius J. van Bavel, *Love As found in Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999): 509.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Root, "Augustine on the Church." *T&T Clark Companion to Augustine and Modern Theology* (2013): 62.

<sup>48</sup> John Paul Hoskins, "The unity of the spirit: the trinity, the church and love in Saint Augustine of Hippo" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2006), 97.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Root, "Augustine on the Church": 62.

<sup>50</sup> New American Standard Bible, 1 John 4:9

<sup>51</sup> Michael J. Clinger, "A Church Built on Charity: Augustine's Ecclesiology" (MA Thesis, Saint John's University, 2016), 13.

<sup>52</sup> John Paul Hoskins, "The unity of the spirit: the trinity, the church and love in Saint Augustine of Hippo" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2006), 105.

<sup>53</sup> John Paul Hoskins, "The unity of the spirit: the trinity, the church and love in Saint Augustine of Hippo," 106.

<sup>54</sup> John Paul Hoskins, "The unity of the spirit: the trinity, the church and love in Saint Augustine of Hippo," 103.

that our faith is not static and inert. Our faith needs to be translated into concrete actions, such as showing love and compassion to all members of the Church. St. Augustine “taught that the work of faith is love.”<sup>55</sup> He quoted St. Paul the Apostle in one of his homilies, saying that faith works through love.<sup>56</sup> Love unites people in the Church to work for the greater glory of God. The “lack of charity is what blocks orthodox faith or sacraments from being effective outside the communion of the Church.”<sup>57</sup> If the Church wants to be effective in her ministry and evangelization, charity must be at the core of her faith and sacraments. Faith and charity should mutually enrich each other and exist together in the hearts and minds of the members of the Church. The Church’s works of charity. This confirms our faith in God, while our faith motivates us to show love to our neighbors. No one can rightly proclaim their faith in God without love. “If one does not love, one does not know God, who is love.”<sup>58</sup> St. James claims that faith that does not show action is dead.<sup>59</sup> St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, even brings faith and love into an eternal marriage when he said:

*If I speak with the tongues of mankind and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give away all my possessions to charity, and if I surrender my body so that I may glory, but do not have love, it does me no good.*<sup>60</sup>

Love and faith are inseparable. Faith should not exist without love. Faith and love perfectly complement each other without dissolving one another. They are distinct from one another, yet they can exist equally and mutually in the members of the Church.

The Church’s love extends beyond boundaries and limitations. Love is universal; it calls all Catholics worldwide to practice it through their actions and endeavors in life. All members of the Church are called into “a global Catholic communion with a particular emphasis on charity to those who are encountered in daily living.”<sup>61</sup> The Church admonishes its members to show love and charity to people we encounter daily, a sign of the Church’s unity. “Unity in charity, unity in Spirit, and unity in Christ are identical. It is of the nature of charity to work unity; to reject unity is, for Augustine, to reject charity.”<sup>62</sup> Love should be the typical attitude and virtue of all members of the Church. The practice of charity unites all the faithful in the Church. St. Augustine succinctly opines:

*The notion of charity [is] the fundamental Christian virtue by which unity is better achieved. Charity is the gift of the Holy Spirit by which people progress toward God.*

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<sup>55</sup> Michael J. Clinger, “A Church Built on Charity: Augustine’s Ecclesiology,” 14.

<sup>56</sup> New American Standard Bible, 1 John 10:1.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Root, “Augustine on the Church,” 64.

<sup>58</sup> New American Standard Bible, 1 John 4:8.

<sup>59</sup> New American Standard Bible, James 2:14-26.

<sup>60</sup> New American Standard Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

<sup>61</sup> Michael J. Clinger, “A Church Built on Charity: Augustine’s Ecclesiology,” 17.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Root, “Augustine on the Church,” 64.

*This entails unity with God's Church through charity because unity with God comes through charity, and God is not separate from His Church.*<sup>63</sup>

Unity in the Church is achieved when all members practice charity toward one another. "For Augustine, ecclesial unity is to be found in the exercise of charity, which is established through God's giving of divine grace. Only charity can build up ecclesial unity; without charity, unity is not authentic."<sup>64</sup> "Without love, we can have no unity in Christ; and without unity, we self-evidently lack the love that is the gift of the Holy Spirit."<sup>65</sup> Augustine tries to emphasize the necessary and substantial role of charity in the unity of the Church. Charity makes ecclesial unity grounded in the union of God, since charity is the gift of God to the Church. We are genuinely and authentically united with the Church and God through charity.

God's love to his people is unconditional and inclusive, by which God loves anyone and everyone without limits and reservations. Since God is the source of charity, the Church exercises in the world, the Church must be inclusive and encompassing in her exercise of charity to people. Augustine argues that "charity [should be] the connective tissue that builds up the Church and the individual Christian. Charity is also open and inclusive, not self-seeking and inauthentic."<sup>66</sup> other-centered Love, which is only concerned with the beloved. Love is selfless and sacrificial because it does not think of itself. "To love," St. Thomas Aquinas holds, "is to will the good of the other."<sup>67</sup> The Church's love must invite all members of the body of Christ to live the same spirit of inclusive and selfless charity. In the exercise of charity, "people build bridges among each other, and unity is built and strengthened."<sup>68</sup> "God's house is a unity, built up by love."<sup>69</sup> Thus, we can say that unity in the Church is attained through charity.

As such, charity should be the inner driving force that unites people in the Church besides faith, sacraments, and common social life. The unity of the Church reflects the love that all members of the body of Christ share in common. St. Augustine describes charity as the connective tissue that connects all members of the Church in whatever part of the world. Charity is necessary in the unity of the Church, without it, unity is considered inauthentic, mere external, and superficial. God unites the Church, but God is love. Therefore, love unites the Church.

### ***St. Augustine's Homogeneous Notion of Charity Towards the Church's Teaching on Unity***

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<sup>63</sup> Michael J. Clinger, "A Church Built on Charity: Augustine's Ecclesiology," 81.

<sup>64</sup> Michael J. Clinger, "A Church Built on Charity: Augustine's Ecclesiology," 83.

<sup>65</sup> John Paul Hoskins, "The unity of the spirit: the trinity, the church and love in Saint Augustine of Hippo," 97.

<sup>66</sup> Michael J. Clinger, "A Church Built on Charity: Augustine's Ecclesiology," 81.

<sup>67</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, STh I-II, 26, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Michael J. Clinger, "A Church Built on Charity: Augustine's Ecclesiology," 83.

<sup>69</sup> John Paul Hoskins, "The unity of the spirit: the trinity, the church and love in Saint Augustine of Hippo," 116.

Examining the homogeneity within St. Augustine's conceptualization of charity is informed by the Church's doctrinal framework.

First, St. Augustine's notion of charity does not contradict the original meaning of unity based on the doctrine of the Church, since it only reinforces the spirit of unity in the members of the body of Christ. St. Augustine, just like any of us, wants to be faithful in the magisterial teachings of the Church. St. Augustine's notion of charity only aims to reinforce the unity of the members in the Church.

Secondly, charity as a fundamental element in the Church's unity is already implied in the doctrine of the Church as one. The church teaches that unity begins with Christ, who founded the Church. Christ's presence in the Church becomes the source and foundation of unity. In the same way, charity also begins and ends with Christ. Christ is the primary source and inspiration of charity. St. Augustine is merely highlighting charity as fundamental in the Church's unity. The magisterium states, "The Church is the visible plan of God's love for humanity."<sup>70</sup> The presence of the Church in our midst reminds us of God's unending love. God never tires of reaching out to us in love through the sacraments we receive in the Church. As members of the body of Christ, we are gathered in the Church to celebrate the love of God for humanity. We are united by the love of God in the Church. It is, first of all, the love of God that calls and unites us in the body of Christ.

Thirdly, Augustine's concept of charity is just a product of logical deductive reasoning from the doctrine of the Church. Love and unity spring from the same source, Jesus Christ. Love and unity can never be separated since they flow from the same source. Love can result in the unity of the Church. Unity, in return, manifests the love that exists amid the Church. We also call God love. To be more specific, love is attributed to the Holy Spirit. Aidan Nichols states that:

*It [love] unifies the Church by the distinctive way it originates in the Holy Spirit, to whom in the Godhead love is especially attributed.... The charity-love whereby the Holy Spirit bonds the faithful together brings about a different kind of unity from those known elsewhere because charity works by making the Church's members sharers in the unity of the Holy Trinity itself.<sup>71</sup> In short, love and unity point us to the reality of the presence of Christ in the Church. Unity and charity emanate from Jesus Christ.*

Indeed, "charity," Aidan Nichols opines, "is the heart of the Church when she is considered as the sign and instrument of union with God and unity among people."<sup>72</sup> Love preserves the unity of the people in the Church. The Church's unity can be in constant challenge when love does not exist in the hearts and minds of the members. Unity in the Church becomes obvious when the members are united in charity. In this regard, St. Augustine's notion of love as the fundamental component for the Church's unity complements the Church's doctrine of unity.

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<sup>70</sup> Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes* in *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Marianne L. Trouve (Boston: Pauline Books, 1999), 7 § 2 cited in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 776.

<sup>71</sup> Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Figuring out the Church: Her Marks and Her Masters*, 25.

<sup>72</sup> Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Figuring out the Church: Her Marks and Her Masters*, 24.

## Conclusions

At the outset, the article began by discussing the following points: 1) the development and evolution of the Church's unity from a Thomistic perspective; 2) the Church's defining mark of oneness or unity; 3) St. Augustine's concept of charity as essential to the Church's unity; and finally, 4) the consistency of Augustine's understanding of charity with the Church's teachings on unity.

On the first point, the Thomistic concept of doctrinal development only allows homogenous evolution, but not transformistic or heterogeneous evolution of doctrines. Homogeneous development of doctrines does not change the original meaning of divine revelation and magisterial teachings of the Church. Second point, the Church's mark as one is part of the four marks of the Church. The three other marks of the Church are holy, catholic, and apostolic. The church is one because Jesus Christ is the founder of the Church. Moreover, the church's mark as one points to our same faith, same sacraments, and common social life. The third point highlights Augustine's notion of charity as fundamental to the Church's unity. For Augustine, charity makes the members of the Church more conscious of their universal calling to exercise unity in the spirit of charity. Unity and charity could not be separated since they both spring from one source- Jesus Christ. The last point concludes that Augustine's notion of charity does not contradict unity in the Church; instead, charity amplifies unity in the Church. Augustine's concept of charity as fundamental to the Church's unity only emphasizes the essential and necessary role of charity in the unity of the Church.

Throughout history, the Church has been open to developments and evolutions of doctrines. These are essential stages in the growth of the Church to become forever relevant to the lives of the people. However, as members of the Church, we are called to be vigilant against developments and evolutions that distort the original meanings of divine revelation. The faithful need to exercise discernment amidst the seemingly unprecedented developments and evolutions in technologies and the digital world that might adversely affect humanity and the Church.

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