

## The Light of Faith and the Development of Doctrine

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*SUMMARY: As a light and guide for the Church's pilgrimage through time, the gift of faith itself grows and develops in history. Citing John Henry Newman's classic work, An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, Pope Francis in Lumen fidei describes the growth of faith in terms of "the unity of a living body" that develops in response to different historical situations. The aim of this essay is to show how the teaching on faith in Lumen fidei sheds light on the idea of the development of doctrine. The second part of the essay reflects on the nature and limits of doctrinal development in light of the current debate surrounding the interpretation of Pope Francis' Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris laetitia.*

At the heart of Pope Francis' first Encyclical Letter, *Lumen fidei* is the idea of faith as an encounter with the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified and risen Lord. The light of faith is at once a memory of his incarnate life and death in history and a light that comes from the future, drawing us in hope toward the eternal life with God his life and death open to us. The gift of faith, writes Pope Francis,

travels through time, passing from one generation to another. Because faith is born of an encounter which takes place in history and lights up our

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journey through time, it must be passed on in every age. It is through an unbroken chain of witnesses that we come to see the face of Jesus (LF 38).

Here, the historical opens to the ontological, the ontological to the historical. Centered on the mystery of Jesus Christ, the faith of the Church “enables us to grasp reality’s deepest meaning and to see how much God loves this world and is constantly guiding it toward himself” (LF 18).

As a light and guide for the Church’s pilgrimage through time, the gift of faith itself grows and develops in history. Citing John Henry Newman’s classic work, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*<sup>1</sup>, Pope Francis describes the growth of faith as follows:

The unity of faith, then, is the unity of a living body; this was clearly brought out by Blessed John Henry Newman when he listed among the characteristic notes for distinguishing the continuity of doctrine over time its power to assimilate everything that it meets in the various settings in which it becomes present and in the diverse cultures which it encounters, purifying all things and bringing them to their finest expression. Faith is thus shown to be universal, catholic, because its light expands in order to illumine the entire cosmos and all of history (LF 48).

In this passage, *Lumen fidei* touches one of the most difficult and pressing questions in Catholic theology today: What is the development of doctrine, and what are the criteria for distinguishing authentic development from corruption? As John Courtney Murray noted, the question of the development of doctrine has important ecumenical implications:

I consider that the parting of the ways between the two Christian communities [Catholicism and Protestantism] takes place on the issue of development of doctrine. That development has taken place in both communities cannot possibly be denied. The question is, what is legitimate development, what is organic growth in the understanding of the original deposit of faith, what is warranted extension of the primitive discipline of the Church, and what, on the other hand, is accretion, additive

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1 JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IN) 1989.

increment, adulteration of the deposit, distortion of true Christian discipleship? ... Perhaps, above all, the question is, what are the limits of development and growth – the limits that must be reached on peril of archaistic stuntedness, and the limits that must not be transgressed on peril of futuristic decadence<sup>2</sup>.

According to the teaching set forth in *Lumen fidei*, the unity and the organic growth of Christian doctrine are essential aspects of the original gift of faith bestowed in and through Jesus Christ. But this gift is ecclesial and sacramental, and by exploring these dimensions of faith in *Lumen fidei*, Francis provides resources for clarifying the meaning of its unity and organic growth, i.e., the development of doctrine. Furthermore, the Encyclical's affirmation of the unity of faith and "the continuity of doctrine over time" (LF 48) recall the limits of development and the Church's responsibility for the integrity of faith and thus "her fidelity in love to Christ her spouse" (LF 48).

My aim in what follows, then, is to show how the teaching on faith in *Lumen fidei* sheds light on the idea of the development of doctrine. The second part of my essay will consider the nature and limits of doctrinal development in light of the current debate surrounding the interpretation of Pope Francis' Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*.

## 1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE AND THE SACRAMENTAL STRUCTURE OF FAITH

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

<sup>2</sup> J. C. MURRAY, *The Problem of God Yesterday and Today*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1964, 53.

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<sup>3</sup>.

In the eyes of Newman, 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 Doctrine*. 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 Christ and his Apostles taught in the first"<sup>4</sup>. 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"<sup>5</sup>. 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 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 the longer time and deeper thought for their full elucidation"<sup>6</sup>. The gift of divine revelation requires time to be received and to unfold. New historical circumstances and new controversies will cause the same truth

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3 J. H. NEWMAN, *Records of the Church*, xxiv. p. 7, cited in *Id.*, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, cit., ix.

4 NEWMAN, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, cit., 5.

5 *Ibid.*, 9.

6 *Ibid.*, 29-30.

to be expressed in different terms, or an implicit idea to be explicated and unfolded.

Throughout his *Essay on Development*, however, 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 the addition of new content to the deposit of faith. As Newman writes: "the Church [today] does not know more than the Apostles knew"<sup>7</sup>. 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:

the 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 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.<sup>8</sup>

According to Newman, the development of doctrine implies and requires a Church that possesses an infallible charism to discriminate between true and false developments. "A revelation is not given", he writes, "if there be no authority to decide what is given"<sup>9</sup>. Note the connection between infallibility and discernment. Infallible teaching comes into play in the context of discerning which developments do or 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. 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

7 J. H. NEWMAN, "Letter to R. F. Hutton", 20 October 1871, in *Letters and Diaries*, vol. 25, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain and Thomas Gornall Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973, 418.

8 J. H. NEWMAN, unpublished manuscript (1868); cited in IAN KER, "Foreword", *Development of Christian Doctrine*, cit., xxiv.

9 J. H. NEWMAN, *Development of Christian Doctrine*, cit., 40.

particular doctrine”<sup>10</sup>. 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. Taken together, these notes bear witness to the essential unity of the Church’s faith which 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’”<sup>11</sup>. This is a key principle that I will return to in the second part of the essay.

Newman’s seminal book on the development of doctrine inspired subsequent theologians such as Pierre Rousselot<sup>12</sup>, Henri de Lubac<sup>13</sup>, Yves Congar<sup>14</sup>, and Karl Rahner<sup>15</sup> to explore the Christological and ecclesiological foundations of doctrinal development. Newman’s basic insight, deepened in light of a Christocentric understanding of revelation, was confirmed by the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on Divine Revelation. The key text from *Dei verbum* reads as follows:

The apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter (cfr. 2 Thes 2:15), and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all (cfr. Jude 1:3) [...] This Tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities

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10 L. MATTHEW, *Engaging the Doctrine of Revelation: The Mediation of the Gospel through Church and Scriptures*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids (MI) 2014, 183.

11 P. MISNER, *Papacy and Development. Newman and the Primacy of the Pope*, Brill Academic, Leiden 1976, 68.

12 P. ROUSSELOT, “Petite théorie du développement du dogme”, *Recherches de science religieuse* 53 (1965), 355-90.

13 H. DE LUBAC, “The Problem of the Development of Dogma”, in *Theology in History*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1996 [“Le problème du développement du dogme”, *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948), 130-160].

14 Y. CONGAR, *La Tradition et la vie de l’Église*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1984<sup>2</sup>.

15 K. RAHNER, “Zur Frage der Dogmenentwicklung”, *Schriften zur Theologie* I, Benzinger, Einsiedeln 1954; “Überlegungen zur Dogmenentwicklung”, *Schriften zur Theologie* IV, Benzinger, Einsiedeln 1960.

and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (cfr. Lk 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her<sup>16</sup>.

Building on this inheritance from Newman and *Dei verbum*, Pope Francis in *Lumen fidei* affirms that “the unity of faith [...] is the unity of a living body” (LF 48). In fidelity to Christ, the Church’s doctrine is capable of assimilating new cultural situations and developing over time. Three points in *Lumen fidei* are especially noteworthy in connection with the idea of doctrinal development. First and foremost is Pope Francis’ Christocentric understanding of the form and content of divine revelation. The second point concerns the ecclesial and sacramental structure of faith. The third point is the essential unity of truth and love. I turn now to consider briefly each of these aspects of *Lumen fidei*.

#### a. *Jesus Christ as the Source and Fullness of Christian Doctrine*

The correct account of doctrinal development depends on a prior notion of God’s self-communication. On the one hand, in order to avoid a false idea of development as the addition of new content, it is necessary to affirm the radical completeness of divine revelation. In the words of *Dei verbum*, “the Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ”<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, it is possible to conceive the completeness of the *depositum fidei* in a reductive and overly rationalistic manner. One of the weaknesses of neo-scholastic reflection on the development of doctrine was a tendency to reduce revelation to a system of propositions from which further truths could be rationally or logically deduced.

<sup>16</sup> *Dei verbum*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Dei verbum*, 4.

*Lumen fidei* avoids both of these mistakes by refocusing attention on the original fullness of God's revelation in Christ:

Christian faith is centred on Christ; it is the confession that Jesus is Lord and that God has raised him from the dead (cfr. Rom 10:9). All the threads of the Old Testament converge on Christ; he becomes the definitive "Yes" to all the promises, the ultimate basis of our "Amen" to God (cfr. 2 Cor 1:20). The history of Jesus is the complete manifestation of God's reliability. If Israel continued to recall God's great acts of love, which formed the core of its confession of faith and broadened its gaze in faith, the life of Jesus now appears as the locus of God's definitive intervention, the supreme manifestation of his love for us. The word which God speaks to us in Jesus is not simply one word among many, but his eternal Word (LF 15).

Before its articulation into distinct propositions or articles, Pope Francis affirms, the gift of revelation is summed up and concretized in the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. Christian doctrine is first and foremost the communication or self-gift of a Person. *Lumen fidei* develops the Christocentric form and content of revelation in connection with the transmission of faith. The content of the faith that is handed on in the life of the Church is not simply an abstract idea, but the very mystery of Christ's incarnate life, death, and Resurrection.

Faith, in fact, needs a setting in which it can be witnessed to and communicated, a means which is suitable and proportionate to what is communicated. For transmitting a purely doctrinal content, an idea might suffice, or perhaps a book, or the repetition of a spoken message. But what is communicated in the Church, what is handed down in her living Tradition, is the new light born of an encounter with the true God, a light which touches us at the core of our being and engages our minds, wills and emotions, opening us to relationships lived in communion. There is a special means for passing down this fullness, a means capable of engaging the entire person, body and spirit, interior life and relationships with others (LF 40).

In this context, we begin to see how the organic growth of Christian doctrine is a consequence and expression of the original form of

the gift of revelation – God’s self-communication in Jesus Christ. For if the content of revelation or Christian doctrine is not simply a set of propositions or ideas, but the very life of the Son of God made man, it follows that the reception and holding fast to this gift involves a whole life, which is to be shaped by the reception and transmission of the gift. Note that this process of reception and transmission requires a temporal unfolding of the gift, and that this temporal unfolding finds expression precisely in the development of doctrine. It is important to stress that this unfolding includes a propositional aspect, since part of explicating the original gift is to express it in words, indeed, in binding propositions. 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.

This leads to the second point: the Church as the recipient and witness of Christian doctrine.

b. *The Sacramental Structure of Faith*

In the third chapter of *Lumen fidei*, Pope Francis poses an incisive question regarding the transmission of faith: “How can we be certain, after all these centuries, that we have encountered the ‘real Jesus?’” (LF 38). Can we trust the Church’s development of doctrine? Pope Francis responds to this question by affirming the relational character of human persons and what he calls the “sacramental structure of faith”. He writes:

Were we merely isolated individuals, were our starting point simply our own individual ego seeking in itself the basis of absolutely sure knowledge, a certainty [regarding the Church’s knowledge of Jesus] would be impossible. I cannot possibly verify for myself something which happened so long ago. But this is not the only way we attain knowledge. Persons always live in relationship. We come from others, we belong to others, and our lives are enlarged by our encounter with others. Even our own knowledge and self-awareness are relational; they are linked to others who have gone before us: in the first place, our parents, who gave us our life and our name. Language itself, the words by which we make sense of our lives and the world around us, comes to us from others, preserved in the living memory of others. Self-knowledge is only possible when we

share in a greater memory. The same thing holds true for faith, which brings human understanding to its fullness. Faith's past, that act of Jesus' love which brought new life to the world, comes down to us through the memory of others – witnesses – and is kept alive in that one remembering subject which is the Church. The Church is a Mother who teaches us to speak the language of faith (LF 38).

The sacramental memory of the Church is the source and touchstone of the authentic development of doctrine. Animated by the Holy Spirit, the Church preserves and hands on what she has received from the Apostles. The innermost center of the development of doctrine is the sacramental life of the Church. It is here that the Church faithfully hands on the gift of God's self-communication in Christ. The idea of the Church's development or pilgrimage through time has its source and measure in the mystery of the Eucharist. As Pope Francis notes, the Eucharist is both a making present of all that God has done in history and the source of the missionary dynamism of the Church that moves through time toward eternity.

c. *The Unity of Truth and Love*

In his *Philosophical Fragments*, Søren Kierkegaard reflects on the paradox of love by telling a story about a king who falls in love with a maiden of lowly station in life. He prefaces the story as follows:

There has been much talk in the world about unhappy love, and everyone knows what the term means: that the lovers are unable to have each other. And the reasons – well, there can be a host of them. There is another kind of unhappy love: the love of which we speak, to which there is no perfect earthly analogy but which we nevertheless, by speaking loosely for a while, can imagine in an earthly setting. The unhappiness is the result not of the lovers' being unable to have each other but of their being unable to understand each other. And this sorrow is indeed infinitely deeper than the sorrow of which people speak, for this unhappiness aims at the heart of love and wounds for eternity<sup>18</sup>.

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18 S. KIERKEGAARD, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) 1985, 25–26.

The key insight Kierkegaard expresses in this passage is that understanding or knowledge belongs to the innermost heart of love. Love seeks to know the other in truth because love aims at union with the beloved.

The second chapter of *Lumen fidei*, “Unless You Believe, You Will Not Understand”, explores this connection between love and truth. Pope Francis begins by noting the impoverishment of the concept of truth in contemporary culture: “we often tend to consider the only real truth to be that of technology: truth is what we succeed in building and measuring by our scientific know-how, truth is what works and what makes life easier and more comfortable” (LF 25). If truth is conceived in terms of technology, love “is seen as an experience associated with the world of fleeting emotions, no longer with truth” (LF 26). Without truth, love is conceived in sentimental terms as a fleeting emotion. The result is an inability move away from self-centeredness toward an abiding relationship with another. “Only to the extent that love is grounded in truth can it endure over time, can it transcend the passing moment and be sufficiently solid to sustain a shared journey. If love is not tied to truth, it falls prey to fickle emotions and cannot stand the test of time” (LF 27).

The gift of faith brings a new synthesis of truth and love. “Faith transforms the whole person”, writes Pope Francis, “precisely to the extent that he or she becomes open to love. Through this blending of faith and love we come to see the kind of knowledge which faith entails, its power to convince and its ability to illumine our steps. Faith knows because it is tied to love, because love itself brings enlightenment. Faith’s understanding is born when we receive the immense love of God which transforms us inwardly and enables us to see reality with new eyes” (LF 26).

The unity of truth and love sheds light on the importance and limits of the development of doctrine. The truth of the Christian faith as expressed in definitive doctrines mediates the personal and incarnate love of God. A concern for the integrity of doctrine to the point of martyrdom is not a pharisaical concern for abstract ideas, but a holding fast in love to the unfathomable mystery of God sharing the substance of his own life and love. At the same time, the unity of truth and love

bears witness to the inexhaustible depths of the Church's doctrine. The Church will never tire of exploring and uncovering new depths within the living tradition received from the Apostles. Her faithfulness to her doctrine is a sign of her virginal purity and fidelity to Christ her spouse.

## 2. THE IDEA OF DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE INTERPRETATION OF *AMORIS LAETITIA*

In order to better appreciate *Lumen fidei*'s teaching on how the gift of faith "expands [...] to illumine all of history", it is helpful to consider a concrete case of doctrinal development. During the 2014 and 2015 synods 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 a tireless effort on the part of the whole community of the faithful to "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" (FC 84). 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" (FC 84).

The question raised in connection with 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' 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 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:

certainly 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.

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

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<sup>19</sup>.

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

<sup>19</sup> An English translation of the interview with ANTONIO SPADARO, S.J., "Cardinal Schönborn on 'The Joy of Love': the full conversion" was published in *America Magazine* [<https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/richness-love>].

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<sup>20</sup>.

In an important lecture to seminarians in Oviedo, Spain on 4 May 2016, “Was dürfen wir von der Familie erwarten?”, Cardinal Gerhard Müller offered a different interpretation of the relationship between *Amoris laetitia* and *Familiaris consortio*<sup>21</sup>. 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;

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20 *Ibid.*

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

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 brothers and sisters, but, rather, upon the visible, objective way of life which is in opposition to the words of Christ<sup>22</sup>.

Müller goes on to consider the counter-argument 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

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22 *Ibid.*

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.<sup>23</sup>

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.

*Amoris Laetitia*’s emphasis on accompaniment, discernment, and integration should encourage the Church’s pastors to consider that each human situation is unique and that God’s mercy is able to reach the most difficult and painful situations. God’s mercy does not simply tolerate sin, but heals the wounds caused by sin. To accompany along the path of mercy is to remain open to the gift of grace and the possibility of a renewed way of life that accords with the sacramental gift of an indissoluble bond. As Müller argues, the contrary claim that *Amoris laetitia* has changed the discipline of the Church so as “to admit a contradiction between the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Marriage would necessarily mean to change the Profession of Faith of the Church.” This interpretation of *Amoris laetitia* is an example of what Newman means by a false or unfaithful development.

Let me return to Schönborn’s double claim that i) *Amoris laetitia* has changed the sacramental discipline of the Church; and ii) this change is an authentic development of John Paul II’s teaching in *Familiaris consortio*.

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23 *Ibid.*

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 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. This principle can be demonstrated both theologically and historically. For example, the fathers at Constantinople demonstrated a profound reverence for, and deference to, the Nicaea’s confession of faith. Unless further qualified, Schönborn’s account of reading prior teaching in light of more recent statements is one-sided and misleading.

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 seems to deliberately overlook or obfuscate 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 counter-sign, 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 and

Francis' own account of the unity of faith in *Lumen fidei*. Perhaps the most important difference between these two representative interpretations of *Amoris laetitia* is that whereas Schönborn seems to overlook 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 life-long fidelity of man and woman, but also the everlasting fidelity of 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, but the capacity of the sexual embrace 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 foisted on struggling couples. No, 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.