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TOPIC: ECHOES OF NICEAE IN AUGUSTINE'S *CITY OF GOD*
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIAN ECUMENISM

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Abstract: The Nicene Creed is an important faith affirmation that transcends Christian denominational barriers. And through the ages, the expression that we believe “in one holy catholic and apostolic church” has been considered the characteristics of the church. Concise and lucid, these “four marks of the church” are inseparable and essentially linked to each other. But, in the light of separations and differences among churches that have been reciting this creed on a regular basis, what should we really mean by confessing the oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church? This paper shall try to give an answer in the light of Augustine’s *City of God* where he envisages the church as the communion of saints that transcends space and time. Particularly, the paper will stress the significance of Augustine’s central thesis that those belonging to the *City of God* were “bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love” (19.24). This is an insight whose relevance for ecumenism will ever be vital and substantial because loving God before loving oneself enables believers to be “of one mind” and “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

I. The Significances of the Nicene Creed: The Nicene Creed is an important faith affirmation that transcends denominational barriers and has been recited by Christians as a confession of faith all over the world on a regular basis. Starting from the basic affirmation that “Jesus is Lord and saviour”¹, creedal statements evolved from an oral confession into a standardized written formulae due to the expansion of the church and doctrinal controversies.² The Council of Nicaea in 325, regarded as the first ecumenical council, marked a new stage in creedal developments where we see the beginning of solemn church meetings “to frame formularies giving utterance to their agreement on matters of faith.” Unlike the prior “summaries of faith” seen locally, these synodal or conciliar creeds were intended to be authoritative for the wider church. Meant to resolve doctrinal conflict, “each confession came to build upon the previous one, taking up material from the earlier creed while adding some new phrases, thus turning the existing material against whichever opponent the newer creed was targeting.”³ Particularly, the Nicene Creed was given “a place of special honour at the church councils” at Ephesus (431, 449), Constantinople (448), and Chalcedon (451), where “the assembled bishops repeatedly

¹ According to Kinzig, “These christological statements gradually came to be assembled to form homological ‘building blocks’, which in turn were combined with traditional divine attributes relating to God the Father, such as his omnipotence and his activity as creator. Thus slowly dyadic and triadic homologies developed as evidenced in Christian writings from the first three centuries.” Wolfram Kinzig, *A History of Early Christian Creeds*, (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2024), 606.

² Kelly asserts that the New Testament already contains “creed-like slogans and tags” which evolved from the contexts of baptism, the catechetical instruction preceding baptism, preaching, liturgy, anti-heretical and anti-pagan polemics, and the formal correspondence of Church leaders with their flocks. These contexts also “determined their style, substance and structure” to some extent. JND Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd edition (New York: Routledge, 1972), 13-14

³ John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, 3rd edition (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 28.

affirmed the unique authority and sufficiency of the Nicene Creed, and praised the ‘fathers’ of Nicaea for their unimpeachable faith.”⁴ While the Council of Nicaea has been subjected to diverse and conflicting interpretations,⁵ the resultant Nicene Creed is still regarded as the touchstone of orthodoxy among the majority of Christians even today.

II. How is the Church signified in the Nicene Creed? Although it is very difficult to reconstruct the actual accounts of the Council of Nicaea, the so-called Arian controversy - where the eternal relation between God the Father and the Son was the crux of the matter - initiated the production of the Nicene Creed. Having a threefold structure that proclaims faith in “one” God the Father, “one” Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit, the main body of the Creed focused upon the nature and works of Jesus Christ. It was remarked that in the article that focuses on the eternal nature of Jesus Christ, we see a “particular density of technical vocabulary” while the rest of the Creed “is comparatively unremarkable, consisting of traditional affirmations, expressed in a self-consciously scriptural idiom.”⁶

The Creed culminated with the confession that “the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes” those who deny this affirmation. Unlike previous church pronouncements where a synod spoke in the first-person plural (“we condemn”), it was the “catholic and apostolic church” that performed this act in Nicaea. These qualifying adjectives “catholic” and “apostolic” highlight the eminence of the decree: the anathema was pronounced against the recent and particular minority view of the heretics by the “universal” church that stood in one unbroken and continuous line with the apostles.⁷ Besides, Emperor Constantine’s interest in the proceeding of the Council⁸ will also lend significant weight to the pronouncement.⁹

At the Council of Constantinople in 381, however, the Nicene Creed was re-affirmed without implicating the anathema. Supplemented with the confession of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, new clauses like the “marks” of the church, baptism, the resurrection and eternal life were added.¹⁰ Although a rich variety of images¹¹ have been offered by the New Testament to describe the church, the Nicene Creed affirmed that “we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.” In line with the point above, we can infer that the first two clauses – one, holy – were scriptural expressions while the next two clauses – catholic, apostolic – were reaffirmations of the eminence of the decree. Referring to the church as “holy” was part of the

⁴ Mark S. Smith, *The Idea of Nicaea in the Early Church Councils, AD 431-451*, (Oxford: OUP, 2018), 1.

⁵ See the chapters: “Introduction” and “Reconstructing the Council of Nicaea” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Council of Nicaea (CCCN)* ed. by Young Richard Kim (Cambridge: CUP, 2021) on some of the issues regarding the interpretations of the Creed as well as the Council in modern scholarship.

⁶ Smith, *The Idea of Nicaea*, 11.

⁷ See Wolfram Kinzig, “The Creed of Nicaea: Old Questions, New Answers” in *The Ecumenical Review*, 75/2: April 2023.

⁸ See H.A. Drake, “The Elephant in the Room: Constantine at the Council” in *CCCN* on the role that he played.

⁹ According to Galvão-Sobrinho, “Constantine’s interference in the conflict and the establishment of an “official” doctrine “criminalized” theological dissent...After Nicaea, bishops had to learn to deal with a force that insisted on making their affairs the affairs of the state and a matter of public security.” Carlos R. Galvão-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power: Theological Controversy and Christian Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 91.

¹⁰ On the emergence of the pro-Nicene alliance that endorsed the Nicene Creed in the Council of Constantinople, see Mark DelCogliano, “The Emergence of the Pro-Nicene Alliance” in *CCCN*.

¹¹ These include Christ’s body (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18); the Bride (Eph. 5:25–27; Rev. 21:2); the building, temple, or household of God (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Tim. 3:15); the new or heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2), etc.

standard baptismal formulas¹² while the *Epistula Apostolorum* (c. 140-150) was asserted to be the first instance where the church was mentioned in a profession of faith.¹³ However, in contrast to the “proto formula” of 325, the affirmation of “oneness” of the church in the beginning highlights the Creed’s conciliatory tone and the unity of the church in matters pertaining to faith. The “four marks of the church”, though rooted in scriptural and liturgical past, therefore should be regarded as a dynamic contextual formulation that encompasses the socio-political and theological acumen of Christians in their changing environment.

Concise and lucid, these four “marks” of the church are inseparable and essentially related to each other. But, in the light of separations and differences among churches that have been reciting this Creed on a regular basis, what should we really mean by confessing the oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church? We shall try to give an answer in the light of Augustine’s *City of God* and see the implications of his insights for ecumenism in Asia.

III. Why Augustine and why the City of God? At the outset, it may be good to briefly explore Augustine’s own engagement with, and his contribution towards the Nicene Creed. Firstly, Augustine knew the conciliar Creed of Nicaea, though he rarely cited it in his works. This rarity can be down to his pastoral concern and how relevant the Creed would be for his interlocutor: it has been asserted that the technical terminology *ousia* introduced by the Council of Nicaea was ambiguous and even regarded as “a mine of potential confusion.”¹⁴ Two of his works from the earlier and later parts of his ministry are a good example. *Faith and the Creed* was an address to a plenary assembly of the episcopate of North Africa that met in Hippo in 393.¹⁵ While a Latin translation of the Nicene Creed had been submitted for approval and solemnly recited at the start of this council, Augustine’s speech is based on the confession of faith - a fusion of the Nicene and Romano-Milanese creeds - as Christians knew it from their baptism. Deeming it as a comprehensive expression of the faith, he demonstrates that “the creed not only addressed the intellect but also nourished spirituality.”¹⁶ Later, we see a rare citation of the Nicene Creed in a debate with Maximinus the Arian (427/8), where Augustine said:

The Father and the Son are, then, of one and the same substance. This is the meaning of that “homoousios” that was confirmed against the Arian heretics in the Council of Nicaea by the Catholic fathers with the authority of the truth and the truth of authority... I should not, however, introduce the Council of Nicaea to prejudice the case in my favor, nor should you introduce the Council of Ariminum that way. I am not bound by the authority of Ariminum, and you are not bound by that of Nicaea.¹⁷

¹² A baptizer would ask the candidate: “Dost thou believe also in the Holy Spirit, in the holy church?” On the relation between creeds and baptism, and how “there was apparently something approaching a settled form for the baptismal questions” as early as St. Justin (c. 100-165), see Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 35, 38, 46, 96.

¹³ Angelo Di Berardino (ed.), *We believe in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church*, (Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), xvii. For the evolution of this simple creed, see Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 82.

¹⁴ See Roland J. Teske, “Introduction” in *Arianism and Other Heresies*, ed. by John E. Rotelle (NY: New City Press, 1995, WSA 1/18), 120. But on why this non-scriptural term is preferred, see Smith, *The Idea of Nicaea*, 13.

¹⁵ He later stated: “[I]n the presence of the bishops who ordered me to do this and who were holding a plenary council of all of Africa at Hippo Regius, I gave a talk as a presbyter on faith and the creed. I turned this talk into a book... In it the discussion of these things is carried out in such a way as not to reproduce the text of the words which is given to the *competentes* to be memorized.” *Revisions* 1.17.

¹⁶ Michael Fiedrowicz, “Introduction” in *Faith and the Creed*, ed. by Boniface Ramsey (NY: New City Press, 2005, WSA 1/8) 153.

¹⁷ *Debate with Maximinus*, 2.14.3; cf. 2.18.1.

So, while Augustine once preferred the common version of the creed over the more intricate idioms of the Nicene Creed in addressing the African bishops, he also considers it futile to allude to the Creed in a debate with someone who did not subscribe to the authority of Nicaea.

Secondly, despite these limited and measured references, Augustine's theological postures were largely determined by a Nicene Trinitarian theology, as opposed to a Trinitarian doctrine of Arianism. It was stated that in Augustine's lifetime, "the controversies over trinitarian language ... were not remote or academic."¹⁸ In fact, his *Confessions* narrates how "Justina, mother of the boy-king Valentinian, was persecuting your man Ambrose in the interest of her heresy; she had been led astray by the Arians." Though not "converted" yet, Augustine was still "excited by the chaos and disturbance in the city."¹⁹ Since his mother was with Ambrose, Augustine will surely be aware of the issues at stake. And as a bishop, it was noted that Augustine's works are "repeatedly concerned with anti-Nicene trinitarian theology" and that he "make acceptance of Nicaea the centerpiece of his polemical writings and, in particular, to regard the acceptance of *homoousios* as the touchstone of orthodox trinitarian doctrine."²⁰ We can therefore say that Augustine's theology has been determined by a Nicene Trinitarian theology from the start.

Thirdly, Augustine makes a sequential link between the doctrine of the Trinity and the church. For him, "due order in the profession of faith required that the Church should be named after the Trinity, like a house after the one who lives in it, a temple after its god and a city after its founder."²¹ And in studying the ecclesiology of his anti-Donatist sermons, Ployd highlights Augustine's dependence upon a Nicene Trinitarian theology. Focusing on his "defense of charitable ecclesial unity against the rigorism of the Donatist schism", Ployd argued that "Augustine uses pro-Nicene principles and exegesis to construct his understanding of the church against the Donatists." Accordingly, "Augustine depicts a church whose identity and integrity are grounded in the life and work of the triune God, rather than in the relative moral purity of human bishops and the closely guarded boundaries of the visible communion."²²

Finally, one critical outcome of Augustine's long reflection on the Trinity is the Western form of the Creed where the *filioque* clause was inserted. In *On the Trinity* (399-422/6), he suggests that the Holy Spirit can only be really distinguished from the Son if we say that He proceeds from the Father *and from the Son*, as from one source: "when the Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the Father, it is to be so understood that His proceeding also from the Son comes to the Son from the Father. For if whatever He has, the Son has from the Father, then certainly He has from the Father that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from Him."²³ Without elaborating further, we can say that this insight is the fruition of Augustine's arduous engagement with the mystery of the Trinity which has been set in motion by the intricate idioms of the Nicene Creed.

¹⁸ Rowan Williams, "De Trinitate" in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia (ATA)*, ed. by Allan D. Fitzgerald (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999), 845.

¹⁹ *Confessions*, 9.7,15.

²⁰ Michael R. Barnes, "Anti-Arian Works" in *ATA*, 32-33; see also fn. 17 above.

²¹ *Enchiridion*, 15.56.

²² Adam Ployd, *Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Donatist Sermons* (New York: OUP, 2015), 1.

²³ *On the Trinity*, 15. 26.47; in *City of God*, 13.24, he stated: "Therefore, when the Lord breathed on the disciples, saying, 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit', He certainly wished it to be understood that the Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of the Father, but also the Spirit of the only-begotten Son Himself. For the same Spirit is indeed the Spirit of the Father and of the Son...the same Spirit belongs to both."

Beyond his contributions to the development of the Nicene Trinitarian theology, *City of God* is important as Augustine reimagined theology in the context of change and uncertainty. The work was prompted by the sack of Rome in 410 which posed a serious existential question to both the pagans and the Christians. Before this time, Augustine subscribed to the idea that associated the Roman empire with a Christian order which the Scriptures foretold.²⁴ This optimism was enhanced by Constantine's endorsement of Christianity and the summoning of the Council of Nicaea which seemingly initiated a new era of harmony between emperors and bishops, and between the state and the church. But Augustine gradually altered his optimistic endorsement of a legal, institutional enforcement of Christianity against pagans and heretics until the sack of Rome forced him to reconsider his stance even more radically. Already losing his "enthusiasm for the alliance between the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church, at just the time when it had become effectively cemented,"²⁵ Augustine expressed the new stance that he adopted toward the Roman empire in the *City of God*.

Theologically, this has been forged between two opposing stances, the triumphalist Rome-Eusebius theology and the apocalyptic tradition more favoured by the Donatists.²⁶ Instead of giving prominence to the political ascension of Constantine, Augustine "began to invoke the incarnation of Christ as a decisive moment in God's action in human history."²⁷ Augustine also asserted that the realization of God's purposes neither depends upon the fate of Rome nor of any earthly society.²⁸ The apocalyptic prophecies refer to the final ending and not to any particular historical catastrophe.²⁹ We can therefore say that *City of God* is an innovative undertaking where Augustine reimagined ecclesiology in the context of change and uncertainty.

IV. Echoes of Nicaea in Augustine's *City of God*: *City of God* was initially prompted by the criticisms levelled at *tempora christiana*³⁰ by "pagan" intellects who attributed the sack of Rome to the Christian religion. In response, Augustine wrote the book where "deconstructs the ideology of Rome as the eternal city, whose peace and justice are the peace and justice of the world" and presented a Christian version of events in the light of his reading of the Scriptures. He asserts that the heavenly "City of God" whose security is eternal and where perfect peace will be established, stands in contrast with the earthly "city" "which aims at dominion", and though served by all nations, "is itself dominated by that very lust of domination".³¹

²⁴ See R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), particularly chapter two, for a thorough treatment of Augustine's association of the Roman empire with a Christian order during this period; also R. A. Markus, "'Tempora Christiana' Revisited", in Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (eds), *Augustine and his critics* (London: Routledge, 2000) for a "revisit" of this theme.

²⁵ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (California: UCP, 2000), 338. According to Markus, Augustine's "working life coincided, almost exactly, with the legal establishment of Christian orthodoxy as the empire's official religion." While Augustine thought that scriptural prophecies are being fulfilled, "it is the euphoria about the official Christianisation that is gone." Markus, "'Tempora Christiana' Revisited", 199, 211.

²⁶ See Markus, *Saeculum*, 53, 56.

²⁷ P.C. Burns, "Augustine's use of Sallust in the *City of God*: The Role of the Grammatical Tradition", in Karla Pollmann, Allan D. Fitzgerald and Mark Vessey (eds), *History, Apocalypse, and the Secular Imagination: New Essays on Augustine's City of God (HASI)*, (Bowling Green: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1999), 108.

²⁸ See *City of God*, 4.7.

²⁹ See Markus, *Saeculum*, 53; also *City of God*, 20.11.

³⁰ Though this is a fluid concept, in this context it will denote the "present time" when Christianity supplanted traditional religious beliefs of the Romans. See *Revisions*, 2,43 on Augustine's version of why he wrote the book.

³¹ See R. W. Dyson, "Introduction" in *Augustine: The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. by R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), xxix; *City of God*, 1 Preface; C. Conybeare, "Terrarum Orbi Documentum: Augustine, Camillus, and Learning from History" in *HASI*.

One principal theme that Augustine develops, and which finds systematic expression in the book is the concept of the church as the “city of God”. In Christian circles, the technical term to indicate the church was the Greek term *ekklesia*, transliterated into Latin as *ecclesia*. This term already existed in the Latin language to indicate an assembly. While Tertullian once used the term *curia* in the sense of a reunion, the Latin terms *comitia* and *convocatio* are used to designate these called-out people.³² In the creeds that Augustine used in his works, we see reference to *sanctam ecclesiam*.³³ But in this book, Augustine at times equates the famous expression “city of God” with the church, although there is no perfect identity between the “heavenly city” and the earthly church which is “a reality in process”.³⁴

Augustine’s concept has been forged in the crucible of the complex North African context where the church had certain distinct emphasis, shaped by the views of Tertullian and the martyr-bishop Cyprian. As Tertullian stated, “What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem?” and “There is nothing more alien to us than the State”, their idea of the church centred on the purity of the community which demands separation from all worldly things, political and intellectual.³⁵ For Cyprian who asserts that “there is no salvation outside the Church”, schismatic bishop is deprived of all ability to administer valid sacraments so that the baptism of heretics and schismatics defiles the recipient.³⁶ And as the fortunes of Christians changed between persecution and patronization of the State, their views found expression in the so-called Donatist schism. As Pose asserts, “Donatism began as a revolt against what many Christians in N. Africa considered a betrayal of the faith by their own leaders, and continued as a protest against the effects of the *christiana tempora* initiated by Constantine.”³⁷ On its ecclesiological implications, Evans remarks that the Donatists “asserted that they alone were now the true Church, which was ‘holy’ and ‘apostolic’” while Augustine considered it important that the Church should also be ‘one’ and ‘catholic.’”³⁸ The stances that Augustine adopted against the Donatists has been embedded in his *City of God*. So, how much does “city of God” conform to the Nicene’s affirmation that the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic?

Firstly, regardless of divisions in the empirical church, Augustine affirms that the “holy city” is truly one since the deepest foundation of the “city of God” lies in the Trinity.³⁹ Regarding citizenship, “there is a city of God, whose citizens we long to be because of the love with which its Founder has inspired us.”⁴⁰ This God-inspired love is essential to the community as “a city is nothing other than a multitude of men bound together by some tie of fellowship”, while “people” is the association of a “multitude of rational creatures bound together by a common

³² Di Berardino, *We Believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church*, xxiii.

³³ For a reconstruction of baptismal creeds in his writings, see J. T. Lienhard, “Creed, *Symbolum*” in *ATA*, 255.

³⁴ We find this in *City of God*, 8.24; 13.16; 16.2; see also Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, “Church” in *ATA*, 169-176.

³⁵ G.R. Evans, “Introduction”, in *Augustine: Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. by Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Book, 1972), xxix-xxx.

³⁶ See Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1986), 280-82.

³⁷ See E. R. Pose, “Donatism”, in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, Second English Edition, 3 Vols, ed. by Angelo Di Berardino, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), 1: 736, 740.

³⁸ Evans, “Introduction”, xlix

³⁹ “In this Trinity is the origin, the instruction and the blessedness of the holy City ... For if we ask, Whence comes it? God founded it; or Whence comes its wisdom? God enlightened it; or Where lies its happiness? In the enjoyment of God. It has its form by subsisting in Him; its enlightenment by contemplating Him; its joy by abiding in Him.” *City of God*, 11.24.

⁴⁰ *City of God*, 11.1.

agreement as to the objects of their love.”⁴¹ The oneness of the church lies in the common love that binds the members together.⁴² As every religious society has some visible sign of unity, Augustine considered the sacraments as the elements that bind the church into unity.⁴³ But here also, love is the decisive factor.⁴⁴ Thus, love became the hallmark of unity: in love, the church as the body of Christ is united to its head. In other words, the church is one not by virtue of the absence of schism and divisions but by and through loving God and our neighbour.⁴⁵

Secondly, against the Donatists’ insistence upon the purity of the church, Augustine adopted a “wider and more patient view of the nature of the Church’s holiness, never condoning sin yet recognizing that men could not act as final judges.”⁴⁶ Taking a cue from Tyconius, a Donatist, Augustine describes the empirical church as a mixed body⁴⁷ where good and bad people co-exist. While defining good and evil in an absolute way, as the Donatists did, can destroy the unity of the church, Augustine maintains that every member of the institutional church is not a member of the city of God.⁴⁸ In other words, one should not insist upon the purity of the church at the expense of ecclesial unity because the city of God in her pilgrimage is a reality in process that will find fulfilment only in the Heavenly City.

Thirdly, while the Donatists insist on being “a tiny remnant”⁴⁹ for the sake of purity, Augustine emphasizes the Catholicity of the church. Asserting that the word “catholic” comes from the Greek words καθόλον meaning ‘according to the whole,’ the Catholic Church is that which has “spread over the whole earth”, extending into the uttermost part of the earth.⁵⁰ As a community which transcends space and time, all the righteous of our history make up the

⁴¹ *City of God*, 15.8; 19.24

⁴² “Since, therefore, true sacrifices are works of mercy shown to ourselves or to our neighbours, and done with reference to God...it surely follows that the whole of the redeemed City - that is, the congregation and fellowship of the saints - is offered to God as a universal sacrifice for us through the great High Priest Who...offered even Himself for us in the form of a servant, so that we might be the body of so great a Head.” *City of God*, 10.6.

⁴³ “‘We, being many, are one body in Christ.’ And this ... is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, by which she demonstrates that she herself is offered...to God.” *City of God*, 10.6.

⁴⁴ “[H]e who is in the unity of His body - that is, in the fellowship of the Christians, who are the members of Christ, Whose body the faithful customarily take when they communicate at the altar - may truly be said to eat the body of Christ and to drink the blood of Christ... Whoever, then, has Christ in his heart, so that no earthly or temporal things - not even those which are lawful and permitted - come before Him, has Christ as his foundation. If he does put such things before Christ, then, even if he seems to have the faith of Christ, Christ is not in him as a foundation, since, for him, other things come before Christ.” *City of God*, 21.26.

⁴⁵ “[B]oth the individual just man and the community and people of the just live by faith, which works by love: by that love with which a man loves God as God ought to be loved, and his neighbour as himself.” *City of God*, 19.23

⁴⁶ Frederick W. Dillstone, “The Anti-Donatist Writings” in *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, ed. by Roy W. Battenhouse (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 186.

⁴⁷ “In this world, the two cities are indeed entangled and mingled with one another; and they will remain so until the last judgment shall separate them....In this wicked world, and in these evil days . . . many reprobate are mingled in the Church with the good. Both are as it were collected in the net of the Gospel; and in this world, as in a sea, both swim together without separation, enclosed in the net until brought ashore. *City of God*, 1.35;18.49.

⁴⁸ Among those very enemies are hidden some who will become citizens...On the other hand, while she is a pilgrim in this world, the City of God has with her, bound to her by the communion of the sacraments, some who will not be with her to share eternally in the bliss of the saints. *City of God*, 1.35

⁴⁹ According to Bonner, “At the time of the Diocletianic persecution there were *traditores* in every part of the world, but in Africa alone had the Church broken off relations with them. Thus, in every other part of the world the Church had become infected with the guilt of *traditio* and had thus ceased to be the Church. Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, 284.

⁵⁰ Maureen A. Tilley, “*Ad Catholicos fratres or De unitate ecclesiae*” in *ATA*, 150; According to Augustine, “This way, therefore, is not the way of one nation, but of all nations. The law and the word of the Lord did not remain in Sion and Jerusalem, but went forth thence to be spread abroad to the whole world.” *City of God*, 10.32.

church⁵¹ while the work of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost also affirmed and testified the catholicity of the church.⁵²

Finally, deviating from his engagement with the Donatist, we can discern resonance of the Nicene affirmation that the church is apostolic in *City of God* when Augustine deals with the authority of Scripture. Asserting that the apostles cite not only the text from Hebrew but the Greek *Septuagint* (LXX),⁵³ Augustine compared the merit of the LXX with other translations as well as Jerome's. Insisting on *Hebraica Veritas*,⁵⁴ Jerome translated the Old Testament from the Hebrew, and the Jews acknowledge its reliability while contending that "the translators of the Septuagint were in many respects in error". Yet Augustine insists that "it is the judgment of the churches of Christ that no one person should be preferred to the authority of so large a body of men." He also insists that "any other accurate translator of these Scriptures from the Hebrew into any other language whatsoever must agree with the Septuagint" since "the highest expression of prophetic meaning lies with the Septuagint".⁵⁵

We can see the importance of his argument when we consider a prevalent notion in some Jewish circles⁵⁶ that the Scriptures inspired by God's spirit came to an end with the last prophetically inspired writers, thereby refuting some books in the LXX along with the Christian literature currently in circulation.⁵⁷ If affirming the church as apostolic basically means continuing in the teaching and practice of the apostles, Augustine's endorsement of the LXX can assert this in two related ways. First, beyond the Jewish Scripture, there are books inspired by the Holy Spirit that Christians came to regard as authoritative in matters of faith and practices. In fact, it is basically through them that Christians can have access regarding the teaching and practice of the apostles. Second, the key issue is not solely about the status of the LXX but of privileging the examples of the apostles and the corporate "judgment of the churches of Christ" in discerning "the highest expression of prophetic meaning" in Scripture, which is Christological.

⁵¹ "For as long as this Heavenly City is a pilgrim on earth, she summons citizens of all nations and every tongue, and brings together a society of pilgrims in which no attention is paid to any differences in the customs, laws, and institutions by which earthly peace is achieved or maintained." *City of God*, 19.17.

⁵² "Thereafter, when ten days had passed, He sent the Holy Spirit, as He had promised; and the greatest and most striking sign of the Spirit's coming to those who believed was that each one of them spoke in the tongues of all nations. In this way, it was shown that the unity of the Catholic Church would be fulfilled in all the nations, and that she would therefore speak in all tongues." *City of God*, 18.49.

⁵³ "It is with good reason, then, that, when making use of the testimony of Scripture, the apostolic authority is found to cite not only the Hebrew text, but the Septuagint also." *City of God*, 15.14.

⁵⁴ Basically meaning "Hebrew truth", *Hebraica Veritas* occurs around 85 times in Jerome's extant writings. Though Jerome first used the expression in his preface to the *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim*, "the concept is already present in the Roman letters." A. Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible: A Study of the Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* (Oxford: OUP 1993), 42.

⁵⁵ *City of God*, 18.43; cf. 18.44 where he stated: "Hence even I, in my small measure, follow in the footsteps of the apostles; for they themselves quoted prophetic testimonies from both - that is, from both the Hebrew and the Septuagint; and I have deemed it right to make use of both as authorities, since both are one, and both divine."

⁵⁶ Those most concerned with the priestly functions in Judaism hold this notion, particularly in the Hasmonean era. See L.M. McDonald, "Critical Issues in the Formation of the Hebrew Bible", in C.A. Evans, J. Neusner, A.J. Avery-Peck (eds), *Earliest Christianity within the Boundaries of Judaism* (Boston: Brill Academic Pub. 2016), 80.

⁵⁷ Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), 45. This is more an attempt "to fence out, rather than to fence in". See Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), 110. Goshen-Gottstein asserted that there was never an official act of introducing certain writings into the canon for Judaism. "The issue was rather which of the various writings which groups had regarded as 'inspired' should be left inside the canon." M. Goshen-Gottstein, "Scriptural Authority, Biblical Authority in Judaism", in David Noel Freedman (ed), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1018.

In other words, it is this Christological reading of the Jewish Scripture by the apostles that determined the status of the LXX for the church. Seen from this perspective, Augustine's stance on the LXX can be seen as an affirmation that the church is apostolic.

V. Implications for Asian Ecumenism: In this paper, we have seen how Augustine reimagined ecclesiology amidst the change and uncertainty of his time and articulated them systematically. Let me conclude by suggesting four brief points that Asian Christians can draw from *City of God* to affirm and enrich our personal and communal identity in Christ.

1. Unity inspired by God's love: Although Paul urged Christians to strive for unity as there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5), we see how the church in North Africa violated this call for unity due to various factors. Feeling the pain of that division, Augustine discerns a "united" community in history, inspired and bound together by a common agreement to the object of their love. This "synchrony" is foundational to the "city of God" where the members were drawn from diverse races, backgrounds and eras. The unity of Asian churches from diverse and pluralistic backgrounds will also be hindered until God is the common object of our love. Conversely, if we are bound together in and by the love of God, this common love can cultivate a spirit of unity that will transcend theological differences and cultural identities.

2. Holiness as the mark of distinction but not separation: Against the Donatists' insistence upon the purity of the church - an otherworldly holiness that avoids contaminations, Augustine asserts that the church is a mixed body. This insight implies that we should not act as the final judges upon others because our measure tends to be shaped by our socio-political, religious-cultural and gender bias. And being "the light of the world" (Mt. 5:14), our holiness should be a mark of distinction that serves others, not leading to a lack of connection.

3. Catholicity as witness and for-allness: In today's "globalised" world, "hegemonic" catholicity which promotes monoculture can resemble what Augustine refers to as "that very lust for domination" which is not congruent with the "city of God." Rather than a lust for authority and dominance, the Catholicity of the church should be grounded in ministry and service which engender an enriching diversity and creative plurality and fulfill the call to love God and our neighbours.

4. Apostolicity and the givenness of Christianity: While Augustine reimagined ecclesiology in the context of uncertainty and new challenges, "City of God" was not a normless and boundless act of speculation but firmly rooted in the self-giving life and work of the Triune God as affirmed by the apostolic faith. And as the venture for ecumenical solidarity demands that we reimagine ecclesiology in Asia, we should maintain a right balance of being faithful to our theological heritage and being relevant to our contemporary context.

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