

The Importance of Christian Faith in the Light of the Teachings Of the Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*¹

Reginald ALVA SVD

Abstract

In the contemporary world, secularization has reduced the relevance of religions. The secularized society considers religion as a subject matter for the weak. Increasing incidents of violence perpetuated in the name of religion has also put fear about religion in the minds of the people. Christian Faith, which was a dominant force in the West, has dwindled. Modern persons prefer to put their trust in science and technology rather than in abstract theologies and philosophies. Pope Francis promulgated an encyclical on faith, *Lumen Fidei* to stress the importance of Christian faith in the modern world.² In this paper, we shall examine the importance of Christian faith in the light of the teachings of the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*. We shall focus on the texts of the encyclical, which note the relevance of faith for the contemporary persons, who are in pursuit of meaning of life.

1. Introduction

Secularization has crept in every aspect of human life. In Western secularized societies, people have reduced faith and spirituality to a commodity. They consider religion as an irrelevant thing, which tricks people to believe in the supernatural. Christian faith, which was a dominant force in the West, faces the various problems occurring in the society due to rapid secularization. In such a situation, the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (*LF*) stresses on the relevance and importance of Christian faith. In this paper, we shall examine the importance of Christian faith in the light of the teachings of *LF*. We shall also examine the contribution of this encyclical in appealing to contemporary persons to rediscover the relevance of faith in their lives.

¹ I thank Nanzan University Pache Research Subsidy I-A-2 academic year 2015 for their support.

² Francis, Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, AAS 105 (2013): 555–598. English version available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html Pope Francis noted in this encyclical that his predecessor Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI had prepared the first draft of this document and he added a few comments in the final draft. However, the Church attributes the authorship of the encyclical to Pope Francis; nevertheless, one can note the contributions of the previous pontiff.

2. Etymology of Christian Faith

In ordinary sense of the term, faith means a belief or trust in someone or something.³ However, in Christian tradition, faith is primarily God's gift and a human response to it.⁴ The Hebrew word for faith is *aman*.⁵ It means to be firm, solid or uphold. The Greek word for faith is *pistis*, which means to believe.⁶ The Latin word *fides* for faith is the translation of the Greek term.⁷ The Hebrew, Greek and Latin terms for faith highlights the personal relationship between God and the one who puts faith in God.⁸ Thus, in Christian tradition, faith does not mean to accept blindly a set of beliefs or doctrines but a filial relationship with God. It emphasizes on the personal encounter with the living God. This personal contact with God transforms a person internally. Such a person is convinced of God's love for him or her, and sets on life's journey putting complete trust in the loving God. Pope Francis notes the following about the importance of such an encounter with God.

Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives. Transformed by this love, we gain fresh vision, new eyes to see; we realize that it contains a great promise of fulfilment, and that a vision of the future opens up before us. Faith, received from God as a supernatural gift, becomes a light for our way, guiding our journey through time.⁹

A Christian does not consider faith as a mere human action.¹⁰ He or she accepts it as a gift of God and responds to God's act of self-giving. Even though, a human person exercises faith, there is always the action of the divine. Pope Francis notes that:

In God's gift of faith, a supernatural infused virtue, we realize that a great love has been offered us, a good word has been spoken to us, and that when we welcome that word, Jesus Christ the Word made flesh, the Holy Spirit transforms us, lights up our way to the future and enables us joyfully to advance along that way on wings of hope. Thus

³ See Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Available at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faith> (accessed on 20 December 2014).

⁴ See Mary Ann Fatula, "Faith," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 379.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *Lumen Fidei*, no. 4.

¹⁰ See Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1995), 73.

wonderfully interwoven, faith, hope and charity are the driving force of the Christian life as it advances towards full communion with God.¹¹

The Biblical figures of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob put their trust in God, who interacted with them. Their actions reveal that God is not a distant entity but is like a loving parent, who longs to be in union with the whole of humanity. Pope Francis noted on the personal relationship between God and us.

Faith is linked to hearing. Abraham does not see God, but hears his voice. Faith thus takes on a personal aspect. God is not the god of a particular place, or a deity linked to specific sacred time, but the God of a person, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, capable of interacting with man and establishing a covenant with him. Faith is our response to a word which engages us personally, to a “Thou” who calls us by name.¹²

Genuine faith challenges all forms of idolatry. The contemporary world tempts people to put their trust in idols of false love, money and power.¹³ History has proved repeatedly that all those who put their trust in prosperity, power and fame failed. Nothing could satisfy them. No earthly thing can satisfy the deepest longings of a human person. Earthly things are not bad in themselves. However, greed and lust for more always disappoints. God alone can fill the void in a person’s being. Pope Francis notes that the history of Israel serves a good reminder to all of us, to see the pitfalls of putting our trust in idols, which do not help us in being free and happy persons. He notes that:

The history of Israel also shows us the temptation of unbelief to which the people yielded more than once. Here the opposite of faith is shown to be idolatry. While Moses is speaking to God on Sinai, the people cannot bear the mystery of God’s hiddenness, they cannot endure the time of waiting to see his face. Faith by its very nature demands renouncing the immediate possession which sight would appear to offer; it is an invitation to turn to the source of the light, while respecting the mystery of a countenance which will unveil itself personally in its own good time. Martin Buber once cited a definition of idolatry proposed by the rabbi of Kock: idolatry is “when a face addresses a face which is not a face”. In place of faith in God, it seems better to worship an idol, into whose face we can look directly and whose origin we know, because it is the work of our own hands. Before an idol, there is no risk that we will be called to abandon our security, for idols “have mouths, but they cannot speak” (Ps 115: 5). Idols exist, we begin to see, as a pretext for setting ourselves at the centre of reality and worshiping the work of our own hands. Once man has lost the fundamental orientation which unifies his existence, he breaks

¹¹ *Lumen Fidei*, no. 7.

¹² *Ibid.*, no. 8.

¹³ See Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 2009). The author notes about the idols of love, money and glory, which have blinded the modern person.

down into the multiplicity of his desires; in refusing to await the time of promise, his life-story disintegrates into a myriad of unconnected instants. Idolatry, then, is always polytheism, an aimless passing from one lord to another. Idolatry does not offer a journey but rather a plethora of paths leading nowhere and forming a vast labyrinth. Those who choose not to put their trust in God must hear the din of countless idols crying out: "Put your trust in me!" Faith, tied as it is to conversion, is the opposite of idolatry; it breaks with idols to turn to the living God in a personal encounter. Believing means entrusting oneself to a merciful love which always accepts and pardons, which sustains and directs our lives, and which shows its power by its ability to make straight the crooked lines of our history. Faith consists in the willingness to let ourselves be constantly transformed and renewed by God's call. Herein lies the paradox: by constantly turning towards the Lord, we discover a sure path which liberates us from the dissolution imposed upon us by idols.¹⁴

Christian faith also means to grow in the likeness of Christ, who is "the image of invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1: 15). Christian faith is a love relationship.¹⁵ The believer grows in love with the person of Jesus. He or she begins to see, hear and act as Jesus. Just like any other relationship, this relationship too is a process. It does not happen automatically. The person involved needs to open up one's self to receive God's grace to begin and grow in this love relationship. There are many instances in the Bible, which narrate the importance of responding to God's call. For instance, John and Andrew responded to Jesus' call to "Come and see" and "remained with Him" (see Jn 1: 37–39). The encounter with Jesus moved both John and Andrew. They shared their experience with others and others came to believe in Jesus (see Jn 1: 40–42). Thus, love relationship with Jesus, convinces a person to follow Jesus closely and become His instrument in this world. Pope Francis noted that:

In faith, Christ is not simply the one in whom we believe, the supreme manifestation of God's love; he is also the one with whom we are united precisely in order to believe. Faith does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus himself sees them, with his own eyes: it is a participation in his way of seeing. In many areas in our lives we trust others who know more than we do. We trust the architect who builds our home, the pharmacist who gives us medicine for healing, the lawyer who defends us in court. We also need someone trustworthy and knowledgeable where God is concerned. Jesus, the Son of God, is the one who makes God known to us (cf. Jn 1: 18). Christ's life, his way of knowing the Father and living in complete and constant relationship with him, opens up new and inviting vistas for human experience. Saint John brings out the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus for our faith by using various forms of the verb "to believe". In addition to "believing that" what Jesus tells us is true, John also speaks of "believing" Jesus and "believing in" Jesus. We "believe" Jesus when we accept his word, his testimony, because he is truthful. We "believe in" Jesus when we personally welcome him into our

¹⁴ *Lumen Fidei*, no. 13.

¹⁵ See James Joseph Gettel, *God's Love, Human Freedom & Christian Faith* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), 155–156.

lives and journey towards him, clinging to him in love and following in his footsteps along the way.

To enable us to know, accept and follow him, the Son of God took on our flesh. In this way he also saw the Father humanly, within the setting of a journey unfolding in time. Christian faith is faith in the incarnation of the Word and his bodily resurrection; it is faith in a God who is so close to us that he entered our human history. Far from divorcing us from reality, our faith in the Son of God made man in Jesus of Nazareth enables us to grasp reality's deepest meaning and to see how much God loves this world and is constantly guiding it towards himself. This leads us, as Christians, to live our lives in this world with ever greater commitment and intensity.¹⁶

Faith without actions is useless (Jas 2: 17). Faith needs to become a lived reality. Faith, which is a love relationship with the Other (personal God) cannot exclude the other (neighbor). The grace of God internally transforms a person to become self-less. All his or her actions flow out of the grace received. He or she does not claim ownership to the acts of the charity done by him or her. Pope Francis notes the importance of this internal transformation.

Those who live this way, who want to be the source of their own righteousness, find that the latter is soon depleted and that they are unable even to keep the law. They become closed in on themselves and isolated from the Lord and from others; their lives become futile and their works barren, like a tree far from water. Saint Augustine tells us in his usual concise and striking way: "Ab eo qui fecit te, noli deficere nec ad te", "Do not turn away from the one who made you, even to turn towards yourself". Once I think that by turning away from God I will find myself, my life begins to fall apart (cf. Lk 15: 11–24). The beginning of salvation is openness to something prior to ourselves, to a primordial gift that affirms life and sustains it in being. Only by being open to and acknowledging this gift can we be transformed, experience salvation and bear good fruit. Salvation by faith means recognizing the primacy of God's gift. As Saint Paul puts it: "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph 2: 8).¹⁷

We come to see the difference, then, which faith makes for us. Those who believe are transformed by the love to which they have opened their hearts in faith. By their openness to this offer of primordial love, their lives are enlarged and expanded. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2: 20). "May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph 3: 17). The self-awareness of the believer now expands because of the presence of another; it now lives in this other and thus, in love, life takes on a whole new breadth. Here we see the Holy Spirit at work. The Christian can see with the eyes of Jesus and share in his mind, his filial disposition, because he or she shares in his love, which is the Spirit. In the love of Jesus, we receive in a certain way his vision. Without being conformed to him in love, without the presence of the Spirit, it is impossible to

¹⁶ *Lumen Fidei*, no. 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 19.

confess him as Lord (cf. 1 Cor12: 3).¹⁸

Christian faith is not an abstract philosophical thought but a love relationship with God. This relationship transforms the person to open-up humbly oneself to receive God's grace. In this process, he or she becomes an instrument of grace for others. Thus, Christian faith is dynamic and lived reality.

3. Faith through Living Tradition

Christian faith is rooted in tradition. The remembrance of the faith of the ancestors confirms the relevance of faith-life. In the Biblical tradition, the great heroes of faith like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and others present to all the way to strengthen their faith lives. Inspiring stories of the faith-lives of the ancestors helps an individual to comprehend his or her faith better. Pope Francis comments that:

Faith opens the way before us and accompanies our steps through time. Hence, if we want to understand what faith is, we need to follow the route it has taken, the path trodden by believers, as witnessed first in the Old Testament.¹⁹

The history of the people of Israel in the Book of Exodus follows in the wake of Abraham's faith. Faith once again is born of a primordial gift: Israel trusts in God, who promises to set his people free from their misery. Faith becomes a summons to a lengthy journey leading to worship of the Lord on Sinai and the inheritance of a promised land. God's love is seen to be like that of a father who carries his child along the way (cf. Dt 1: 31). Israel's confession of faith takes shape as an account of God's deeds in setting his people free and acting as their guide (cf. Dt 26: 5–11), an account passed down from one generation to the next. God's light shines for Israel through the remembrance of the Lord's mighty deeds, recalled and celebrated in worship, and passed down from parents to children. Here we see how the light of faith is linked to concrete life-stories, to the grateful remembrance of God's mighty deeds and the progressive fulfilment of his promises. Gothic architecture gave clear expression to this: in the great cathedrals light comes down from heaven by passing through windows depicting the history of salvation. God's light comes to us through the account of his self-revelation, and thus becomes capable of illuminating our passage through time by recalling his gifts and demonstrating how he fulfils his promises.²⁰

Faith has a communitarian dimension.²¹ It is never lived in isolation. Christian faith is

¹⁸ Ibid., no. 21.

¹⁹ Ibid., no. 8.

²⁰ Ibid., no. 12.

²¹ See Stanley Grenz & John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville:

Trinitarian. The communion of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit is the model for a Christian community, the Church. A Christian community nurtures the faith-life of an individual. Pope Francis noted that the sacraments celebrated by the Church have communitarian dimension. The liturgy of the sacraments takes into account the communitarian dimension of faith. Hence, the whole community joins an individual right from the sacraments to initiation (baptism, confirmation and eucharist).

It is impossible to believe on our own. Faith is not simply an individual decision which takes place in the depths of the believer's heart, nor a completely private relationship between the "I" of the believer and the divine "Thou", between an autonomous subject and God. By its very nature, faith is open to the "We" of the Church; it always takes place within her communion. We are reminded of this by the dialogical format of the creed used in the baptismal liturgy. Our belief is expressed in response to an invitation, to a word which must be heard and which is not my own; it exists as part of a dialogue and cannot be merely a profession originating in an individual. We can respond in the singular — "I believe" — only because we are part of a greater fellowship, only because we also say "We believe". This openness to the ecclesial "We" reflects the openness of God's own love, which is not only a relationship between the Father and the Son, between an "I" and a "Thou", but is also, in the Spirit, a "We", a communion of persons. Here we see why those who believe are never alone, and why faith tends to spread, as it invites others to share in its joy. Those who receive faith discover that their horizons expand as new and enriching relationships come to life. Tertullian puts this well when he describes the catechumens who, "after the cleansing which gives new birth" are welcomed into the house of their mother and, as part of a new family, pray the Our Father together with their brothers and sisters.²²

Christian families are basic units of passing and nurturing faith in a community. Parents are the first catechists in the family. It is their responsibility to nurture faith-lives, in their children. Their own faith-lives must also serve as a good model for their children.²³ Parents need to make time to pray, read the Bible and recite the rosary as a family. They also need to introduce their children to the wider Church community, by taking their children to the various liturgical celebrations in the Church. Thus, the family and the Church community are vital agents to transmit faith to the younger generation. In the contemporary world, religious values have little relevance. It prefers material prosperity and fun. In such a context, the family as well as the Church community can help the youngsters to know the relevance of the faith-life and the value of religious education. In spite of the best of the intentions, children may not accept the parents' faith formation initiatives. However, parents need to take the effort to teach their

Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 230–231.

²² *Lumen Fidei*, no. 39.

²³ See Steve Bell & Valerie Bell, *Faith Shaped Kids: Helping Your Child Grow Spiritually* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2001), 12–13.

children the importance of Christian faith. Pope Francis noted the following about the importance of faith-life in the family and Church community.

In the family, faith accompanies every age of life, beginning with childhood: children learn to trust in the love of their parents. This is why it is so important that within their families parents encourage shared expressions of faith which can help children gradually to mature in their own faith. Young people in particular, who are going through a period in their lives which is so complex, rich and important for their faith, ought to feel the constant closeness and support of their families and the Church in their journey of faith. We have all seen, during World Youth Days, the joy that young people show in their faith and their desire for an ever more solid and generous life of faith. Young people want to live life to the fullest. Encountering Christ, letting themselves be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness.²⁴

The Catholic Church maintains that both tradition and Scripture are vital components to hand over faith down the generations. The Church community shares the faith with the younger generations. In pre Second Vatican times, the hierarchy was mainly responsible to educate people in faith. However, the Second Vatican Council reversed the pre-Vatican hierarchical order in the Church. It noted that all are "people of God."²⁵ The Second Vatican Council documents further emphasized the communitarian dimension of faith, by the renewal of liturgical celebrations. The Second Vatican Council allowed the use of native languages instead of Latin. The Council Fathers wanted to make the liturgical rites more participatory. Further, the renewal in liturgical celebrations helped Christians to better understand and relish their faith.

The Church, like every family, passes on to her children the whole store of her memories. But how does this come about in a way that nothing is lost, but rather everything in the patrimony of faith comes to be more deeply understood? It is through the apostolic Tradition preserved in the Church with the assistance of the Holy Spirit that we enjoy a living contact with the foundational memory. What was handed down by the apostles — as the Second Vatican Council states — "comprises everything that serves to make the people of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith. In this way the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes".

²⁴ *Lumen Fidei*, no. 53.

²⁵ See Conciliar Documents *Lumen Gentium* no. 13. Available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (accessed 23 December 2014).

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. It is the sacraments, celebrated in the Church's liturgy. The sacraments communicate an incarnate memory, linked to the times and places of our lives, linked to all our senses; in them the whole person is engaged as a member of a living subject and part of a network of communitarian relationships. While the sacraments are indeed sacraments of faith, it can also be said that faith itself possesses a sacramental structure. The awakening of faith is linked to the dawning of a new sacramental sense in our lives as human beings and as Christians, in which visible and material realities are seen to point beyond themselves to the mystery of the eternal.²⁶

Communitarian dimension enhances faith-life. A Christian can better understand his or her faith because of the Church community, which helps and encourages the him or her to grow strong in faith-life.

4. Faith gives Meaning to Life

Contemporary people are on move. They are in pursuit of meaning of life. The progress in science has made human life convenient but not necessarily better. Science can never satisfy the deepest needs of a person. It cannot give meaning to a person's existence. On the other hand, the secularized culture has also aggravated the problems in the society. A society, which takes pride in pushing God out, has done more harm than good to people.

Our culture has lost its sense of God's tangible presence and activity in our world. We think that God is to be found in the beyond, on another level of reality, far removed from our everyday relationships. But if this were the case, if God could not act in the world, his love would not be truly powerful, truly real, and thus not even true, a love capable of delivering the bliss that it promises. It would make no difference at all whether we believed in him or not. Christians, on the contrary, profess their faith in God's tangible and powerful love which really does act in history and determines its final destiny: a love that can be encountered, a love fully revealed in Christ's passion, death and resurrection.²⁷

²⁶ *Lumen Fidei*, no. 40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 17.

Faith gives meaning to life. The *imago dei* in a person has given him or her distinction among other creatures.²⁸ Further, the incarnation of Jesus, has raised the fallen nature of a person and made him or her child of God. A person who does not believe in a loving God cannot find the reason for the dignity of a human person. Faith teaches a person that he or she is a mystery and that God dwells in his or her being. This realization helps a person to see God within himself or herself and in others, who are also *imago dei*.

How many benefits has the gaze of Christian faith brought to the city of men for their common life. Thanks to faith we have come to understand the unique dignity of each person, something which was not clearly seen in antiquity. In the second century the pagan Celsus reproached Christians for an idea that he considered foolishness and delusion: namely, that God created the world for man, setting human beings at the pinnacle of the entire cosmos. “Why claim that [grass] grows for the benefit of man, rather than for that of the most savage of the brute beasts?” “If we look down to Earth from the heights of heaven, would there really be any difference between our activities and those of the ants and bees?” At the heart of biblical faith is God’s love, his concrete concern for every person, and his plan of salvation which embraces all of humanity and all creation, culminating in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without insight into these realities, there is no criterion for discerning what makes human life precious and unique. Man loses his place in the universe, he is cast adrift in nature, either renouncing his proper moral responsibility or else presuming to be a sort of absolute judge, endowed with an unlimited power to manipulate the world around him.²⁹

Christian faith helps a person to know that he or she has a distinct place in the world. However, God has not given this gift to humans to subdue and manipulate the nature or other creatures. God has given humans the distinct place to take care of the environment (see Gen 2: 15). Humans have the tremendous responsibility to work for the integrity of the whole creation. They need to work for sustainable development. Thus, Christian faith broadens the scope of solidarity. It calls for solidarity not only with humans but also with the whole of creation.³⁰

Faith teaches a person the need to resolve conflicts by dialogue and not violent confrontation. A person can forgive the wrongs of the other, only in faith. Thus, faith gives the person strength to begin the healing process, in moments of discord and strife.

Faith, on the other hand, by revealing the love of God the Creator, enables us to respect nature all the more, and to discern in it a grammar written by the hand of God and a

²⁸ International Theological Commission, *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents 1969–1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 319–326.

²⁹ *Lumen Fidei*, no. 54.

³⁰ See Pablo Martínez de Anguita, *Environmental Solidarity: How Religions Can Sustain Sustainability* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 94.

dwelling place entrusted to our protection and care. Faith also helps us to devise models of development which are based not simply on utility and profit, but consider creation as a gift for which we are all indebted; it teaches us to create just forms of government, in the realization that authority comes from God and is meant for the service of the common good. Faith likewise offers the possibility of forgiveness, which so often demands time and effort, patience and commitment. Forgiveness is possible once we discover that goodness is always prior to and more powerful than evil, and that the word with which God affirms our life is deeper than our every denial. From a purely anthropological standpoint, unity is superior to conflict; rather than avoiding conflict, we need to confront it in an effort to resolve and move beyond it, to make it a link in a chain, as part of a progress towards unity.

When faith is weakened, the foundations of life also risk being weakened, as the poet T. S. Eliot warned: “Do you need to be told that even those modest attainments. As you can boast in the way of polite society. Will hardly survive the Faith to which they owe their significance?” If we remove faith in God from our cities, mutual trust would be weakened, we would remain united only by fear and our stability would be threatened. In the Letter to the Hebrews we read that “God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them” (Heb 11: 16). Here the expression “is not ashamed” is associated with public acknowledgment. The intention is to say that God, by his concrete actions, makes a public avowal that he is present in our midst and that he desires to solidify every human relationship. Could it be the case, instead, that we are the ones who are ashamed to call God our God? That we are the ones who fail to confess him as such in our public life, who fail to propose the grandeur of the life in common which he makes possible? Faith illumines life and society. If it possesses a creative light for each new moment of history, it is because it sets every event in relationship to the origin and destiny of all things in the Father.³¹

The contemporary world finds it difficult to define the concept of truth. It prefers vagueness. It promotes relativism. The laboratory truth, which science demonstrates interests the modern society more than the Biblical truth. The society leaves all other matters of life at the free disposition of humans. In doing so, the society rejects the ultimate truth, God. However, humans can find meaning of their existence only by having a relationship with God, who loves them. Pope Francis notes:

Today more than ever, we need to be reminded of this bond between faith and truth, given the crisis of truth in our age. 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. Nowadays this appears as the only truth that is certain, the only truth that can be shared, the only truth that can serve as a basis for discussion or for common

³¹ *Lumen Fidei*, no. 55.

undertakings. Yet at the other end of the scale we are willing to allow for subjective truths of the individual, which consist in fidelity to his or her deepest convictions, yet these are truths valid only for that individual and not capable of being proposed to others in an effort to serve the common good. But Truth itself, the truth which would comprehensively explain our life as individuals and in society, is regarded with suspicion. Surely this kind of truth — we hear it said — is what was claimed by the great totalitarian movements of the last century, a truth that imposed its own world view in order to crush the actual lives of individuals. In the end, what we are left with is relativism, in which the question of universal truth — and ultimately this means the question of God — is no longer relevant. It would be logical, from this point of view, to attempt to sever the bond between religion and truth, because it seems to lie at the root of fanaticism, which proves oppressive for anyone who does not share the same beliefs. In this regard, though, we can speak of a massive amnesia in our contemporary world. The question of truth is really a question of memory, deep memory, for it deals with something prior to ourselves and can succeed in uniting us in a way that transcends our petty and limited individual consciousness. It is a question about the origin of all that is, in whose light we can glimpse the goal and thus the meaning of our common path.³²

Thus, Christian faith gives the person the meaning of his or her existence.

5. Faith through Witness

Christian faith is not a matter of abstract doctrines but love in action. It helps a person to get rid of self-centeredness and be other-centered. Faith transforms a person's distorted worldview and helps him or her to see the reality with the eyes of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the principal animator of the person, who surrenders oneself to God. Such a person becomes a strong witness of God. His or her actions bear witness to God's love and grace working in this world.

We come to see the difference, then, which faith makes for us. Those who believe are transformed by the love to which they have opened their hearts in faith. By their openness to this offer of primordial love, their lives are enlarged and expanded. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2: 20). "May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph 3: 17). The self-awareness of the believer now expands because of the presence of another; it now lives in this other and thus, in love, life takes on a whole new breadth. Here we see the Holy Spirit at work. The Christian can see with the eyes of Jesus and share in his mind, his filial disposition, because he or she shares in his love, which is the Spirit. In the love of Jesus, we receive in a certain way his vision. Without being conformed to him in love, without the presence of the Spirit, it is impossible to

³² Ibid., no. 25.

confess him as Lord (cf. 1 Cor12: 3).³³

Christian faith helps a person to accept sufferings as a part of life. Sufferings may come in a person's life because of various reasons. As far as possible, society must do everything to alleviate human sufferings. However, a person may have some sufferings for which, there are no solutions. It is difficult without faith to accept such sufferings. A person can bear sufferings only in the light of his or her faith in Jesus, who suffered for no fault of His. Jesus has given meaning to every redemptive suffering.³⁴ The early Christians faced many persecutions and sufferings but they did not give up (see Acts 14: 22). Nothing could move their faith in Jesus. They became strong witnesses of Jesus because of their unflinching faith in Him. Pope Francis noted that the early Christians knew the importance of sufferings. The contemporary world prefers a life without any suffering. It promotes a utopian world, which does not exist. Christian faith does not claim to solve all the problems of the world. It rather ascertains a believer, the presence of God in all the situations of life. A person looks at his or her own suffering with the grace of faith, reaches out to others who are suffering. Faith does not make a person passive. It helps a person to discern and take the proper action.³⁵

Writing to the Christians of Corinth about his sufferings and tribulations, Saint Paul links his faith to his preaching of the Gospel. In himself he sees fulfilled the passage of Scripture which reads: "I believed, and so I spoke" (2 Cor 4: 13). The reference is to a verse of Psalm 116, in which the psalmist exclaims: "I kept my faith, even when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted'" (v. 10). To speak of faith often involves speaking of painful testing, yet it is precisely in such testing that Paul sees the most convincing proclamation of the Gospel, for it is in weakness and suffering that we discover God's power which triumphs over our weakness and suffering. The apostle himself experienced a dying which would become life for Christians (cf. 2 Cor 4: 7-12). In the hour of trial faith brings light, while suffering and weakness make it evident that "we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor 4: 5). The eleventh chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews concludes with a reference to those who suffered for their faith (cf. Heb 11: 35-38); outstanding among these was Moses, who suffered abuse for the Christ (cf. v. 26). Christians know that suffering cannot be eliminated, yet it can have meaning and become an act of love and entrustment into the hands of God who does not abandon us; in this way it can serve as a moment of growth in faith and love. By contemplating Christ's union with the Father even at the height of his sufferings on the cross (cf. Mk 15: 34), Christians learn to share in the same gaze of Jesus. Even death is illumined and can be experienced as the ultimate call to faith, the ultimate "Go forth from your land" (Gen 12: 1), the ultimate

³³ *Lumen Fidei*, no. 21.

³⁴ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1505. Available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM (accessed on 24 December 2014).

³⁵ See Phil C. Zylla, "Suffering," in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, eds. Glen G. Scorgie *et al.*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2011), 774-775.

“Come!” spoken by the Father, to whom we abandon ourselves in the confidence that he will keep us steadfast even in our final passage.³⁶

Nor does the light of faith make us forget the sufferings of this world. How many men and women of faith have found mediators of light in those who suffer! So it was with Saint Francis of Assisi and the leper, or with Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her poor. They understood the mystery at work in them. In drawing near to the suffering, they were certainly not able to eliminate all their pain or to explain every evil. Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey. To those who suffer, God does not provide arguments which explain everything; rather, his response is that of an accompanying presence, a history of goodness which touches every story of suffering and opens up a ray of light. In Christ, God himself wishes to share this path with us and to offer us his gaze so that we might see the light within it. Christ is the one who, having endured suffering, is “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12: 2).³⁷

Thus, a Christian needs to witness his or her faith through actions. His or her life must bear fruit worthy of their call as Christians. Witness is an important parameter in the gospel proclamation. Witness is much more powerful than mere preaching. Thus preaching the gospel through one’s life would have a great impact on others. A Christian must not hesitate to be a powerful witness for the Lord.

6. Faith gives Hope

Christian faith gives true hope to a person. The economic recession, the cutthroat competition and corruption is stifling a common person in the modern world. People who cannot cope with the stress of life decide to commit suicide. There is a steady rise in the number of suicides in the world. Some people become mentally ill because of the workload, unhealthy working conditions and abusive human relations. The rapid development in science and technology has failed to solve the complex problems of life. Christian faith does not promise quick-fix solutions to the problems of life. However, it offers genuine hope that God will “wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (Rev 21: 4). Pope Francis noted that:

Suffering reminds us that faith’s service to the common good is always one of hope — a hope which looks ever ahead in the knowledge that only from God, from the future which comes from the risen Jesus, can our society find solid and lasting foundations. In this sense faith is linked to hope, for even if our dwelling place here below is wasting away, we have an eternal dwelling place which God has already prepared in Christ, in his body (cf. 2

³⁶ *Lumen Fidei*, no. 56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 57.

Cor 4: 16–5: 5). The dynamic of faith, hope and charity (cf. 1 Th 1: 3; 1 Cor 13: 13) thus leads us to embrace the concerns of all men and women on our journey towards that city “whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11: 10), for “hope does not disappoint” (Rom 5: 5).

In union with faith and charity, hope propels us towards a sure future, set against a different horizon with regard to the illusory enticements of the idols of this world yet granting new momentum and strength to our daily lives. Let us refuse to be robbed of hope, or to allow our hope to be dimmed by facile answers and solutions which block our progress, “fragmenting” time and changing it into space. Time is always much greater than space. Space hardens processes, whereas time propels towards the future and encourages us to go forward in hope.³⁸

7. Conclusion

Modern world has reduced faith to a commodity. The secularized society considers relativism as the norm. It does not accept absolute truth. Moreover, it gives more importance to scientific truths, which a scientist can verify in the laboratory. However, there are many issues of life, which a scientist cannot experiment in laboratories. The increasing angst and ennui is making the modern person disenchanted with life. It is in this context, the encyclical *LF* serves as a valuable guide to the modern person, to know the relevance of Christian faith. Christian faith does not deny existential problems of the world. It does not claim to solve all the issues with a stroke. However, it gives meaning to a person’s existence. It helps a person to accept redemptive sufferings. Moreover, it gives a person a strong hope of a better future, where “God will be all in all” (see 1 Cor 15: 28). Thus, we can conclude that the encyclical *LF* is a valuable guide, which encourages a person to have an encounter with God and allow God’s love to transform him or her.

³⁸ Ibid., no. 57.