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'Lumen fidei' described by Vatican radio

Thomas C. Fox | Jul. 5, 2013 NCR Today
Pope Francis

Pope Francis issued his first encyclical entitled *"Lumen fidei"* or ?The Light of Faith? today.

Vatican radio described it as a work of ?four hands?, begun by his predecessor, Benedict XVI, who passed on his draft for the new pope to complete.

The document, according to the report, is divided into four chapters with a short introduction. The encyclical sets out to show how Faith in the Risen Christ can lead us beyond the narrow confines of individual existence into the all-inclusive community of God?s love. Rather than the notion of ?blind faith?, which impedes scientific progress and must be kept to the private sphere of personal convictions, we?re called to rediscover the light that can guide all people from the darkness of selfish desires towards a more just and fraternal world, grounded in the faithful promises of God the Creator.

This is the Vatican radio description of the document:

The first chapter takes the reader on a whirlwind tour of the Old and New Testaments, from Abraham, who first hears God?s call, through the Israelites traveling towards the light of the Promised Land, to Jesus? death on the Cross, the ultimate act of God?s love for humanity. The more we are touched by the transforming power of that love, writes the Pope, the better we are able to understand our relationship to all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Chapter two insists on the essential link between Faith and Truth, without which our beliefs seem nothing more than a fairy story, an illusion of happiness, unable to sustain us when the going gets tough. Contemporary society, the encyclical says, tends to see technological progress and individual pleasure as the only objective truth, viewing any broader questions about the origins of our existence with deep suspicion. Without love in our hearts, truth becomes cold, impersonal, oppressive, unable to transform the lives of others. But by listening, seeing and believing in Christ?s presence in our lives today, we can broaden our horizons and find better ways of serving the common good. The light of our faith in Christ can also contribute to a more fruitful dialogue with non-Christians and non-believers, showing how all those who search for God or seek for truth will be welcomed and illuminated by that light.

The third chapter of the encyclical centers on the Church as the place where the light of faith is safeguarded and transmitted from one generation to the next. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, through profession of the Creed, praying the Our Father and obeying the Ten Commandments, the Church teaches the language of faith and draws us into the Trinitarian relationship of love, so that ?whoever believes is never alone?. The final chapter focuses on Faith and the common good and shows how the light of faith can promote peace and reconciliation, and teach respect for God?s creation. The encyclical also considers those areas illuminated by Faith, starting with the family based on marriage, understood as a stable union between man and woman. Faith, writes the Pope, cannot eliminate suffering in our world, but it can accompany us and bring a new sense of hope in God?s love. The encyclical ends with a prayer to Mary, Mother of Jesus and icon of faith,

who can lead us into the light of God?s love.

Vatican radio highlighted the following excerpts:

1. From Paragraph 4: ?The light of faith is unique, since it is capable of illuminating every aspect of human existence. A light this powerful cannot come from ourselves but from a more primordial source: in a word, it must come from 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 fulfillment, and that a vision of the future opens up before us.?

2. From Paragraph 16: ?If laying down one?s life for one?s friends is the greatest proof of love (cf. Jn 15:13), Jesus offered his own life for all, even for his enemies, to transform their hearts. This explains why the evangelists could see the hour of Christ?s crucifixion as the culmination of the gaze of faith; in that hour the depth and breadth of God?s love shone forth.?

3. From Paragraph 18: ?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.?

4. From Paragraph 25: ?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 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.?

5. From Paragraph 26: ?Faith transforms the whole person 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.?

6. From Paragraph 46: ?The Decalogue is not a set of negative commands, but concrete directions for emerging from the desert of the selfish and self-enclosed ego in order to enter into dialogue with God, to be embraced by his mercy and then to bring that mercy to others. Faith thus professes the love of God, origin and upholder of all things, and lets itself be guided by this love in order to journey towards the fullness of communion with God. The Decalogue appears as the path of gratitude, the response of love, made possible because in faith we are receptive to the experience of God?s transforming love for us.?

7. From Paragraph 52: ?The first setting in which faith enlightens the human city is the family. I think first and foremost of the stable union of man and woman in marriage. This union is born of their love, as a sign and presence of God?s own love, and of the acknowledgment and acceptance of the goodness of sexual differentiation, whereby spouses can become one flesh (cf. Gen 2:24) and are enabled to give birth to a new life, a manifestation of the Creator?s goodness, wisdom and loving plan.?

8. From Paragraph 57: ?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).?

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