



# The concept of faith from Benedict to Francis: 10 years after *Lumen Fidei*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article, referring to the tenth anniversary of the publication of the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* in 2013, the first encyclical of Pope Francis, which he wrote to complement the work of Benedict XVI, will want to show, on the one hand, the hermeneutical continuity between the two pontificates, with regard to faith and its transmission, on the other and methodological differentiation in relation to the concept of faith between the German and the Argentinian pope. Analyzing *Lumen Fidei*, the article shows the exemplary unity of intentions of both Popes who, despite coming from different theological and existential experiences, find themselves in this document and propose a unifying message that includes, on the one hand, a clear analysis of the act of faith to demonstrate its rationality and necessity, to be fully “human” clearly inspired by Ratzinger, and on the other hand, the practicality of faith and its impact on today’s areas of life and society with a decidedly more Bergogliian inspiration. The theological genius of Benedict, one of the greatest theologians who ascended the papal throne, and the pastoral charisma of Francis, the first Latin American Jesuit and Pope, remain an inexhaustible source of inspiration for all believers.

**Keywords:** Benedict XVI, Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, faith.

## Introduction

Faith in God as an act of reason (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC 155) was at the centre of the theological reflection of Pope Benedict XVI, even during his time as a professor in Tübingen, later during his service to the Church as the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and subsequently as Pope. Attempting to synthesize Ratzinger’s concepts of faith is thus a laborious endeavour, far beyond the scope of this article’s possibilities. As a result, referring to the tenth anniversary of the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (hereafter LF), the first encyclical of Pope Francis, in which he supplemented the work of Benedict XVI by “adding some reflections to the text” (LF 7), this article aims to demonstrate, on the one hand, the hermeneutical continuity between the two pontificates, concerning faith and its transmission, and on the other, the methodological differences regarding the concept of faith between the Popes of German and Argentine origin.

The common thread connecting both theological approaches and ensuring the aforementioned hermeneutical continuity, as will be shown, is the magisterium of the Second Vatican Council, which “revealed the radiance of faith in the human experience, thus journeying through the paths of contemporary humanity. In this way, it became clear that faith enriches human existence in all its dimensions” (LF 6).

In this interpretation of the conciliar magisterium, Pope Francis aligns himself in full harmony with his predecessor, and he doesn’t hesitate to present the considerations of his encyclical as the fruit of a “four-hand” collaboration, born from a distinctively perceived and deep intellectual and spiritual harmony (Forte, 2013).

On the other hand, the methodological difference in relation to the concept of faith, or rather a shift in the emphasis of understanding faith, can be observed

1 Article in polish language: Pojęcie wiary od Benedykta do Franciszka: 10 lat po *Lumen Fidei*, [https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/2023\\_4Matt.pdf](https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/2023_4Matt.pdf)

in the transition from Ratzinger's more academic and deductive reflection to Francis' remarkably pastoral and inductive understanding. Francis highlights the concreteness of faith, its practical impact on the lives of the faithful. It is evident that his pastoral thinking stems from Latin American, particularly Argentine, post-conciliar theological efforts, referred to as the "theology of the people."

This article will strive to demonstrate that both these levels are present in the theological and pastoral thought of both Popes, showing, on the one hand, the continuity of their magisterium and, on the other, the methodological difference between the two Popes. It will undertake a synthesis of both Benedict's (Part One) and Francis' (Part Two) magisterium regarding faith. Subsequently, the third part will be focused on LF as an "ideal encounter" of these two thoughts, outlining a synthesis that reveals the doctrinal and pastoral potential of two distinct yet complementary ecclesiastical experiences.

## **1. The Notion of Faith in the Thought of Benedict XVI**

On October 17, 2011, with the apostolic letter "Porta Fidei" (hereinafter PF), Pope Benedict XVI announced the Year of Faith (from October 11, 2012, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, until November 24, 2013) "to show all the faithful the strength and beauty of faith" (PF 4). It is significant that his pontificate came to an end during the Year of Faith, thereby concluding a journey that, from the earliest years of his studies, focused on the need for a "renewed education in faith, which certainly involves knowledge of its truths and salvific events, but which above all arises from a true encounter with God in Jesus Christ, from loving Him, from trusting in Him, so that one engages in it with one's whole life" (Benedict, 2012).

While not delving into all aspects of Ratzinger's teachings on faith, we will analyse two significant aspects that characterize his intellectual effort in analysing the concept of faith: firstly, moving away from the neo-Scholastic theological framework towards

a more Augustinian and existential approach; and secondly, the strong emphasis on demonstrating the rationality of faith in Christ, its adequacy to reality.

In Ratzinger's theological formation, the thought of St. Augustine plays a central and decisive role. Benedict XVI himself, speaking about St. Augustine, stated: "I have a personal attachment and gratitude to the figure to which I feel very close due to the role it played in my life as a theologian, priest, and pastor" (Benedict XVI, 2008). This concept was reiterated several times by Pope Ratzinger on various occasions during his pontificate: in the last of the five catecheses dedicated to him, between January and February 2008, in a series of general audiences focusing on Church Fathers; by the tomb of St. Augustine in Pavia in April of the same year; and earlier to the students of the Roman Major Seminary on February 17, 2007.

This spiritual and intellectual bond began in the 1950s when Ratzinger, then a young deacon, accepted Prof. Gottlieb Söhngen's invitation to write his doctoral thesis on the ecclesiology of St Augustine. The title of the dissertation was: "The People and the House of God in St Augustine's teaching on the Church" (Panaro, 2014, p. 106). His interest in the Church Fathers, which deepened when he wrote his dissertation on Augustine, had its origin in his studies at the University of Munich, where the young Ratzinger had the opportunity to study the theology of the Church Fathers and to deepen his knowledge of Scripture and the liturgy. Following the new theological current represented by many of his professors, which consisted of a move away from neo-Scholastic schematism and a return to the sources of the Church Fathers, Ratzinger thus learned to open himself up to a serious and critical dialogue with the Tradition of the Church in order to respond appropriately to the challenges of modern man. The supervisor of his thesis, the aforementioned Prof. Söhngen, had a decisive influence on the young theologian: from him Ratzinger borrowed this particular sensitivity to the innovative theological trends which, both in France and Germany, pointed to a return to patristic and liturgical sources in order to overcome the rigid neo-scholastic schematism that prevailed during the modern period (Panaro, 2014, p. 103).

The new approach to understanding the apostolic Tradition, as represented by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and 1970s, stems from his studies on the Church Fathers, particularly Augustine. As Ratzinger himself recalls, “Faith was here an inner vision and became, through the thought of the Fathers, once again a reality” (Ratzinger, 2005, p. 72).

As Benedict XVI mentioned during a meeting with seminarians in Rome, “For me, the most fascinating aspect was the greatness of St. Augustine’s humanity. He could not identify directly with the Church from the beginning, as he was a catechumen, but he had to wrestle spiritually to find the way to the Word of God, to life with God, until the great ‘Yes’ he pronounced to his Church... This is why his very personal theology convinced me, mainly through his preaching. This is important because Augustine, at the beginning, wanted to live purely contemplatively, to write further books on philosophy... but the Lord did not want that. He made him a priest and bishop, and so the rest of his life, his works, developed primarily in dialogue with very simple people. He always had to, on the one hand, personally find the meaning of the Holy Scripture, and on the other hand, consider the possibilities of these people, their life context, and arrive at a Christianity that was realistic and at the same time very profound” (Benedict XVI, 2007).

This challenging internal journey that Bishop Augustine embarked upon—to believe and understand, and simultaneously understand and believe, allowing faith and reason to engage in dialogue—is what captivated Ratzinger. This dialogue Ratzinger maintained and developed throughout his life (Campisi, 2023). The Augustinian thought, as expressed in the work *Soliloqui*, concerning the relationship between faith and reason can in fact be summed up by two Latin formulas: *credo ut intelligam—intelligo ut credam* (I believe in order to understand, I understand in order to believe). In this way, Augustine wants to show that in order to understand, in order to have a correct philosophical discourse, the light of faith is necessary. Likewise, in order to believe, philosophical reasoning is necessary, the use of reason is indispensable. This concept is reiterated in n. 33 LF, in a text which, even if it remains only a conjecture of the author, seems clearly influenced by Ratzinger:

“In the life of St Augustine we find a significant example of this path in which the search for reason, with its desire for truth and clarity, was integrated into the horizon of faith, through which it gained a new understanding” (LF 33).

This passion, which characterised Ratzinger since the beginning of his academic career to demonstrate the rationality of faith, thus comes from his encounter with the thought of St Augustine. And it is the second aspect of Ratzinger’s thought that will now be analysed.

Ratzinger is convinced that today, to effectively bring the Gospel to contemporary people, it is necessary to expand the concept of reason and make use of it. This encouragement was succinctly expressed by Pope Benedict XVI in his memorable lecture at the University of Regensburg (Benedict XVI, 2006). According to the Pope, reason and faith must find themselves “united in a new way,” overcoming “the self-imposed limitation of reason to what is verifiable by experiment,” and re-opening its “full range” before it. Today, it is absolutely necessary to present faith as an essential aid in the process of expanding reason. In fact, it reminds science that if the certainty of knowledge neglects what is “human,” namely the mystery of man formed by soul and body, it risks moving away from the rationality it represents. “A Christian is convinced,” as Ratzinger reminds us, “that his faith not only opens up new dimensions of knowledge, but that it primarily helps reason to be itself... A believer himself, whose reason has been helped by faith, must give himself to reason and to what is rational: in the face of reason that is dormant or ailing, it is his duty towards the whole human community” (Ratzinger, Pera, 2004, p. 118).

Ratzinger repeats this concept in his work “Introduction to Christianity,” where he states that “in early Christianity, the choice was made in a completely different way: Christian faith took a stand against the gods of various religions, in favour of the God of the philosophers, that is, against a myth sanctified by custom and in favour of the truth of being” (Ratzinger, 1994, p. 131). This means that at its origins, Christianity, enlightened by the paschal event, chose *logos* over all forms of *mythos*, accomplishing a “definitive demythologization of the world and religion” (Ratzinger, 1994, p. 127).

In conclusion, it can be said that for Ratzinger, the God revealed to us by Jesus Christ is the truth about man, the most rational way of being human. Either faith in Jesus Christ is connected to daily life and has a tangible impact on experience, or it remains merely a religious system like many others, a myth. This was the constant thought that drove the young Bavarian priest to search for a methodology of conveying faith that would demonstrate its rationality and existential influence. Precisely because Christian Revelation is true, the obedience to the message of faith is not, according to Ratzinger, “a passive acceptance of information that is, moreover, unknown, but the awakening of our buried memory and the unveiling of the powers of understanding which wait within us for the light of truth” (Ratzinger, 2005, p. 33). So, for Ratzinger, faith is necessary for reason and vice versa; indeed, faith is the light of reason (*lumen fidei*). In fact, reason is not stifled by faith, “but rather released from the sterile cycle within what cannot be understood and led back to the path” (Ratzinger, 2005, p. 33). As Francis and Benedict XVI write in “Lumen Fidei” (LF), “The recovery of the light, which is an inherent characteristic of faith, becomes urgent because when its flame goes out, all other lights eventually lose their brightness. The light of faith has a special nature, as it is capable of illuminating the entire life of a person. However, for this light to be so powerful, it cannot come from ourselves; it must come from a more primal source, ultimately originating from God” (LF 4).

## 2. Pastoral Approach to the Concept of Faith in Francis’s Understanding

Let us now delve into Bergoglio’s thinking regarding the concept of faith. As stated in the introduction to this article, in content it does not differ substantially from Ratzinger’s; it simply emphasizes different aspects. This distinct emphasis undoubtedly stems from the different origins of the two Popes, which include not only geographical but also theological differences. In the late 1980s, Gustavo Gutierrez wrote in the preface to the revised edition of “Liberation Theology,”

corrected after the intervention of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then led by Cardinal Ratzinger, that while European theological efforts in the last century focused on demonstrating the existence of God and the rationality of faith in Him in the face of a society gradually moving away from Christian truth, for Latin American theology, “the great pastoral question – and therefore theological – is how to tell the poor, to whom conditions of life expressing a denial of love are imposed, that God loves them” (Gutierrez, 2012, p. 33).

In reality, as stated by Kasper, due to Pope Benedict’s origin and formation, he “represents, in a well-outlined manner, the best European tradition. He starts from the faith of the Church, seeks to intellectually and spiritually open it up for understanding, and then translates the doctrine of faith into practice in accordance with the traditional relationship between theory and praxis” (Kasper, 2015, p. 20). On the other hand, Pope Francis is theologically a son of the theology of the people, an Argentine reinterpretation of liberation theology, particularly developed since the CELAM conference in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979. Additionally, he is guided by kerygmatic theology, as suggested by Kasper. His Jesuit origins are discernible in this approach. Saint Ignatius of Loyola “does not begin with doctrine, but with the concrete situation; naturally, he does not merely want to adapt to it, but rather, in line with the assumptions of Ignatian spiritual exercises, seeks to judge according to the rules of discernment of spirits. With the help of such spiritual discernment, he arrives at concrete practical decisions” (Kasper, 2015, p. 21).

As mentioned, one cannot imagine Pope Francis’s thought detached from the theology of the people. This theological system, according to Juan Carlos Scannone’s classification, represents a stream of liberation theology (Scannone, 1983, pp. 406-415) and can be labelled as an Argentine type of this theology, which has taken its own path, developing its specific profile (Kasper, 2015, p. 29). I addressed this stream in a previous study, to which I refer in this part of the article (Campagnaro, 2020). The main representatives of this stream are Lucio Gera, Rafael Tello, and the already mentioned Juan Carlos Scannone. Argentine popular theology de-

rives from the work of the Bishops' Commission for Pastoral Care (COEPAL), established during the post-conciliar period (1966) by the Argentine Bishops' Conference to create a national pastoral plan in line with the spirit of Vatican II. According to Scannone, this Commission included various bishops, theologians, pastors, including Gera and Tello, both professors at the Theological Faculty in Buenos Aires (Scannone, 2017, p. 18). COEPAL was largely responsible for the Argentine bishops' declaration in San Miguel (1969), which applied the conclusions from Medellín to the specific situation in Argentina. In this declaration, when speaking about popular pastoral care, the people were no longer seen as objects but as subjects of pastoral action: subjects whose *sensus fidei* emphasizes the fruits brought about by God in the specific history of the people, who had already accepted the Gospel in their poverty and expressed their own "mysticism" through the inculturation of faith.

What distinguishes the theology of the people from other streams of liberation theology? First and foremost, in contrast to the other streams examined above, it does not start from the analysis of socio-political and economic conditions or social contrasts; it initiates its theological reflection from a historical analysis of the people's culture, united by a common ethos (Kasper, 2015, p. 29). In the theology of the people the subject of understanding faith as acting love is God incarnated in specific peoples. This theological line particularly values the religiosity of the people and the religious dimension of liberating praxis. As Gera states, "The Church should promote liberation originating from faith [...]. Its task is to give the process of people's liberation a foundation that is religious and faith-based; faith and religion, by their nature, more profoundly penetrate human conscience and provide deeper and more lasting stability to the people's will for self-determination" (Gera, 2015, p. 106). The central point that sets it apart from classical liberation theology lies in its understanding of the reality of the people and its different stance toward Marxist analysis. In fact, it primarily conceives the people from a collective-communal, historical-cultural perspective – that is, unified by a shared culture, memory, way of life, and destiny – and from

an ethical-political perspective, manifesting as an organic community that is socially, politically, and historically self-defined. The theology of the people holds that categories derived from Latin American history and culture (people, anti-people, cultural syncretism) are more suitable than Marxist categories (class-based) for interpreting the continent's reality. For this stream, the people are a communal subject of specific history (the history of individual Latin American countries) and culture understood as a way of life (Campagnaro, 2020, p. 93).

In his understanding of faith, Bergoglio emphasizes the pastoral and practical influence it brings to the life of the people. Already from his first address on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica on March 13, 2013, one could sense the novelty that this bishop, who came "from the end of the world," was bringing to the Church: a novelty that was precisely the fruit of the theology of the people, this theological-practical reflection born in Argentina at the end of the 1960s, and which now burst forth with great force in the universal Church. "And now we set out in a new journey: Bishop and people" (Francis, 2013), said the Holy Father, wishing, for the first time in the history of the Church, to ask for the blessing of the people. This symbolic gesture, which surprised many, reflects Bergoglio's theological recognition of the "faithful people of God," who bring with them a specific way of understanding the Church, that is, the recognition of the "sense of faith" of the people and the role of the laity in it. This ecclesiological concept, already developed by the Second Vatican Council, which speaks in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (hereinafter: LG) about the Church as the messianic People of God (LG 9–12), was received with reservations by European theology, which suspected it to be a one-sidedly sociological, political, and bottom-up concept (Kasper, 2015, p. 58). In Argentina, the reception of this conciliar ecclesiology was quite different; it evolved in the Argentine form of liberation theology, namely the theology of the people. It is not a new Church, but rather a new way of perceiving the Church that brings along a new ecclesial way of life. As Kasper emphasizes, for Pope Francis, the Church is something more than just an organic and hierarchical institution; it is primarily

the “people of God on the way to God, a pilgrim and evangelizer, who goes beyond every necessary institutional expression” (Kasper, 2015, p. 59).

The contribution that the theology of the people brings to the universal experience of the Church through Pope Francis is precisely the renewed proposal of the conciliar ecclesiology of LG, enriched by the specific experience of the Latin American people. In *Evangelii Gaudium* (hereinafter: EG), Francis speaks precisely about the evangelizing power of popular piety with a clear reference to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Paul VI<sup>2</sup> (hereinafter: EN), which is exactly what the Final Document of the Medellín Conference (hereinafter: DM) in 1968 called “popular religiosity.” Above all, we rediscover today the evangelizing potential of popular piety, which is often underestimated, especially by the European theology directed primarily at elite Christianity. In EG 122, Francis confirms the evangelizing role of peoples in whom the Gospel has already been inculturated, including the peoples of Latin America. This means that every person conveys faith: “When the Gospel has been inculturated in a people, the cultural process involves also the transmission of faith, always in new ways. Hence the importance of evangelization understood as inculturation” (EG 122). Inspired by the Final Documents of the conferences in Puebla (hereinafter: DP) and *Aparecida* (hereinafter: DA), Francis clearly states that “the people continue to evangelize themselves” (EG 122). It is precisely in this sense that “popular piety” is “an authentic expression of the spontaneous missionary activity of the People of God. It involves a reality in constant development, in which the Holy Spirit is the protagonist” (EG 122). In paragraphs 124–126 of

EG, Pope Francis directly refers to DA, which spoke of “popular spirituality” (DA 263) and “popular mysticism” (DA 262). According to Francis, popular piety is not, as is often regarded by the European theological tradition, an expression of intellectual poverty incapable of imparting important content for the process of evangelization. On the contrary, it conveys the content of faith “more through symbols than through reason as a tool, and in the act of faith, it emphasizes *credere in Deum* more than *credere Deum*” (EG 124).

Another important contribution of this new emphasis on popular piety is the rescue of Catholic theology, as well as its pastoral care, from the danger that Pope Francis calls the heresy of gnosticism. Gnostics, as Francis recalls, claimed “that there were two kinds of faith: a primitive faith, the faith of simple people, imperfect and remaining on the level of the body of Christ and the contemplation of His mysteries; and another kind of faith, deeper and perfect, true faith reserved for a narrow circle of initiates, which, thanks to intellect, elevated itself above the body of Jesus toward the mysteries of the unknown Divinity” (LF 47). Francis acknowledged that this concept of faith “still has its allure and its adherents in our time.” Quoting the words of St. Irenaeus, he reminded that “faith is one, because it touches the concrete fact of the Incarnation, never detaching itself from the body and history of Christ, since God wanted to fully reveal Himself in them” (LF 47). This sensitivity to popular piety was also taken up in the recent post-synodal exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (hereinafter: QA) under number 78, where it is reminded that in this region of Latin America, some characteristics of Catholicism “are currently

2 This is how Pope Paul VI writes in paragraph 48 of EN: “In those regions where the Church has been deeply rooted for many centuries, as well as where it is just beginning to take root, unique customs sometimes arise among the people, through which they express their search for and faith in God. These habits, long considered not clean enough and sometimes even with disgust, are now almost everywhere seen by contemporary people as a new way of inquiry and understanding. The bishops themselves, during the recent Synod, endeavored to understand their significance clearly, guided by pastoral realism and keen insight. It must be admitted that popular religiosity is confined within certain narrow boundaries. Often, it is susceptible to the influence of many false forms of religiosity and even verges on superstition; frequently, it remains at the lowest level of religious worship that does not lead to a proper act of faith; it can also incline towards creating sects and factions, which threatens the very unity of the Church. However, if properly directed, especially through appropriate evangelization methods, it also abounds in much good. For it carries within itself a hunger for God that only simple and poor in spirit people can feel; it gives people the power to sacrifice themselves and offer their lives heroically for the sake of faith. It awakens an acute sense of understanding the ineffable attributes of God: fatherhood, providence, constant and benevolent love. It generates in the inner person such virtues that are rarely encountered to the same extent elsewhere: patience, awareness of bearing the cross in daily life, self-denial, kindness towards others, respect. Due to these attributes, we might rather call it popular piety or the religion of the people, rather than religiosity.”

a reality that people have made their own.” Even if there is a danger in this religiosity that it may turn into magic or superstition, “one must be able to recognize the seed that grows amid confusion, because in popular piety, one can grasp the way in which the received faith has been incarnated in culture and is still being transmitted.”

From the above, it follows that the value of the theology of the people primarily concerns the level of method, rather than content. The theology of the people, strongly situating the method of the hermeneutical circle between orthopraxy and orthodoxy, proposes an important and effective methodological key, faithful to the teaching of the Council expressed in *Gaudium et Spes*.

### 3. *Lumen Fidei*: Continuity of Two Pontificates

After briefly outlining the theological aspects that both Popes emphasized in their academic and pastoral service, let us now proceed to a brief analysis of the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (LF), which strongly expresses the continuity between the two pontificates and offers clear and profound magisterium on the topic of faith to every believer.

In response to the question of whether the encyclical is more reflective of Ratzinger or Bergoglio, Cardinal Marc Ouellet provided an exhaustive answer, stating: “There is much of Benedict in it, and everything of Francis” (Rodari, 2013). Indeed, Pope Francis acknowledges: “I wish to add these reflections on faith to what Benedict XVI has written in his encyclicals on love and hope. He has almost finished working on the first draft of the encyclical on faith. I am profoundly grateful to him for this and, in the spirit of Christ’s brotherhood, I take over his precious work, adding some reflections to the text.” (LF 7).

The encyclical is divided into four chapters, which will now be briefly analysed,<sup>3</sup> preceded by an introduction (LG 1-7) that explains its purpose and illustrates the motivations behind the document:

firstly, to recover the character of the light proper to faith, capable of illuminating the entirety of human existence (LF 3), to help distinguish between good and evil, especially in an era like the present, where belief is seen as the opposite of seeking, and faith is regarded as an illusion, a leap into emptiness that restricts human freedom. Secondly, in the context of the Year of Faith, the encyclical revisits the teachings of the Second Vatican Council: “The Year of Faith, writes the Pope, began on the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. This coincidence helps us see that *Vaticanum II* was a Council about faith, because it called us to make the primacy of God in Jesus Christ the centre of our personal and church life” (LF 5).

Faith is not predetermined; it is a gift from God that needs to be nurtured and strengthened.<sup>4</sup> “He who believes, sees” (LF 1), writes the Pope, as the light of faith comes from God and can illuminate the entirety of human existence. It stems from the past, from the memory of Jesus’ life, but it also comes from the future, opening up great horizons.

One of the important elements that somehow summarizes the document is the affirmation that faith is primarily a history that is narrated and conveyed within the community. This affirmation accompanies the development of the entire encyclical and is a key point summarizing its message (Morosini, 2014, p. 13). In this perspective, the first chapter (LF 8-22), titled “We have believed in love” (1 Jn 4:16), which primarily refers to the figure of Abraham, is fundamentally significant. The narrated history constitutes the primum of faith logically and chronologically because faith is transmitted within the community that tells this story, the story it believed in and in which it recognizes the cause of its reality as a community. On the other hand, God’s action, which gives us faith, is the ontological primum, as only He can enable us, through the action of the Spirit, to believe in Him (Morosini, 2014, p. 14). The first chapter lays the biblical foundations for the theme of faith, precisely depicting the journey of faith from Abraham through Israel to reach the fullness of rev-

3 Papa Francesco. Ecco l’enciclica “Lumen fidei” «La fede illumina l’esistenza», (2013), *Avvenire*. 5 lipca. <https://www.avvenire.it/papa/pagine/enciclica-papa-francesco-lumen-fidei> (access: 5.06.2023).

4 Ibidem.



elation, which is Christ. It concludes by emphasizing that “believing existence becomes ecclesial existence” (LG 22), as faith is professed within the body of the Church, a “specific communion of believers” (LG 22). Christians are “one,” without losing their individuality; in serving others, each person gains their essence. Therefore, “faith is not a private matter, an individualistic concept, a subjective opinion” (LG 22), but it emerges from listening and is destined to be expressed and proclaimed.

In the second chapter (LF 23-36), “If you do not believe, you will not understand” (Is 7:9), the Pope highlights the close connection between faith and the trustworthy truth – the truth of God’s faithful presence in history. “Faith without truth does not save it remains a beautiful fairy tale, a projection of our desires for happiness” (LF 24), writes the Pope. Today, in the face of the “crisis of truth in which we live” (LF 25), it is more necessary than ever to remind of this connection, as contemporary culture tends to embrace only the truths of technology – what humanity can construct and measure through science – or individual truths that matter solely to the individual and not in service to the common good. Suspicion is directed towards the “great truth, a truth capable of explaining the meaning of personal and social life” (LF 25), as it is mistakenly associated with the truths demanded by the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century.

However, this leads to the “great oblivion of the modern world” (LF 25), which, driven by relativism and a fear of fanaticism, forgets to inquire about truth, the origin of everything, and the question of God. At this point, the Pope initiates a broad reflection on the dialogue between faith and reason, where Benedict XVI’s influence is evident, as well as on the concept of truth in today’s world, which often reduces it to “subjective authenticity” (LF 34), because the universal truth is feared, it is identified with the intransigent imposition of totalitarianisms. If, however, the truth is the truth of love, it does not impose itself violently, it does not destroy the individual. Therefore, faith is not uncompromising, a believer is not arrogant. On the

contrary, truth makes one humble and leads to respect for others and coexistence. It follows that faith leads to dialogue in all domains: in science, by awakening critical thinking and expanding the horizons of reason, inviting one to look with admiration at Creation; in interreligious dialogue, where Christianity offers its own contribution; in dialogue with non-believers, who continue to seek and “try to act as if God exists”, because “God is luminous and can be found also by those who seek him with sincere heart” Theology is participating in self-discovery through God; thus, it must serve the faith of Christians, and the Church’s Magisterium is not a constraint on theological freedom but rather its constitutive element, ensuring contact with the original source, the Word of Christ.<sup>5</sup> Chapter Three (n. 37-49) is titled: “I handed on to you what I also received” (1 Cor 15:3). The entire chapter focuses on the significance of evangelization: those who have opened themselves to the love of God cannot keep this gift to themselves, writes the Pope. The light of Jesus shines on the faces of Christians and spreads in this way, transmitted like a flame ignited by another flame, passed from generation to generation through an unbroken chain of witnesses of faith. This leads to a connection between faith and memory, as the love of God unites all times in unity and makes us contemporaneous with Jesus. Furthermore, it becomes “impossible to believe alone” (LF 39) since faith is not an “individual option” (LF 39) but opens the “I” to the “we” and always takes place “within the communion of the Church.” Consequently, “those who believe are never alone” (LF 39), as they discover that their “self” extends and generates new relationships that enrich life. However, there is a “particular means” (LF 40) through which faith can be transmitted: the sacraments, through which “embodied memory” is conveyed. In the second part of the third chapter, the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist are analysed in this sense.

Chapter Four (n. 50-60) is titled: “God prepares a city for them” (Heb. 11:16). This chapter explains the relationship between faith and the common good, which leads to the creation of a place where humanity

5 Papa Francesco. Ecco l'enciclica “Lumen fidei” «La fede illumina l'esistenza», (2013), *Avvenire*. 5 lipca. <https://www.avvenire.it/papa/pagine/enciclica-papa-francesco-lumen-fidei> (access: 5.06.2023)..



can dwell together. This is the most social and Bergoglian part of the encyclical: faith, born from the love of God, strengthens bonds among people and serves justice, law, and peace in a tangible manner. As a result, faith does not distance itself from the world and is not alien to the concrete engagement of contemporary individuals. On the contrary, without the trusting love of God, unity among people would rely solely on utility, interest, or fear. Faith, however, captures the ultimate foundation of human relationships, their ultimate purpose in God, and dedicates them to the service of the common good. Faith “is a good for all, it is common good” (LF 51); it does not merely contribute to building an afterlife, but assists in constructing societies that move towards a future full of hope.

The encyclical then addresses areas illuminated by faith: first and foremost, the family based on marriage, understood as the enduring union of a man and a woman. Then, the youth: here the Pope mentions the World Youth Days, during which young people demonstrate “the joy of faith” (LF 51) and a commitment to living it resolutely and generously. Another area is nature: faith helps us respect it, “to find models of development that are not based on utility or profit alone, but consider creation as a gift” (LF 55); it teaches us to recognize just forms of governance where authority stems from God and serves the common good; it provides us with the capacity for forgiveness, which leads to the resolution of conflicts. Another area illuminated by faith is the realm of suffering and death: Christians understand that suffering cannot be eliminated, but it can acquire meaning, becoming a trust in the hands of a God who never abandons us, thus being a “stage of growth in faith” (LF 56). To those who suffer, God does not provide exhaustive explanations, but offers His presence, accompanying them and illuminating darkness with light. In this sense, faith is intertwined with hope.

In conclusion, the Pope invites us to contemplate Mary as a “perfect icon” (LF 58) of faith, because, as the Mother of Jesus, she conceived “faith and joy”

(LF 58). The Pope directs his prayer to her, asking for her assistance in human faith, reminding us that those who believe are never alone and teaching us to see through the eyes of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusion

This concise excursus through LF shows us the exemplary unity of intentions between both Popes, who despite their differing theological and existential backgrounds, as demonstrated, find themselves in this document and propose a unifying message. On the one hand, it includes a clear analysis of the act of faith to demonstrate its rationality and necessity to be fully man, embodying Ratzinger’s distinct inspiration. On the other hand, it delves into the practicality of faith and its impact on contemporary areas of life and society, aligning more with Bergoglio’s influence. LF does not fully encompass Pope Francis’s pastoral program yet, which he expressed in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (further: EG) published in 2013. What we find here is a definitely ambitious programme based on the pastoral and missionary conversion of the Church and the need to go to not only the geographical but also the existential peripheries of today’s world. In this programme, as Kasper reminds us, “the differences are clear—differences not in faith, but certainly in style, methodological approach and the emphases distributed” (Kasper, 2015, p. 20). In EG, Francis offered the entire treasure of Latin American pastoral theology, making it available to the universal Church. The Gospel is presented anew as “joy that fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus” (EG 1), an aesthetic encounter that spurs us towards conversion and mission. Thus, it is better to have a “Church bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets” than a Church imprisoned by itself. Let us not fear, EG reminds us, to be “concerned about the lack of friendship with Christ in so many of our brothers and sisters” (EG 49).

6 Papa Francesco. Ecco l’enciclica “Lumen fidei” «La fede illumina l’esistenza», (2013), *Avvenire*. 5 lipca. <https://www.avvenire.it/papa/pagine/enciclica-papa-francesco-lumen-fidei> (access: 5.06.2023)..

Moreover, the Latin American ecclesiastical perspective enriches our European experience of Christianity, reminding us that the Church is itself and fully fulfils its mission when it is “poor and for the poor, boldly condemning the current unfair economic system at its roots” (EG 59). As John Paul II stated, the Church “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice” (EG 183). Lastly, Francis reminds us that in relation to the world, a Christian always provides reasons for their hope, but not as an adversary pointing fingers and condemning (EG 271). For Francis, a pastor from a humble Church, rich in authentic religiosity, “it remains clear that Jesus Christ does not want us as rulers who look down upon others, but as men and women who are brothers and sisters of the people.” This, the Pope reiterates, “is not an opinion of the Pope or a pastoral option among others; these are indications of the Word of God so clear, direct, and obvious that they do not require interpretations that would diminish their power to ask questions” (EG 271). Let us live them *sine glossa*, without commentary, Francis advises. In this way, we will experience the missionary joy of sharing life with people faithful to God, trying to ignite the fire in the heart of the world (EG 271).

Benedict and Francis are a gift of the Spirit to the Church of the last two decades. Through them, we have been able to draw from the richness of European theology and the freshness of the evangelical impulse of the Latin American Church. I believe that it is essential to resume the dialogue between these two Church experiences, now as “sisters, one older and one younger” (Alessandri, 1981, p. 131), no longer as mother and daughter. The Latin American Church, after the Second Vatican Council and the CELAM conferences in Medellin in 1968 and Puebla in 1979, underwent, using Methol Ferré’s terminology, a transformation from a “receptive” Church to a “protagonist” Church (Methol Ferré, Metalli, 2006, p. 68). This became increasingly evident with the CELAM conference in Aparecida in 2007 and especially with the election of Pope Francis as the successor of Peter. This article aims to be a voice in this academic dialogue, which is always searching for new ways to communicate faith to today’s people. The theological genius of Benedict, one of the greatest theologians to ascend the papal throne, and the pastoral charisma of Francis, the first Jesuit Pope from Latin America, remain an inexhaustible source of inspiration for all believers.

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