

Faith Enlightens the Mind: Pope Francis's *Lumen Fidei* and Contemporary Errors on the Nature of Divine Faith

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“Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love . . . transformed by this love, we gain fresh vision, new eyes to see.”¹

THE GOSPEL of Luke recounts the story of Jesus healing a blind man on his way to Jericho. When the blind man cries out to the Lord, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Lk 18:39–41, RSV). The blind man cries out, “Lord, I want to receive my sight.” Jesus replies, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well” (Lk 18:42). Jesus heals the man, who went forth from this encounter giving praise and glory to God.

Pope Francis’s first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, emphasizes in a profound way this Biblical theme of the encounter of the living God in *faith*, and the reception of *sight*: “transformed by this love, we gain fresh vision, new eyes to see.”² Faith is a light, initiating the believer into communion with God, and therefore into the deepest and most profound truths of human existence. Yet unlike the blind man of Luke’s Gospel, who knows he is blind, knows that he wants to see, and knows from whom he can receive his sight, crying out to him, Pope Francis’s encyclical is directed towards a different kind of blindness, the blindness of contemporary man who has not yet realized that he is blind. This blindness of soul, as the ancient philosophers understood, is a more debilitating kind of blindness. As Socrates teaches in the *Apology* through the Delphic Oracle, the wise man

¹ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (June 29th, 2013), §4.

² Ibid., §4.

knows when he does not know, and seeks the truth for which he longs. There is, however, a new situation for modern man, a new ignorance which blocks the “light of faith.” Wounded by skepticism, relativism, nihilism, and enticed by the greatness of man’s technological progress and the endless pursuit of entertainment, modern man no longer pursues the questions which are most fundamentally human. *Where did I come from? What is the meaning of my life? Why is there evil? How can I find happiness?* Whereas the early Fathers and Doctors of the Church realized that the Incarnation is the fundamental answer to these deepest of questions which compel every human heart,³ modern society is so distracted that it largely does not ask these fundamental questions anymore. The contemporary culture has buried itself almost exclusively in technological mastery and in the pursuit of material things. Yet, as Pope Francis reminds the modern world, this endless pursuit of the material world will never fulfill the deep hungers of the human heart, for “There is nothing in the material world which can shed light on the meaning of the whole of existence.”⁴ There is nothing material which can answer life’s most fundamental question: “Why is there something rather than nothing?”⁵

Both Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI Emeritus, who authored the original draft of the encyclical, are acutely aware of the new situation for modern man. The secular culture often dismisses anything outside of the material realm as “unscientific,” or perhaps as merely a matter of private opinion or private faith to which each person is entitled. The idea that the Catholic faith presents a universal truth which is objective and certain and thus able to be proposed to everyone seems fundamentally unreasonable. Pope Francis states with clarity the following contemporary objection:

Yet in speaking of the light of faith, we can almost hear the objections of many of our contemporaries. In modernity, that light might have been considered sufficient for societies of old, but was felt to be of no use for new times, for a humanity come of age, proud of its rationality and anxious to explore the future in novel ways. Faith thus appeared to some as an illusory light, preventing mankind from boldly setting out in quest of knowledge.⁶

According to the modern objection, faith is something of the past, which perhaps man’s naïve ancestors needed to explain reality and to live peace-

³ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (September 14th, 1998), §1.

⁴ *Lumen Fidei* §1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, §1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, §2.

fully, but human beings now have more developed rational capacities, especially modern technology, which take man into “real” human knowledge, and open new horizons of hope for humanity. At best, enlightened modernity calmly sees no need for faith, and at worst, thinks it is actually an obstacle to real knowledge and human progress. After stating this modern objection, in the next sentence of the encyclical Pope Francis cites the atheist philosopher Nietzsche, who “encouraged his sister Elisabeth to take risks, to tread ‘new paths . . . with all the uncertainty of one who must find his own way’, adding that ‘this is where humanity’s paths part: if you want peace of soul and happiness, then believe, but if you want to be a follower of truth, then seek’.”⁷ The Pope comments on this text that as a result of the modern outlook, the pursuit of truth becomes fundamentally divorced from the light of faith. He states, “Belief would [therefore] be incompatible with seeking. . . . Faith would thus be the illusion of light, an illusion which blocks the path of a liberated humanity to its future.”⁸

The modern premise that faith is fundamentally divorced from the light of truth yields disastrous results both for *faith* and for *truth*. The Pope explains that, as a result, faith becomes associated with what is “dark” and unreasonable, and thereby becomes reducible to subjectivism and blind emotion.

In the process, faith came to be associated with darkness. There were those who tried to save faith by making room for it alongside the light of reason. Such room would open up wherever the light of reason could not penetrate, wherever certainty was no longer possible. Faith was thus understood either as a leap in the dark, to be taken in the absence of light, driven by blind emotion, or as a subjective light, capable perhaps of warming the heart and bringing personal consolation, but not something which could be proposed to others as an objective and shared light which points the way.⁹

For the majority of modern men, faith is understood just as the Pope describes, as an irrational Kierkegaardian “leap” into the darkness of the unknown, or as something very subjective, or merely emotive. Very often even well-meaning Christians speak of their own belief in God as “taking a leap of faith” as if it were something fundamentally irrational and opposed to human nature. Such an account of an individual’s faith is a far cry from understanding faith as a theological virtue, that is, as an act of the intellect that is moved by divine grace to assent to God himself, and to the

⁷ Ibid., §2.

⁸ Ibid., §2.

⁹ Ibid., §3.

things he reveals. The problem that Pope Francis points out is that this specifically more voluntarist way of thinking about faith as private and subjective creates an impassible chasm between the faith of the believer and the pursuit of objective truth. One often finds this chasm not only throughout the secular media and in society in general, but also in the university culture, sadly even among Catholic universities, which, unaware of their rich intellectual heritage, have fallen into accepting this same modern dichotomy between faith and truth as their secular contemporaries. The modernist culture cannot help but think in terms of this fundamental disjunction: either one follows a subjective and blind faith, or one follows the path of rigorous objectivity accomplished only by modern science.

Such a divide, however, is fundamentally untenable for two reasons: first, because it misconstrues the true nature of ecclesial faith as a gift which perfects the intellect in its pursuit of truth, and second, because it proposes a very truncated view of human reason, dogmatically accepting as true only those things which are empirically verifiable, cutting off human reason from its true breadth and grandeur. As Pope Francis says, “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.”¹⁰ Such a gravely erroneous understanding about the nature of faith and truth was completely foreign to the early and medieval Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and does a great disservice both to the light of faith and to the full breadth of human reason, which are never contradictory or in opposition, but rather illumine each other through the conjoined pursuit of natural and supernatural wisdom. Faith is not opposed to the pursuit of truth, but rather enlightens the mind, revealing truth most fully. As St. Cyril of Jerusalem observes in the opening of his *Protocatechesis*, catechumens who are preparing to enter into the faith of the Church are truly the *photizomenoi*, “those being *enlightened*.”¹¹ The fundamental crisis of faith today, as Pope Francis points out, is that faith is no longer rightly understood, as it should be, precisely and formally as “an objective and shared *light* which points the way.”¹² Modern man no longer seems to understand the nature of faith as initiating the believer into a living encounter with God who is Truth itself. Thus Pope Francis states that “today more than ever,

¹⁰ Ibid., §25.

¹¹ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, ed. F. L. Cross (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1951), 1. Translation mine.

¹² *Lumen Fidei* §3.

we need to be reminded of this bond between faith and truth, given the crisis of truth in our age.”¹³

The Pope’s characterization of the contemporary error about the nature of faith reminds me of a very moving image from Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. In the beginning of the dialogue, Boethius notices that the garment of Lady Wisdom “had been ripped by the hands of some violent men, who had torn away from it what bits and pieces they could.”¹⁴ Certain sects of philosophers had torn off pieces of her luminous garment, grasping but a mere shred of her wisdom, and concluded erroneously that they had grasped her wisdom fully. The situation of such men is in fact very dangerous, more dangerous than those who have never known Lady Wisdom, for in learning only very little of her truth, they think that they know her fully and as a result, have ultimately renounced the overarching search for truth and wisdom. This imagery describes well the current secular culture’s view of Christianity, and shows why it is necessary for the Church to renew her missionary efforts in the “New Evangelization.” Most of our contemporaries have heard of Christianity and of the Church, and they know some pieces or shreds of her truth. Yet they often dismiss Christianity as merely mythical, or irrational, or boring, or its teachings as hopelessly outdated. In possessing a mere part, they think that they have grasped the whole, and they have ultimately renounced the “light of faith,” the Divine light ever ancient and ever new, which is “capable of illuminating *every* aspect of human existence.”¹⁵

The renunciation of faith, and the corresponding reduction of human reason, Pope Francis argues, leads humanity to dismiss the search for the overarching truth about the nature of God, whence man comes and toward whom he is ordered. Pope Francis cautions that “the light of autonomous reason is not enough to illumine the future. . . . As a result, humanity has renounced the search for a great light, Truth itself, in order to be content with smaller lights which illumine the fleeting moment yet prove incapable of showing the way.”¹⁶ When the light of faith is dismissed, even the natural light of human reason begins to fade. Man becomes so blinded that he is no longer capable of discerning the Divine Light that reveals the meaning and purpose of his life. His eyes are so weakened by living in the cave of darkness that he even begins to lose his

¹³ Ibid., §25.

¹⁴ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Ignatius Critical Edition, ed. and trans. Scott Goins and Barbara H. Wyman (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), Book I.

¹⁵ *Lumen Fidei* §4.

¹⁶ Ibid., §3.

natural ability to discern good from evil. Pope Francis says, “[I]n the absence of light, everything becomes confused; it is impossible to tell good from evil, or the road to our destination from other roads which take us in endless circles, going nowhere.”¹⁷ The Pope’s words here seem to be a play on the Vulgate’s translation of the Psalms, which put the matter very vividly. *In circuitu impii ambulabunt*; “the wicked walk around in circles” (Ps 12:8), like the blind leading the blind, going nowhere having lost the light which illumines their path (Ps 119:105). Pope Francis makes the following argument specifically to modern man who believes he is so enlightened by his autonomous human reason that he no longer needs divine faith: To reject the light of faith is to reject the wisdom of God entering into and illumining the mystery of humanity. In a word, it is to accept living in darkness, fumbling about in circles, being spiritually lost in a wood without a guide. He argues therefore: “There is an urgent need, then, to see once again that faith is a light, for once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim.”¹⁸ And Pope Francis boldly proclaims that the source of this light is not a theory or an abstract truth, but the very person of Jesus Christ who enlightens every man coming into the world (Jn 1).

But how, one might ask, can ecclesial faith be associated with “sight” and “vision”? Is not faith precisely a *lack* of sight and vision? For in supernatural faith, one does not yet see fully for himself the truths which he professes to know, but accepts them based on the testimony and vision of another. How, then, is faith a true “light” and knowledge, when its mysteries are not apparent to the senses? Do not the faithful believers sing before the mystery of the Blessed Sacrament *praestet fides supplementum/ sensuum defectui*?

Again, Pope Francis anticipates this question within the heart of modern man. “How is this possible? How can we be certain, after all these centuries, that we have encountered the ‘real Jesus?’”¹⁹ Certainly it is impossible for an individual to verify personally an event which happened thousands of years ago. But Pope Francis cautions that individual verification is not the only path to knowledge; in fact, it is not even the most common way of knowing. The majority of what is considered universal knowledge, even in the empirical sciences, does not come about through each scientist personally verifying every experiment of his predecessors; rather, it is based on natural belief in the work of others handed on through a tradition. This very natural indebtedness to tradi-

¹⁷ Ibid., §3.

¹⁸ Ibid., §4.

¹⁹ Ibid., §38.

tion is precisely why the radical skepticism proposed by René Descartes and bequeathed to modernity is so fundamentally unreasonable. Descartes's theoretical principle of beginning in doubt, especially of doubting the role of the senses in coming to knowledge, is fundamentally incompatible with the nature of reality and the way he actually lived. If man were to doubt everything that exists on principle, then in practice he ought not to get out of bed in the morning, for he could not be sure the world exists, the sun has risen, and that the room before him is his own. Descartes departed so radically from that tradition of which he was, in fact, a recipient, and in which he naturally (but perhaps not consciously) *believed*, but which, in his philosophical skepticism, he failed to acknowledge.

Supernatural faith too comes by way of tradition. This is why the Church has always stated that faith is fundamentally *ecclesial* and not a radically individual enterprise. To enter into ecclesial faith is to encounter anew the living Christ, whose word and sacrament are handed on by an "unbroken chain of witnesses" which date back to the Incarnation itself.²⁰ St. John the Evangelist argues that the knowledge of faith is not some gnostic spiritual intuition or personal opinion untethered to the concreteness of reality and the flesh, but is truly rooted in the very sense experience of the apostles: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we have *looked* at and our hands have *touched*—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life" (1 Jn 1–2). To enter into the faith of the Church is to trust God's plan of establishing an unbroken chain of witnesses, each of whom has been physically *touched* by the sacramental "laying on of hands" of his ordained predecessor (1 Tim 4:14), going all the way back to the very tangible experience of the apostles themselves, whose own hands have touched the Lord Jesus himself, and who boldly proclaim, "We have *seen* His glory" (Jn 1:14).

For this reason, Pope Francis reiterates the teaching of the Church that the fullness of divine faith takes place only within the communion of the Church. Outside of full communion with her, one fails to recognize fully the authentic tradition to which the Christian believer is in fact indebted. He can never make the act of faith on his own, *qua* individual.

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

²⁰ Ibid., §38.

very nature, faith is open to the “We” of the Church; it always takes place within her communion.²¹

When speaking of the theological virtue of faith, St. Thomas Aquinas shows the reason for the Pope’s conclusion even more clearly. He states: “When we believe God by faith, we reach God himself. . . . This is why I have said that God is the object of faith not simply in the sense that we believe in God (*credere Deum*) but also that we believe God (*credimus Deo*).”²² The Angelic Doctor distinguishes the material content of the faith, the truths which are believed (*fides quae*), from the formal aspect of faith, or the faith *by which* one believes (*fides qua*). To believe means to trust God for *no other reason* than that it is God the First Truth revealing himself. To put it simply, in the act of faith man first trusts and believes God himself (*credere Deo*) before he accepts any particular articles of faith (*credere Deum*). Thus, discovering the internal coherence and reasonableness within the articles of faith is not yet the virtue of theological faith. Finding certain propositions of faith to be attractive and beautiful, though it is part of the initial stage of coming to faith, is still not yet the virtue of faith. “The faith of which we are speaking,” St. Thomas says, “does not assent to anything except because it is revealed by God.”²³ Man assents because it is the First Truth himself, the beloved Father, who speaks. In the act of faith, the believer trusts the divine *Someone*, who, on account of his trustworthiness, gives him reason to assent to the divine *something* or the revealed truths that God speaks through his Word handed on faithfully through his Church.²⁴ After all, how could man, who by nature is endowed only with natural reason, adjudicate on supernatural matters? His faith in their truth relies upon the omniscient God who in his divine nature enjoys fully the vision of himself and reveals his truth through the tradition of apostolic witnesses. An individual man who has stumbled upon the Sacred Scriptures cannot trust himself to make infallible pronouncements on revealed truths and be certain that they are free from error. (Is Christ *homoousios* or *homoiousios* with the Father?) He is, by his own human nature, incapable of doing so.

Therefore only a fully *ecclesial* faith preserves the certitude of divine truth. When a person dissents from a particular teaching of the Church, whether doctrinal or moral, the very *ratio* for that person’s faith changes; in truth, the reason for his faith becomes somewhat incoherent. When a Catholic or a non-Catholic Christian accepts many but not all the truths

²¹ Ibid., §39.

²² *Summa theologiae* II–II, q. 81, a 5.

²³ ST II–II, q. 2, a. 2.

²⁴ Joseph Pieper, *Faith, Hope and Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 31.

about God revealed in Christ through his Church (1 Tim 3:15), he is in fact making two formally distinct acts which are by nature in opposition. By one act, he trusts God the Father who reveals supernatural truths and teaches them to man infallibly through the Church; by another act, he removes his faith in God the revealer by trusting his individual self, resorting to his own human opinion or private judgment of Scripture to discern what is true concerning supernatural realities.²⁵ Herein lies the incoherence: the very *ratio* of his belief continually oscillates between relying upon a tradition that he implicitly continues to trust as providing him infallible truth about the inner mysteries of God, and resorting to his own private judgment. Such oscillation is contrary to the virtue of faith. One cannot maintain the same *ratio* for belief in God's revelation, while at once making oneself the private arbiter of divine revelation. Although the reasons for the splintering of Christianity and individual dissent are various and complex (and one cannot fault an individual Christian believer, Catholic or non-Catholic, for not being taught clearly the fullness of the Catholic faith), nevertheless, a very real intellectual incoherence remains in such Christians with regard to the theological virtue of faith. This unsteady oscillation between an implicit trust in the infallibility of the Church and a resort to private judgment not only causes tremendous disunity among various Christians, but also, and perhaps even more regrettably, causes Christians to lack credibility in presenting the unified divine faith as a light to the modern world. From the perspective of a contemporary atheist or non-Christian, it seems that even Christians themselves cannot agree on what is the truth of the faith; the unbeliever is left confused and hesitant to place his trust in Jesus Christ as the "way the

²⁵ Reinhard Hütter, in his article "Relinquishing the Principle of Private Judgment in Matters of Divine Truth," explains that an integral part of his journey into the Catholic faith was the recognition of the falsehood of the principle of private judgment on matters of revealed truth. He states, "What stood at the beginning of this quest [into "the fullness of the Catholic faith"] was the slow but sure realization that the principle of private judgment in matters of divine truth, and hence in matters of the faith, is a burden and a bane inescapably embedded in all versions of Protestantism. And what sent me eventually on the road to the Catholic Church was my increasing realization that as a Protestant theologian I could not escape from abiding by the principle of private judgment. Because I am narrating the journey of a theologian into the Catholic Church, it does not come as a surprise that my story has a theological plot: the more I understood the principle of private judgment as the hidden center of my existence as a Protestant theologian, the more strongly was I drawn to the faith of the Catholic Church." See Reinhard Hütter, "Relinquishing the Principle of Private Judgment in Matters of Divine Truth: A Protestant Theologian's Journey into the Catholic Church," *Nova et Vetera* 9.4 (2011): 865–81.

truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). When faced with this reality, the secular unbeliever is more likely to conclude, as his philosophical modernism has taught him, that one simply cannot know truth concerning supernatural realities. The rejection of a fully ecclesial faith due to individual private judgment and the consequent splintering of Christians into various factions, in fact, contributes to the pervading contemporary skepticism of the modern world. Such disunity and unbelief was never God's intention. On the eve of his passion, Jesus Christ Himself prayed to the Father for the unity of all believers, "that they may be one as we are one" precisely so that "the world may believe that you have sent Me" (Jn 17:21).

When a believer enters into the Catholic faith, therefore, he neither enters as an individual who discovered the mysteries of the faith by himself nor remains as an isolated individual, but as is revealed in the Sacred Scriptures, he becomes a part of God's covenantal family. The faith of the Church, as Pope Francis teaches, is a *covenantal* faith which believes in the profoundly personal love God has for man; he loves his own creature so deeply that "he loved him to the end" (Jn 13:1), to death, even death on a cross (Phil 2). To enter into the life of faith is to acknowledge that one's life is not so radically individual, but already a part of a greater narrative. Faith opens the believer's eyes to the divine love story which begins with the primacy of God's goodness as the origin and end of all things, and his initiative in founding a covenant with fallen man. "The beginning of salvation," the Pope says, "is openness to something prior to ourselves, to a primordial gift that affirms life and sustains it in being."²⁶ To enter into the life of faith is to recognize the priority of God's gift and to receive his love, a covenantal love which creates new personal and family bonds.²⁷ The believer now calls upon his Creator not only as Lord of all things but much more intimately as "Father," and receives a new communion with the whole mystical body of believers. Pope Francis states:

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.²⁸

²⁶ *Lumen Fidei* §19.

²⁷ For a summary of the current development in the Biblical notion of covenant, see Scott Hahn, "Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994–2004)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 3.2 (2005): 263–92.

²⁸ *Lumen Fidei* §39.

By entering the new covenant of faith, the believer is now a brother to Abraham and to Moses; their story is now an integral part of his own. The Mother of Jesus is now the believer's own Mother (Jn 19; Rev 12), the saints are his own brothers and sisters, whose being is filled by the very same body and blood of the Divine Bridegroom, offered in the sacrament of the altar. Participating in the New Covenant through the Eucharistic feast feeds the hungry soul of man with the divine substance itself and creates a new spiritual family incarnated by the Eucharistic blood of the Lamb flowing in every believer's veins. Through the sacraments, the believer enters into a new blood relationship with God and with his neighbor, whom he now sees with "new eyes." This profound communion with the Father through the Son and Holy Spirit leads the human person to begin to see reality from the heights of God's own vision. His faith leads to new sight and to a new vision of the whole of reality. By accepting the love of Jesus, "we receive in a certain way his vision"²⁹ or as St. Paul says, "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). Pope Francis's words on the nature of faith as leading to a deeper sight conform very deeply to the Biblical notion of faith found throughout the Gospels and especially to the words that come from the very lips of Jesus Christ: "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (Jn 11:40). Pope Francis states that "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."³⁰ God's love is the original source of man's gift of faith, and, transformed by this love, man longs to know more of the one whom he has already come to see and know; he longs for the eternal vision of God as he is in himself.

The gift of faith invites the believer into this profound vision of truth, which elevates the mind and heart to see reality anew as God himself sees it and enables the believer to find his own personal mission in the world in light of the primordial truth about his origin and destiny. It is in this sense, both Biblical and Greek, that faith is fundamentally, as Pope Francis says, "a common good,"³¹ for salvation is the common spiritual good of the covenant family, who calls upon God not merely as "my Father" or "my personal Lord" but as Jesus Christ himself has taught his disciples, as "*Our Father*" (Mt 6:9). For God both is and is to be loved as the Father of the whole human family, as the common good of all. Divine faith cannot be otherwise than a common good since it is a good so superabundant that it is capable of perfecting the being of all men with the

²⁹ Ibid., §21.

³⁰ Ibid., §26.

³¹ Ibid., §51.

radiating power of truth and love. Only in light of this Divine common good³² which unites truth and love can men work towards building just and virtuous societies, which is true human “progress.” Yet, without this light of faith which initiates the believer into the very wisdom and love of God, man tends towards darkness and to the destruction of human life.

³² J. Brian Benestad, in *Church, State and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Doctrine*, explains that recognition of God as the highest common good leads to the greatest respect for the dignity of the human person. “No person properly seeks salvation for himself alone. He wants all people to share his liberation from sin and his union with God. To affirm the primacy of the highest common good is to desire that all human beings participate in the life of God and that all are united in that participation. To will the end is to will the means. Therefore, those desirous of salvation pray that everyone’s trespasses will be forgiven and that all live virtuously in the eyes of God. It may seem ironic that seeking God as the highest common good leads to the greatest respect for the dignity of the human person . . . [yet] the whole message of salvation proclaimed by the Church teaches people that, as parts of a whole, they are ordered to the greatest of all goods, union with God.” J. B. Benestad, *Church, State and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Doctrine* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 104–5. See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* III, ch. 17; *ST* II–II, q. 26, a. 3, ad. 3, and especially *ST* I q. 60, a. 5, ad. 5: “Since in God his substance and the common good are one and the same, all who behold God’s essence are by the same movement of love moved towards the Divine essence as it is distinct from other things, and according as it is the common good. And because He is naturally loved by all so far as He is the common good, it is impossible that whoever sees Him in His essence should not love Him. But such as do not behold His essence, know Him by some particular effects, which are sometimes opposed to their will. So in this way they are said to hate God; yet nevertheless, so far as He is the common good of all things, everything naturally loves God more than itself.”

For an excellent treatment of St. Thomas’s notion of the common good see Charles De Koninck, *De la Primauté du Bien Commun contre les Personnalistes. Le principe de l’ordre nouveau* (Québec/Montréal: Ed. de l’Université Laval/Fides, 1943), and “In Defense of St. Thomas,” *Laval Theologique et Philosophique* 1 (1945): 9–109. De Koninck succinctly summarizes St. Thomas’s position on love of God as a common good when he says, “Why is God so insistent that we love our neighbour? Why does our very salvation depend upon the love of our neighbour? *If any man say: I love God, and hateth his brother; he is a liar.* It can surely be only because it is impossible to love God as he is in himself without loving him in his communicability to others. If God had created and beatified but a single intellectual creature, he would still have to be loved in his communicability to other intellectual creatures. God is the *bonum universale simpliciter*. There can never be a proportion of equality between this infinite good and the intellectual creature’s capacity for beatitude. The divine good can never be other than a common good for the creature. To prescind from the inexhaustible communicability of the divine good to others, whether it is actually communicated or not, is to prescind from the *bonum universale* itself.” Charles De Koninck, “In Defense of St. Thomas,” 47.

In his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis goes straight to the heart of the modern world's erroneous conception about the nature of divine faith and shows the falsehood and inadequacy of the contemporary disjunction between the light of faith and the search for truth. Faith is not merely a subjective enterprise, reducible to personal opinion, voluntarism, or blind emotivism. Nor is human reason's pursuit of truth reducible merely to *techne* and *praxis*; rather, both the full breadth of human reason and the light of divine faith lift man up into the very mind and heart of God, who, through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, offers to man the treasury of his own divine life.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus says to the blind man on his way to Jericho (Lk 18:39–41). It is a chilling sort of thing to imagine the Son of God asking a mortal man to make a request of him. What to ask for! What is the greatest thing one could ask of the Divine Majesty? In a word, it is vision, sight. One holy saint and preeminent doctor of the Church gave such an answer to this very question when asked by the Lord Himself. While celebrating Mass on the feast of St. Nicholas, St. Thomas Aquinas heard a voice coming from the cross: "You have written well of me, Thomas. What reward will you have?" The saint replied, "Only You, Lord. Only You." In that moment, Christ granted him a profound mystical vision, after which the Angelic Doctor never wrote again. Though he had spent his life preaching and writing of that very "light" that comes from faith, bequeathing to the Church an unparalleled treasury of wisdom, St. Thomas's profound silence before the mystery of God teaches man that even the great "vision"³³ and "sight" which man receives through the gift of divine faith does not compare with the eternal vision to come. For even the "new eyes"³⁴ that man receives by faith, are eyes which have not seen, nor in any way have imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor 2:9). N.V

³³ *Lumen Fidei* §4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, §4.