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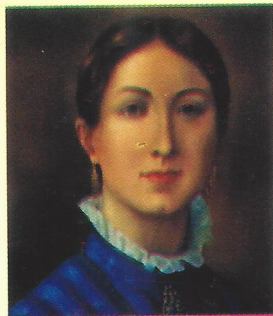
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of St. Peter the Apostle*

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THE STORY OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

MARYSYLVIA NWACHUKWU, DDL

1. Introduction

In the document *Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, Vatican II says that the invisible and merciful God addresses men as his friends in order to invite and receive them into his own company (DV 2), and the adequate response to this invitation is faith" (DV 5). The title of this paper, *The Bible and Christian Faith*, invites us to search the Bible to discover exactly what the word 'faith' means. The major and almost only source for this research is the Bible. Moreover, the title suggests that we discover the specific character or nature of Christian faith in relation to the entire body of Divine Revelation enshrined in the Bible. Therefore, what faith is and what it is not is sought in the events of revelation which the Bible describes and human responses to them. We know that the basic theological presupposition of the entire Bible is that God's salvific plan, which received its fullest manifestation in Christ, is realized progressively in the God - human relationship over the course of time. The paper will, therefore, define the specific nature of Christian faith from the body of divine revelation as the Bible describes it. It will do this from within the entire testimony of Scripture, consisting of Old and New Testaments. Jesus is the fullness of divine revelation, and what became of Christian religion was prepared by the Old Testament.

This introduction also presents the research methodology that best suits the topic under discussion. After a study of the use of the faith terminology in the Old Testament, the paper will trace the specific nature of Christian faith from along the story lines of the creation-covenant scheme in the Bible. Since the Bible describes faith in relational categories, the attitudes of the characters in this relationship - God and the human person - are more evidently ascertained within the story line of creation and covenant in the

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Bible. Finally, the essay will use the findings to address the attitudes of the present-day Christian.

2. Use of the 'Faith' terminology in the Old Testament

Apart from the explicit definition of faith that is found in the letter to the Hebrews (11:1), the Bible generally has no definition of faith. In fact, Heb 11 is instrumental for the choice of the methodology adopted for this research. By explaining what faith means in its portrayal of biblical characters, it gives the signal that the nature of faith is best ascertained in the attitude of a person in action. In spite of the lack of explicit definitions, descriptions of experiences of faith fill the entire Bible.

The Hebrew word that describes the experience of faith is *'mûnāh* (verb *'āman*), which expresses firmness, solidity, truthfulness, steadfastness and faithfulness. The vocabulary appears both as a noun and in its verbal forms. As a noun, it appears in the masculine and feminine singular forms as *'ēmûn* and *'ēmûnāh*, or in the Niphal participle (*ne'ēmān*), and translated as faithfulness. The subject of this nominal form is usually people in relationship with God. Only in few cases (Deut 7:9; Is 49:7; 55:3) does it describe God's covenant faithfulness, "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" (Deut 7:9). In Deut 7:9, the vocabulary of faith comes to close relationship with *ḥesed*, whose meaning includes invincible faithfulness and gracious love. In Ps 143:1, the Psalmist appeals to God's faithfulness as the ground for mercy and for help against more powerful and threatening forces against life. The few instances in which God is the subject of *'ēmûnāh* might appear insignificant; nevertheless, God's faithfulness to his covenant is both the basis of the entire history of salvation and the grounds on which the attitude of the biblical characters are evaluated. Therefore, the terminology of faith appears more frequently in its verbal forms to describe the actions of those who relate with God. Further explanations on the meaning of the term is given below in relation to a few instances.

In Gen 15:6, the term describes Abram's response to God's promise. The nature of Abram's faith is more understandable when presented

within the context of the entire Abraham cycle in Gen 12-25. God gave a promise of offspring to a very old and childless man whose wife was barren and passed the age of childbearing. There was nothing in the physical life of this man's family which seemed to give this divine promise a realizable possibility. So, it was a promise based on a logical impossibility. It was so ludicrous that the idea made Sarah laugh (Gen 18:9-12). Abram could not understand how God could make this happen, yet, as Scripture says, "he believed God" and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). In this story, the *Hiphil* perfect verb *he'ēmin* has the sense of 'confident trust', whose basis is God's personal commitment to keep the promise. This commitment is symbolized in the covenant (Gen 15:9-21). This is basically a belief in what is not seen; it is steadfast attitude even in affliction (Ps 116:10) and a courageous waiting in hope, as Paul says of him in Rom 4:18-21, *Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations, according to what was said...he did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body which was already as good as dead...or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God...being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.* The verbal form used in Gen 15:6 includes the foregoing descriptions of Abram's response to the promise of God: hope in spite of all discouraging evidences, unwavering conviction about the truth of God's word and God's ability to accomplish what he promised.

There are other instances of faith as obedience to the word of the Lord on the basis of what is seen or known: In the *Niphal* imperfect form, the terminology is used to describe the people's obedience and loyalty to the word of God on the basis of God's benevolence towards them. In Exod 4:31, *The people believed (ya'āmen); and when they heard that the LORD had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.* This obedience is the acceptance of the truth of a claim made by another because the latter has proved himself trustworthy (Cf. also 1 Sam 27:12; 1 Kings 10:7). The same meaning is implied in Num 20:12, where the vocabulary, expressed in the *Hiphil* perfect (*he'ēmanthem*), designates the failure of Moses and Aaron to heed the instruction of the Lord, their previous experience of the Lord, notwithstanding. Exasperated by the people's rejection of his office and authority,

together with their murmuring over lack of water, Moses was commanded by God to "tell the rock... to yield its water" (Num 20:7), but he struck it twice with the rod (Num 20:11). The statement *Listen you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock*, highlight the effort of Moses and Aaron to inspire credibility in the people through exhibition of power. This attitude is interpreted as failure to sanctify Yahweh. Lack of belief, in this sense, is the arrogation of divine power to self and away from God. Similarly, in Deut 9:23 and Ps 78:8,37, the entire people of Israel are accused of rebellion against the command of the Lord in showing lack of trust and steadfastness in spite of the miracles they had experienced. In their *Niphal* and *Hiphil* imperfect and *Niphal* and *Hiphil* perfect forms, the object of the verb is the Lord himself, or the word of the Lord or the name of the Lord or to the covenant (cf. also 1 Chron 17:23,24; 2 Chron 1:9; 6:17; 9:6; 20:20; Ps 78:37; Is 7:9). The object of the *Hiphil* and *Niphal* perfect forms is the Lord and the covenant with him (cf Deut 9:23; Ps 78:37; Is 7:9).

The vocabulary also designates somebody who is capable of being entrusted with something because in his loyalty he acts only according to the mind of the Master. For instance, in Num 12:7, it describes Moses' preeminent character as a prophet *primus inter pares*, whom the Lord entrusted the care of his entire house. Expressed in the *Niphal* participle (*nu'eman*), it describes Moses as a trustworthy steward and guardian. It also describes the promised priest (a faithful priest - *nu'eman*) in place of Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, who shall act only according to the mind of the Lord (1 Sam 2:35). This use of the word describes the steward as loyal, trustworthy, reliable and steadfast (see also Is 8:2). In 1 Sam 3:20, the same vocabulary identifies Samuel as that trustworthy prophet and priest of the Lord. It also describes David's loyalty to Saul. "Who among all your servants is so faithful as David...he is quick to do your bidding and is honored in your house" (1 Sam 22:14). This was Ahimelech's defense of David before Saul. Similarly, the vocabulary is used to describe a nurse or caretaker (Num 11:12 [*'omen*]; Ruth 4:16; 2 Sam 4:4 [*'omeneth*] and the guardians of the king's palace 2 Kings 10:1,5 [*ha'omnim*]).

Finally, the vocabulary designates what is true and solidly stable, as

in the adverbial forms 'umnāh and 'āmnāh, meaning truly or verily, indeed or in the *Niphal* perfect form ne'ēmān, which describes the secured, stable, enduring household that God swore he would give David (cf. 2 Sam 7:16). It also describes an event or attitude that is lasting and enduring (cf. Deut 28:59).

The biblical evidence shows that faith is human attitude in a relationship with God, and not adherence to a body of laws or to a system of beliefs. Faith is chiefly defined in relational terms. It is defined in relation to God as the acceptable human relationship with God and to what God has revealed. It is the proper human response to God who calls human beings into a covenant relationship. It is important at this stage to discuss the basis for this faith.

3. Establishing the Biblical Basis of Faith

This paragraph describes, along general lines, the biblical themes of creation and covenant in order to show how they function as platform for a relationship of faith. The primary themes in creation theology are Divine Sovereignty, Human Sin, Election and Covenant. These themes show how God established his universal reign and sovereignty over creation through personal commitment to the welfare of creation and by showing mercy. Human faith is described on the foundations of these notions.

Without the use of related vocabulary, the two accounts of creation in Gen 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-25 establish the primary theological basis on which the relationship of faith is founded. These accounts represent a holistic view of God's providence and of human strength and weakness. The creation of heaven and earth is the first stage of the history of salvation, the basis of all God's acts of salvation and the first stage of divine self-disclosure. It therefore provides the context for a description of human response to God who acts in history.

The first message which the account of creation in Gen 1 impresses on the reader is the reality of God's benevolence and providence. Ideas of God's benevolence emerge from the text's description of God's uncompromising efforts to dispel the forces of chaos which undermine creation (Gen 1:2), and which represent a disorderly situation in which life is impossible. The contrast indicated by 'darkness' symbolically defines the pre-creation state as a situation of total obscurity; without significance and without a sense of

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orientation. God's speaking to this pre-creation state gives way not only to order and life but it imbues creation with meaning and purpose. God made life possible and brought all creation under his lordship. Nevertheless, **it should be noted that** God's action in creation only confined the disorderly mass of imposing water, without dispelling it, setting limits which it must not pass (Ps 104:9; Prov 8:29). While the stories leading up to the Flood show that the elements of chaos remain a potential threat to God's creation, it is only thanks to God's personal commitment (Gen 8:22) that the created order is safeguarded from the danger to which human inclination poses for creation (Gen 6:6).

In their history, the Israelites had experience of the disorder which is of the rank of the chaos of the primordial times. As Israel experienced dismay and faintheartedness, caused by the displacement, the disorientation and meaninglessness of the exilic period, Second Isaiah formulated out of the creation story, a theology of the power and supremacy of God over all anti-life forces. Recourse to idols, in this context, represent the human search for security by allying themselves to the most influential idol of the time, such as Marduk or Bel.¹ This prophet of the exile invoked God's power in creation as basis for renewed trust in God's supreme power to save. In order to address the people's disappointment and their refusal to approve God's action, the prophet defends God's right as Creator in doing things his way and in determining the exile status and suffering of Israel (Is 45:7-12). He also underscores God's righteousness in appointing a means of salvation for Israel through his choice of Cyrus (Is 45:1-6). This interpretation of history, as Second Isaiah gives it, highlights the meaning and function of the creation story. God's power as Creator is a strong safeguard against faithlessness. It is a power to which his people should make appeal in their historical experiences of disorder and meaninglessness.

Alongside this notion of God is a description of human strength and weakness. The idea that the human being is image of God (Gen 1:27) is understood to be affirming human similarity to God and ability to represent God where the latter is not personally present.² This motif gives real evidence of God's willingness to share his life with his

¹Cf. John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34 - 66*, Word Biblical Commentary 25, Texas: Word Books, 1987, p163.

²Cf. MarySylvia Nwachukwu, *Creation-Covenant Scheme and Justification by Faith*, Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2002, p. 62.

creatures, and more concretely, it gives evidence of God who wills to invite human beings to share in the divine life. The human being, in this sense, is introduced as a sphere of encounter between divinity and humanity. Ps 8 deepens the meaning of the image motif, by presenting the human being as a special locus of divine encounter, especially in the human being's exercise of power, "...you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet (Ps 8:5-6). By closely associating the image motif with the blessing and the commission to dominate creation, the Bible implies that mankind's exercise of creative power is an expression of the likeness to God. The two verbs 'to dominate' and 'to subdue' (*radah and kabash*), which describe human beings' representative role in Gen 1:26-28, include both positive and negative ideas of royal power. In the biblical tradition, these two verbs express either the king's responsibility for the wellbeing of the people (for instance Ps 8:4-9; 72) or violent and oppressive subjugation of conquered lands and peoples (cf. Num 32:22,29; Josh 18:1; Isa 14:6; Ezek 34:4). The positive meaning of the verbs is intended in Gen 1:27, since in connection with the image motif, it suggests a positive relation to God's own rule over the world. Human power is, in this sense, clearly a means of mediating God's goodness and purpose for creation. Therefore, through the image motif, a relationship between God and the human person is established whose ultimate goal is the wellbeing of creation.

Against this lofty presentation of the human being in Gen 1:26-28 is a parallel account of mankind as made from dust (Gen 2:7). The narratives in Gen 3-11 are fundamental to our understanding the critical consequences of the fragility of human beings to the stability of creation. These stories underscore the ultimate aim of the Eden story, that is, to explain the root of human rebellion against God and its consequences on human relationship with God and with the rest of creation.³ The human being is described as continually acting from evil intentions and not according to the designs of God (Gen 6:5). This observation, undersigned by God himself ("And God saw that..." Gen 6:5), is the point of departure for the assessment of humanity's sinful condition and the corruption of the earth in need of

³Cf. Nwachukwu, *Creation - Covenant Scheme*, pp64-65.

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redemption. The idea of human inability to do good is re-applied to Israel in Historical and Prophetic texts. In Rom 8:7-8, Paul describes this human hostile inclination as setting the mind on the flesh as against the mind that is set on the Spirit. "...it does not submit to God's law - indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God". This state of affairs provides the background for covenant and election. The Noah covenant highlights God's commitment to the good of creation in spite of human action (Gen 8:21). Creation would have been destroyed but thanks to God's unconditional oath.

The second basis for a description of faith is the covenant idea. The story of Israel's rebellion is fundamental to our understanding of how covenant themes grow out of the critical consequences of the fragility of human beings in relationship with God. In the Bible, the covenant serves the purpose of protecting God's project from any eventual collapse which human weakness could cause it. This idea is expressed in the divine oath in Gen 8:21-22, "... *the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.*" According to this assessment of the human being, evil is what is opposed to God's will as against God's will that creation be good, that is, that it accords with his creative design. Given the existentially universal fact that human beings are inclined to evil, and therefore, cannot exercise the privilege of image, the dominant law which came to govern and determine history moves beyond retributive punishment towards God's gracious commitment to salvage creation in spite of human sin. Actually, the covenant with Noah represents a demonstration of God's holiness and compassion in advancing his creative purposes even in the face of continuing human disobedience (Gen 9:8-17).

As in the covenant with Noah, the Sinaitic covenant was also given as a hedge against the consequences of sin. The Sinaitic covenant pericope in Exod 19:1-24:11 is followed by a narrative in Exod 24:12-34:28 which exposes the threat which Israel's apostasy in making the golden calf posed for her continuous existence as Yahweh's people. It is in relation to Israel's rebellion in the wilderness that God revealed his character as merciful and gracious (Exod 33:19). The emphasis on Israel's stiff-necked nature in this context means that she cannot keep

the covenant stipulations despite her declared willingness to do so. In this event, God demonstrated his sovereign freedom to restore Israel to the covenant at the moment when he could have most justifiably destroyed her. In the broad context of God's covenant, God is revealed as a compassionate God (Exod 34:6-7), who rules Israel by showing mercy and compassion. God's compassion is revealed as special power of love, which overcomes the sin and infidelity of the chosen people. This revelation of the character of the covenant God offers the basis for a theology of grace. The covenant, therefore, describes God's indomitable faithfulness to his commitment to creation and to Israel, and unshakeable fidelity to a plan of salvation. These notions form a theological basis for a description of the nature of Christian faith.

4. Christian Faith

According to the testimony of the New Testament, Jesus is the culmination and fulfillment of God's creative design and the fulfillment of the covenant history. In presenting him as son of Adam (Luke 3:38), of Abraham (Matt 1:1; Luke 3:34) and of David (Matt 1:1), the Gospels affirm truths of deep theological import. In Jesus Christ, God brought to fullness the program of salvation that is traced in the story line of the creation - covenant scheme.

My definition of Christian faith in this part of the essay will use evidences that are found in the New Testament, and it will give particular and major attention to the witness of Paul. Some space is dedicated to the exposition of the use of the vocabulary of faith in the Gospels, more attention is given to Paul here for the simple reason that his description of Christian existence, especially in the letter to the Romans, follows the biblical creation-covenant scheme.⁴

4.1 Use of the Faith Vocabulary in the Gospels

In different ways, the four evangelists build the plot of the Gospel around the identity of Jesus Christ as God. The terminology of faith appears in the New Testament in its nominal (*pistis*) and verbal (*pisteuō*) forms, which are translated as 'faith' and 'to believe' respectively. A study of where the word appears in the New Testament shows that the faith is even here, as in the Old Testament,

⁴This was the argument of my doctoral dissertation as it is presented in the book: *Creation - Covenant Scheme and Justification by Faith*, Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2002.

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not presented as a distinct notion. Jesus often praised the faith of non-Jewish people who did not share the sacred stories and beliefs of the Jewish people (Matt 8:10; 15:28). After his resurrection, he also praised those who did not see and yet believed (John 20:29). The reality of faith is also described by texts which do not use the terminology, for instance, the case of the persistent woman who wanted a favour from a Judge (Luke 18:1-8). These passages show that faith is not adherence to a set of religious tradition or teachings.

The study of the terminology in the Gospels will be based on the witness of Matthew and Mark, using Matthew as the main text. There is evidence of more use of the nominal than the verbal forms of the faith terminology. These nominal cases are relative judgment on the measure of faith of people who encountered Jesus. These people are said to have great faith (*megale pistis*), faith (*pistis*), little faith (*oligopistis*) and no faith at all (*apistia*). Of these, the Canaanite woman was praised for her great faith (Matt 15:28).⁵ Next to her was the Centurion of whose faith Jesus said he had not found the kind in Israel (Matt 8:10).⁶ Significantly, these two, who were not Israelites, expressed belief in the power of the word spoken by Jesus. Symbolic demonstration of power was not necessary. They were convinced about the efficacy of the word spoken by Jesus. So they, resolutely, demanded that he uttered the word. Jesus was amazed. Jesus also praised the faith of the sick or those who carried them, who came to him with strong inner conviction that contact with him would make them well. These were those who carried the crippled man (Matt 9:2; Mark 2:5), the woman with the flow of blood (Matt 9:22; Mark 5:34), and the two blind men (Matt 9:28-29; Mark 10:52). How best can we explain the nature of their faith? These people entertained an inner conviction which led to different measures of openness to the word or person of Jesus. They recognized in Jesus the presence of a higher or transcendent being, and they abandoned themselves to him as the only condition for survival. This explains their resoluteness and refusal of the possibility of an alternative.

Besides these different measures of faith attitudes are those whom Jesus judged as people of little faith, the *oligopistoi* and those whom

⁵ Mark 7:24-30 does not use the language of faith in the story of this woman.

⁶ This story is absent in Mark. Mark has another story about the leader of the Synagogue (Mark 5:36)

he judged as faithless, those characterized by *apistia*. Surprisingly, these are those who have very close relation and connection to Jesus. In the five instances of the appearance of *oligopistos* in the Gospel, they refer to the disciples (Matt 8:26; 16:8; 17:20) and to Peter (Matt 14:31), but also generally, in only one instance, to the crowds during the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:30). In these different contexts, the disciples were accused of fear, doubt (wavering faith), lack of understanding, inability to perceive and to remember, and over-concern for food. At the incident of the storm, the disciples were afraid even in the company of Jesus. At the invitation to walk on the waters, Peter took up the challenge, but he began to waver and doubt his ability even with Jesus there watching him. He lacked the resoluteness and inner conviction of the Centurion and the Canaanite woman. In presenting these same incidents in which the disciples were involved, Mark makes a more forceful distinction between faith and fear (Mark 4:40) and between faith and doubt (Mark 11:22). "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?...and they were filled with awe...(Mark 4:40-41). Similarly, Jesus tells his disciples concerning the fig tree that he had cursed and which withered, "...if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you" (Mark 11:22-24). Fear and doubt are certainly contrasts to faith and obstacles to the nurturing of the kind of faith that relationship with Jesus required. It is faith that lacks the total assimilation of the reality of Jesus. Heb 11:1 describes faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." The experience of faith, according to this text, is founded on something which gives assurance and conviction.

Similar to these people of little faith are the group judged as faithless. They are again the disciples (Matt 17:17) and people from Jesus' own town, Nazareth (Matt 13:58). Matt 13:58 represent an extreme case of where materialistic interpretation about things that concern Jesus are obstacles to proper understanding and conviction about the power of Jesus. These examples of people with little and lack of faith show that physical closeness to Jesus does not work magically as guarantee for safety. The fact of being a disciple also does not confer the power to work miracles. Rather, one needs faith, an inner motivation which leads to abandonment to a power which the person neither could understand nor control. These negative instances are important and powerful descriptions of what faith is not. Nevertheless, they function to explain how these faithless followers of Jesus grew to

become powerful examples of faith after the Pentecost. The two Gospels end with a strong negative note on lack of faith. While the Jews asked Jesus as he hung on the cross to come down from it in order for them to believe the truth of his claims (Matt 27:42; Mark 15:32), the disciples, on their part, neither believed the news of the resurrection (Mark 16:11), nor the message of those who saw him after the resurrection (Mark 16:13).

The Gospel witness is complemented by Paul's description of faith within the context of salvation history. It allows us to appreciate how Paul's treatment of the theme follows the story line of the Old Testament.

4.2 Use of the Faith Vocabulary in Paul

In Paul, the event of Christ is the basis for a definition of Christian life and a redefinition of ethical responsibilities. Paul describes faith in two fundamental ways. Firstly, it is humanity's recognition of its inability to obtain salvation through human achievements or efforts. Secondly, it is the acceptance of Jesus Christ as God's means of salvation. Therefore, very central to Paul's definition of faith is the cross of Jesus Christ, which is both the goodnews of the power of God for salvation and the symbol of that salvation (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 2:5).

The first point from which to map the terrain of Christian faith is, first and foremost, what Paul calls the righteousness of God, and this is equivalent to the Old Testament description of God's *hesed*. Paul begins his letter to the Romans by saying:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith" (Rom 1:16-17)

He also says in Rom 3:21: *But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the Law and the Prophets.* These Pauline statements make a historical connection between the event of Jesus Christ and the covenant history of Israel. It also calls attention to the gracious character of God's action in Christ,

through the use of the Greek word *charis* (cf. Rom 3:24). This character of salvation is understandable only from within the creation - covenant scheme which highlights God's grace, setting it against human weakness. Grace is, basically, the nature of God's saving work in Christ on behalf of sinful humanity (cf. Rom 4:24-25; 5:6-11; 8:32). The event of the death and resurrection of Jesus revealed an awareness of the power of sin in human flesh which rendered impossible the belief that human beings could obtain salvation through human efforts. This deepened awareness of the power of sin allows the idea of salvation that is a gift from God, a righteousness not based on works but received by faith in Christ (cf. Rom 5:17; 10:5-20).

For Paul, Christian existence is a life under grace. He uses the expression 'under grace' (*hypo charin* - Rom 5:2) to describe both human liberation from bondage to sin and the situation into which the event of Christ has introduced redeemed mankind. This expression describes the new relationship that is thereby created. Paul describes this relation in texts like Rom 6-8; Gal 5; Eph 2. Christians live out this new relationship under the liberating rule of a new Lord, Jesus Christ. The immediate effect of God's grace is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into the human heart (Rom 5:5), which assures the renewal of the human mind towards total obedience to God (cf. Rom 6:17; 8:5-14). Therefore, an important prerequisite for any definition of Christian faith is the confession of the Lordship of Christ. This confession permeates the entire New Testament witness, and since it is affirmed on the basis of the resurrection, it implies that it is determined and established by God (cf. Rom 1:4). In Rom 4:17 Paul traces the resurrection back to the activity of the Creator God. And in Rom 10:9, the confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ represents a public expression of belief that God raised him from the dead, a confession that constitutes the climatic worship of God by all creation.⁷

Using the Greek term *basileueiv*, Paul contrasts the effects of the reign of sin and the dominion of Christ. This contrast highlights the superior effects of the lordship of Christ over humanity, that is,

⁷The early Christians' interpretation of Ps 110:1 underlies the development of the belief in the Lordship of Christ. See J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edingburgh, 1998, p. 247.

obedience from the heart to the gospel (Rom 6:17; 10:16) and liberation from sin for a new form of service to righteousness (Rom 6:18-22). The lordship of Jesus places him at the centre of God's purpose for mankind. The author of Col 1:13-19 describes the lordship of Jesus with the biblical image motif. As image of God, Jesus gives order and coherence to creation. Everything is created through him. Without him creation would revert to the chaos from which it emerged. He is, therefore, not only the agent of creation but also the agent of its preservation. He stands at the centre of created and recreated (redeemed) humanity as head and firstborn, all-powerful because of his unique relationship to God and to creatures. What the author of Colossians says here comes close to a similar Pauline reflection in Rom 5:12-24. According to N.A. Dahl, the tradition that lies behind the Adam - Christ Christology in this text is the covenant. According to this tradition, the mercy of God is greater - and will have far more-reaching effects - than his judgement of human sin.⁸

The second land map of Christian faith in Paul is the affirmation that the revelation of God's *hesed* in Christ is appropriated; it becomes a reality in the life of people through faith. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the righteousness of God is revealed through faith and for faith (Rom 1:17). Faith is the acceptance of the divinity of Jesus Christ and him as God's means of salvation. In his death and resurrection is revealed God's saving power and means of salvation.

Paul explains this adhesion to Christ with the expression *pistis Iēsou Christou* or *pisteuōs Iēsou*. The interpretation of this expression in this essay will hinge heavily on Rom 3:21-26, a text considered as central for the interpretation of the meaning of faith in Paul. The expression "*pisteuōs Iēsou*" (vv22,26) has been interpreted in several ways, discussion basing on whether it should be understood in the objective (faith in Jesus) or subjective (faith of Jesus) sense. The entire context determines the meaning of the expression. At the beginning of this session in Rom 3:3, Paul uses the same grammatical, genitive construction (*pistin tou Theou*) to establish a contrast between the faithfulness of God and human faithlessness, *What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the*

⁸Cf. N.A. Dahl, *Studies in Paul. Theology for the Early Christian Mission*, Minneapolis, 1977, p90.

faithfulness of God? This shows that the statement in Rom 3:22,26 could be interpreted subjectively to mean the faith of Jesus. This possibility, notwithstanding, the inner logic of the meaning of Christ's death is clarified in Rom 3:21 with the statement that in Christ, the righteousness of God is revealed apart from the law. This is the point at which Paul turns from describing the revelation of God's wrath (Rom 1:18-3:20) to that of God's grace (Rom 3:24) in order to introduce Christ and his atoning death as the means through whom God demonstrated his covenant faithfulness in Christ. God's *hesed* takes on a historical- eschatological character in the person and history of Jesus. Its salvific effect is now mediated through Christ (cf. use of the pronoun '*dia*' in v22, meaning 'by means of', 'through').

The expression '*Pisteuōs Iēsou*', as Paul uses it in Rom 3:22,26 to form an *inclusio* for a description of Christ's atoning death, establishes a special relation between Christ and believers. God is described in v26 as literally "the one who justifies the person from the faith of Christ". Whether the expression is translated in the subjective or objective sense, the use of the preposition '*ek*' suggests that the one who believes 'participates' in the faith of Jesus Christ. The preposition could also express a sense of belonging, as is evident from this statement in Rom 1:5-6, which uses the genitive without the preposition *ek*: *through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ (kletoi Iēsou Kristou)*. Since the expression forms an envelope around the description of the atoning death of Jesus, it calls for identification with Jesus Christ. The believer is one who identifies with Christ in his atoning death. Human inability to obtain salvation through personal efforts calls for the necessity of this identification with Christ.

In what does this identification consist? In Rom 3:21-25, the vocabulary of faith appears 4x to describe both Jesus' act of self-giving through his death ('through faith in his blood' - v25), and human response to it (faith in Jesus). Identification with Christ is achieved through answering the call to self-emptying like Christ and self immolation for the good of others and rising to newness of life that looks toward God (Rom 6:3; Col 3:1-3). Believers are those who accept Jesus as Savior and are committed to sharing in his life through dying to themselves and living for him alone (2 Cor 5:14-15). Faith is

not a static gift of salvation; it is to be nurtured to grow through identification with God and expressed in a Christ-like way of life.

5. Evaluation and Conclusion

One very important prelude to understanding Christian faith is the tracing of a history of salvation that began with the event of Eden, which describe human disobedience in relation to God. The importance of this assessment is underscored by the definition of faith as an attitude that brings a person into a right relationship with God. The rightness or appropriateness of this relationship is based on a proper knowledge of what God has revealed about himself. Another way of putting this matter is to say that the way we interpret both Christian belief system and acceptable Christian behavior is often conditioned by who and what we think God is. How we think about God reflects in the values and way of life we cherish and encourage. I illustrate this point with respect to some interpretations that any breach of the law invites God's anger and/or cuts one off from God. This kind of interpretation makes God a big old tyrant who watches out on sinners to punish them. These are views that paint a legalistic picture of the Bible and which depict a melancholic, merciless God who punishes every offence and would not have any dealings with sinners. This interpretation and the values it encourages does not represent the biblical witness. Our study has revealed that what God demands in the faith relationship is openness to mystery, which leads towards total identification with Christ. The creation-covenant scheme provides notions of divinity and includes a history of God's faithfulness which provides the basis for the interpretation of Christian faith.

Our study of relevant terminologies in the Old and New Testament reveals that faith is that attitude by which normative biblical characters are defined in their relationship with God. Abraham (Neh 9:8; Sir 44:20; Heb 11:8-19), the other patriarchs (Heb 11:20-22); Moses (Sir 45:4; Heb 11:23-28), Phinehas (Sir 45:23), Joshua (Sir 46:3), Samuel (Sir 46:15), other Israelite heroes (Heb 11:29-38), the prophets and kings are all described by later literatures as people of faith. Therefore, fundamentally, faith is a word for relationship, and the Bible defines its nature by presenting biblical characters in action. In their relationship with God, these biblical characters exhibited the firmness, steadfastness and unwavering conviction about the truth of God's word and God's ability to accomplish what he promised. It is stable and enduring fidelity in relationship. The object of the verb is the Lord himself, or the word of the Lord or the name of the Lord or to the

covenant.

In the New Testament, faith is the strong conviction that recognizes in Jesus the presence of a higher or transcendent being, which leads one to abandon the self to him as the only means of salvation. This explains the resoluteness in the people of faith and their refusal to accept an alternative. The opposite of faith is fear and doubt, and its obstacles are lack of understanding and attachment to materialistic interpretation of experience. The Gospel of Matthew underscores the importance of understanding the mysteries of Christ for growth in faith. Hearing the word of God and understanding it is like seed sown on good soil, in contrast to those that fell on the path, which bears fruit in plenty (cf. Matt 13:18-23). From this background, Israel and the disciples are evaluated as falling short of faith. They lacked understanding, perception and trust in spite of what they had seen and experienced.

Christian faith is obedience to God and acceptance of the truth claims of the word of God. The obedience of faith, which Paul speaks about in his letters is expressed both as obedience to the word of God and human collaboration in God's project. For Paul, those whose minds are set on the flesh, those who are materialistically minded, can neither obey nor please God. Obedience to God is possible for those who possess the Spirit (Rom 8:1-17).

As the biblical evidences show, faith must characterize the life of a leader. No one should be chosen as a leader in any ecclesiastical institution who is not a person of great faith. A person of faith is one who could be entrusted with something because in his loyalty, he acts only according to the mind of the Master. Therefore, leaders like Moses (Num 12:7) Samuel (1 Sam 2:35) and Jesus (Rom 3:21-26) are judged as examples of faith in administering loyal stewardship. The loyalty, trustworthiness, and steadfastness required of the steward challenges some compromising attitudes that some of us, leaders, exhibit in relationships. Dishonesty, sycophancy, disloyalty, irresponsibility, lack of compassion and ignorance; these are faithless attitudes that do not befit custodians of the deposit of faith. The following New Testament texts illumine the point more clearly:

Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy (1 Cor 4:1-2).

For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it (Tit 1:7-9).

Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 4:10-11).

Finally, I use the language of faith to address the attitude of faithlessness that characterize the present-day Christian. We live in a world infused by division, disorder, meaninglessness and instability in different spheres of life. How could we, as collaborators in God's project for the world, make meaning out of our situation of meaninglessness? How could we make sense of the chaos that characterize human existence? How could we ensure a stable and secure environment in our different institutions? These are questions that border around the meaning of faith.

The basis for the description of the nature of faith is the confession of the lordship of Jesus. 'Jesus is Lord' implies that no other power stands against his sovereign rule over all nations. As Lord, Jesus is able to deliver us from all threatening and destructive forces. He has proved this through his death and resurrection from the dead, teaching us lessons in exercise of salvific power. Christ reigns through his atoning self-giving for the life of others. Those who belong to Christ should trust that Jesus has the power to deliver them from all evils; they should also be courageous to reign with Christ through self-less living for others.