

Chapter 1

I BELIEVE – AMEN

What does “believe” mean? What are the implications that come forth from the word “creed” when it is uttered in the context of our life of Faith? These are the questions we need to answer before we dive into the central theme of this work: to interpret the Cross of the Apostolate in the context of the Symbol of the Apostles, enlightened by the theological reflections of Pope Benedict XVI and the spiritual experience of Venerable Servant of God Concepción Cabrera de Armida.

In order to delve deeply into the topic of faith in the Church, as it is confessed in the Creed, let us begin at the origin and meaning of the Symbol of the Apostles.

The origin of the Creed in the context of Baptism

The symbol of the Apostles - which receives this name because it is considered a faithful summary of the preaching of the Apostles – was composed in the 2nd and 3rd centuries in the context of the Rite of Baptism, drawing from Mt 28,19: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit”. And so, the candidate to baptism answers three questions: Do you believe in God the Father Almighty...? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son...? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit...? And three times he answers “I do”.

The phrase “I believe” implies “I accept”. It’s an event eminently personal, made public in the threefold “I believe” and “I renounce”. In this threefold renunciation and the threefold assent the true nature of faith or belief is clearly illustrated: it is a conversion, an about-turn, a shift of being.¹

Faith is a movement of the human being, a 180° turn about, which will permanently give structure to human existence.

Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed. As personal adherence to God and assent to his truth, Christian faith differs from our faith in any human person. It is right and just to entrust oneself wholly to God and to believe absolutely what he says. It would be futile and false to place such faith in a creature (Cf. Jer 17:5-6; Pss 40:5; 146:3-4)².

¹ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 88.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 150

A radical choice

The meaning of faith in God is a topic that Pope Benedict XVI talks about in several passages of his book *Introduction to Christianity*, with the objective of underlining the inherent implications to the act of faith. Here are some of his thoughts:

Thus faith in God appears as a holding on to God through which man gains a firm foothold for his life. Faith is thereby defined as taking up a position, as taking a stand trustfully on the ground of the word of God.³

Three actions underline the strength of the act of faith: to hold on to, to take up a position and to take a stand, that is to say, to place oneself firmly in front of all of reality. It is not simply an act of the intellect; rather it implies a complete involvement of the whole person. And this is not an easy task. Ordinarily, the compromise of faith finds resistance on the part of man, who wants to keep his own rational autonomy and who finds it hard to submit his own reason to a “superior light”, which might be paradoxically “dark”, but which nonetheless is the only light that consoles man in the search for meaning.

The true believer cannot get stuck to the visible and tangible realities as if they were the ultimate explanation of the being, the true believer must go beyond until he can discern the invisible origin of reality, for “By faith we understand that the universe was ordered by the word of God, so that what is visible came into being through the invisible”. (Heb 11, 3)

Belief is a leap across an infinite gulf out of the tangible world that presses on man from every side. Belief has always had something of an adventurous break or leap about it, because in every age it represents the risky enterprise of accepting what plainly cannot be seen as the truly real and fundamental. Belief is a decision calling on the depths of existence, a decision that in every age demanded a turnabout by man that can only be achieved by an effort of will.⁴

The first and the last word of the Creed

This pair formed by the first and last word of the Apostles’ Symbol, “I believe” and “amen”, highlights the radical option that faith implies; these two words weave around each other and encompass the twelve articles of the Creed. Here is an extract from Pope Benedict’s book:

The word **credo** “I believe” contains a basic option vis-à-vis reality as such; it signifies a fundamental mode of behavior toward being. It signifies the deliberate view that what cannot be seen is not unreal; that, on the contrary, what cannot be

³ J Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 69

⁴ Cf. J Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 52

seen in fact represents true reality, the element that supports and makes possible all the rest of reality.⁵

“Amen” simply says once again in its own way what belief means: the trustful placing of myself on a ground that upholds me, not because I have made it and checked it by my own calculations but, rather, precisely because I have not made it and cannot check it. It expresses the abandonment of oneself to what we can neither make nor need to make, to the ground of the world as meaning, which first of all discloses to me the freedom to make.⁶

Indeed, the two words, “I believe” and “amen” summarize the different meanings in the attitude of the believer: trust, fidelity, stability, steadiness, truth. Truth alone is the basis for human existence. The act of Christian faith includes, essentially, the conviction that the only thing that gives meaning to life is “*Logos*”, that is to say the Word, the reason and truth that allow us to be firmly rooted in God.

Faith as a means to “understanding”

It is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith, and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love.⁷

It is important to underline that in order to deepen into what has been revealed to us, it is best to “stand firm” than to “understand”. This is the thought Pope Benedict expresses when he draws from Isaiah: “If you do not believe, then you do not abide”, and he says that to abide in this context (Is 7,9) means “to understand”. The verb “to abide” is part of the language of faith, because not only does it mean permanence in the solid basis of the word of God, but it also indicates understanding of the word, and comprehending it.⁸ This interpretation leads us into the field of the spiritual experience.

To abide in Christ Jesus

The biblical quote from Isaiah, “If you do not believe, then you do not abide”, finds an echo in the spiritual experience of Concepcion Cabrera de Armida, who captures her experience of faith in a text from her Account of Conscience (AC): this is a transcript that explains what she lived spiritually in an encounter with Christ, this transcript was delivered in the literary genre of *locution*.

⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 50-51

⁶ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 75

⁷ Cf *Catholic Church Catechism*, 158

⁸ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 72

This quote does not, as others which are part of the same genre of *locution*, mean to be an objective and infallible revelation, as if it were the word of God in the strictest of senses; however, its objective value is shown through its conformity or adherence to the message of the gospel. The text we mention is an invitation – very much like the one Jesus makes to his disciples in the Gospel – to abide in him. Concepcion’s quote is as follows:

“Remain in me and you shall be happy... this is your life, this is why you were born, to remain in me and drink from my Heart the light and science of the saints, and that is the cross. He who remains in me, remains with the Father and the Holy Spirit and you know your life should melt into the life of the Holy Trinity...” (Account of Conscience 32, 292, May 27, 1909).

The evangelical value of these words of Concepcion is evident when we compare it to the invitation Jesus makes to His disciples:

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you will remain in my love... just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.”(Jn 15, 7.10)

And also:

Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."(Jn 8, 31-32)

The biblical text “you will remain in my love” finds an echo in the spiritual experience of Conchita Cabrera. The relationship between the verb “to remain” and the experience of faith, which is the science of the saints: “*you were born to remain in me and to drink the science of the saints*”; there’s an explicit reference to the object of faith, which is the knowledge of the Holy trinity: “*remain in the Father and the Holy Spirit*”; this text also manifests that the science of the saints is “*the cross*”, and the source from where light shines forth is the “*heart*”.

This expression of the spiritual experience encloses a profound meaning that sheds light on the mystery of the trinity symbolized in the Cross of the Apostolate. *Happiness*, the kind of happiness mentioned in the text, is the consequence of *remaining* in Jesus, that is to say, of understanding His word, understanding He himself is the Word of God. To remain in Jesus is to remain in the Trinity. To this extent, the Pope explains:

When we speak of Christ, we must, of course, always see the Trinitarian mystery in the background; he comes from the Father and he works at present and in all of history through the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to Christ and guides believers into all the truth. (Jn 15, 26: 16,13)⁹.

⁹ J. Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ* 132

What Jesus promises Concepcion Cabrera is the light of His Heart, the science of the saints; that is to say, the complete truth to which the biblical quote is making reference, and which is the source of happiness. It's an echo of the words Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:

"If you knew the gift of God ... you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (Jn 4, 10) The living water that Jesus promises this woman is the gift of revelation, manifested in the person of Jesus, Word of God who reveals the Trinitarian mystery,

Concepción's experience of faith leans on the symbol of the Cross of the Apostolate. This Cross reflects God's gift, the revelation of God's love for mankind. This revelation does not mean a word we need *to hear*, but a person we have to "see". For this vision of faith, the symbolical language works best. And therefore, God did use symbolical language when he revealed himself to the prophets: he not only inspires words in them, he also keeps them company through the power of symbols, guaranteeing thus the supernatural origin of the words He inspires (cf Ex 3,12:4,5)

In human life, signs and symbols occupy an important place. As a being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols. God speaks to man through the visible creation. Light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, symbolize both God's greatness and his nearness. These perceptible realities can become means of expressing the action of God who sanctifies men.¹⁰

The Cross of the Apostolate is one of those symbols which summarize the fundamental truths of our faith: it responds to the need of mankind to understand faith not only through a theological discourse, but also through the language of symbols. Since the symbol of the Cross of the Apostolate is a manifestation of a spiritual experience, we will talk, in the next chapter, about the value we need to imbue in that experience to get to know God.

¹⁰ Cf *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1145-1148