

Chapter 10WAS CRUCIFIED, DIED AND WAS BURIED

Until now we have considered the first statements of our faith in Jesus Christ proposed in the Symbol of the Apostles with these words: “*I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, Our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary*”. We have confronted this confession of faith, expressed within the theological dogma, with the spiritual experience of Concepcion Cabrera, as it is visualized in the symbol of the Cross of the Apostolate. The different elements in the image of the Cross illuminate the doctrine expressed in the “Creed”, and the doctrine explains and interprets them. The light, the clouds, the pierced heart, the dove, and the fire speak of the Trinity, of Jesus Christ and of Mary.

The remaining aspects of the profession of faith in Jesus Christ, the ones that have to do with His Paschal mystery, crucifixion, death, descent into hell and resurrection, we will analyze at different “moments”, in the same way the liturgy of the Paschal Triduum presents them: the crucifixion on Friday; the descent into hell on Saturday, and the resurrection on Sunday.

In this chapter we will talk about the topic of Jesus’ death on the Cross, the mystery of our redemption which we should not separate from the mystery of the Incarnation. The theology of the Incarnation talks about Jesus’ “being” and centers around the fact that here a man *is* God; the theology of the Cross speaks instead of the event; the *activity* of God in the Cross and Resurrection.<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, in the cited text *Introduction to Christianity* explains how these two mysteries can be combined: “a Christology of being and the Incarnation must pass over into the theology of the Cross and become one with it”<sup>2</sup>.

We have expressed the foundation for this doctrine before: Jesus’ deeds and mission are an integral part of the person of Jesus Christ. And the main event of His mission is the Cross. Starting with the cross, faith takes us to identify the person with His word and His works. Jesus’ being, His person is better contemplated from the cross, and this cross says more than all the words in the world. The Lord’s crucifixion is such a full reality that everything else takes second place.

The arms of the Lord outstretched on the Cross reveal the complete devotion to men, they are a gesture of embrace, of full and undivided brotherliness<sup>3</sup>. The life of Jesus was an open existence, an existence that culminated and found consummation in His openness on the cross. His words at the last supper summarize the mystery of Calvary; it is “the body which will be given up for you, the blood that will be poured out for you”.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 229

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI demonstrates in his book *Introduction...* how the theology of the incarnation and the theology of the cross have been separated throughout the course of history, 230.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 252.

Let us compare the Cross at Golgotha with the Cross of the Apostolate. The Cross is truly the center of revelation, a revelation that does not reveal any previously unknown principles but reveals us to ourselves by revealing us before God and God in our midst.<sup>4</sup> It tells us what God is like, a Trinitarian God Who approaches man to save him.

### *A paschal cross*

The similarities between Benedict XVI's writings and Concepcion Cabrera's spiritual experience are very suggestive. She doesn't consider the cross, the one she lived, as a torment, but a paschal cross, a place where Jesus' heart rests, a place where God's love shows itself in human form. The image she contemplated in the Church of the Society of Jesus proves it this way, to the extent that she would ask Jesus in prayer, "Do you seek to rest on the Cross? And even when the answer is not easily heard, it is easy to guess it when she asks Jesus to hang Himself on the cross. In this circumstance, Concepcion does not mean the image of the Cross she saw in her vision, or the cross at Golgotha, rather she is talking about herself, who has become a living Cross of the Apostolate, a cross where the Heart of Jesus can rest (cf. AC 4, 201: September 26, 1894).

In fact, the Bible does not present the cross as an instrument to restore the right that had been violated and which needed to be reestablished. The cross is rather the expression of the radical love that surrenders completely; the expression of a life lived completely for others.

God's passionate love for his people—for humanity—is at the same time a forgiving love. Here Christians can see a dim prefigurement of the mystery of the Cross: so great is God's love for man that by becoming man he follows him even into death, and so reconciles justice and love.<sup>5</sup> A love so great that it places God against himself, His love against His justice.

Through the cross, God draws himself near to men in order to grant to us the gift of life. The right disturbed by sin is reestablished by the initiative of the love of God, who, in His creating mercy justifies the sinner and gives life to the dead. His justice is grace. It is not man who reconciles himself to God, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ", (2Cor 5:19). God does not wait for us to come to Him to be reconciled; He goes to meet us and reconciles us<sup>6</sup>.

That is to say, the cross is not the work of reconciliation that humanity offers to an angered God, but the proof of the incomprehensible love of God Who abases Himself to save mankind. This is why, in Christianity, the only possible answer from man to God is adoration and thanksgiving for having been the recipient of the salvific action of God.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 293.

<sup>5</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 10

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 283.

One of the Prefaces to the Eucharistic Prayer makes echo of this doctrine when it says: “since our praises add nothing to your greatness, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift”<sup>7</sup>. That is to say, we do not give glory to God when we offer something to Him but when we accept what he gives us and we recognize Him as the only Lord. Christian sacrifice does not consist in a giving of what God would not have without us, but in our becoming totally receptive and letting ourselves be completely taken over by Him. Christian sacrifice consists in letting God act in us, or as Concepcion used to say, “let yourself be formed by God”.

### *The meaning of the Cross*

The relationship that unites the theology of the Cross and the theology of the Incarnation is admirably expressed in an excerpt from the letter to the Hebrews; the author explains that from the moment of the entrance of the Son of God in this world, when He assumed human nature He integrates the mystery of the cross in his incarnation:

"Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin offerings, you neither desired nor delighted in." Then he says, "Behold, I come to do your will." (Heb 10:8-9)

The letter to the Hebrews insists on the expiration of the ancient rites. God does not want bulls nor he-goats, but the surrender of man. The author explains the meaning of the cross as being in the spiritual line of Psalm 50: “I need no bullock from your house, no goats from your fold. For every animal of the forest is mine, beasts by the thousands on my mountains”. (Ps. 50:9-10). The author dares to show without reservations the obsolescence of all ancient religions, because he knows that the response of man to God finds in Christ a whole new meaning.

The meaning of the death of Jesus is that it is the true liturgy of humanity. Jesus took away from the hands of men the sacrificial offerings and in their place He offered His own being, His own self; an existential sacrifice, this accomplishment on the cross has no cultic appearance; only when we refer to Jesus’ own declarations, where He identifies Himself with the Servant of Yahweh Isaiah talked about – who would give his own life for many – can we understand how, on Jesus’ part, death on the cross is the oblation of His body through an act of love.

He who, in terms of the Law was a layman, writes Benedict XVI, was the one true priest. His death was in reality the one and only liturgy of the world, a cosmic liturgy, in which Jesus stepped in the true temple, before the face of God Himself, not in the earthly temple, but before the eyes of the world.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Common Preface IV.

<sup>8</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 286

Indeed, Jesus entered once for all into the heavenly sanctuary, “with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption”(Heb 9:12). The blood symbolizes the life lived in the weakness of the flesh. The blood poured out is the expression of Jesus’ love, who, having loved, loved them to the end (Jn 13:1). This gesture of the love who gives completely is the real reconciliation of the world; this is why on Good Friday, the hour of the Cross is the time of the cosmic reconciliation. There is no other offering or priest than He who celebrated it: Jesus Christ. True adoration can only happen with the human “Yes” to God without reservations.

And so, in His incarnation Jesus assumed our human condition, sharing thus “in blood and flesh” (Heb 2:14), becoming this way, one with his brothers, capable of giving Himself even to death. It’s what happened on Good Friday; and the piercing with the spear (by the soldier) is a solemn witness that Jesus suffered our death<sup>9</sup>.

### *The pierced heart*

We have already talked about this central fact of Calvary. The sacrificial aspect of the death on the cross is symbolically expressed in the scene where the soldier pierces Jesus’ heart with a spear (Jn 19:33-34) The piercing with a spear that ends His earthly life shows His existence is completely open, now He is entirely “for”. The open side of the new Adam repeats the mystery of the “open side” of man at creation: it is the beginning of a new definitive community of men. Jesus is no longer a single individual; He is the new Adam from whose side Eve, a new mankind is formed<sup>10</sup>.

By insisting on the scene of the open side, from where blood and water gush forth, Saint John shows the fundamental motivation of the sacrifice of Christ: love. The outpouring of water from Jesus’ side symbolizes the gift of life. From the pierced heart springs forth the fountain of the Spirit. This opening of the living water, that represents the first outpouring of the Spirit, had been prophesied by Jesus himself: “Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: ‘Rivers of living water will flow from within him. He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive (cf. Jn. 7:37-39).”

If one looks at history with a keen eye, one can see this river flowing through the ages from Golgotha, from Jesus crucified and risen. One can see that, wherever this river reaches, the earth is decontaminated and fruit-bearing trees grow up; one can see that life, real life, flows from this spring of love that has given itself and continues to give itself<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ch-A Bernard, *Spiritual Theology*, (128 in the Spanish edition)

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 241

<sup>11</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 247-248.

*The Cross of the Apostolate*

Let us now turn our gaze back to the Cross of the Apostolate. We have pointed out repeatedly the Trinitarian value of the symbol that shows us the love of the Father, the mercy of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. There we can feel touched by the triune God, who reveals Himself to us and encourages us to open our hearts to receive this confession of love.

Like the cross at Golgotha, the Cross of the Apostolate also shows a movement that comes from the top down, because it is the object of a vision that God gave to Concepcion Cabrera as a new expression of His love for humanity. This Cross evokes the sacrifice of Christ priest and victim, Who through the Holy Spirit offered Himself as living host to the Heavenly Father, in order to give glory to the Father in our favor. This is how the presence of the Trinity on the Cross shows a Paschal characteristic, closely related with the central event of the history of salvation.

Let us examine the cross. In the center is the Heart of Christ surrounded by thorns, pierced by a lance, a heart that emits flames of fire, symbol of the love of Christ for his Father and of His mercy toward suffering mankind. The small cross embedded on the heart indicates the mysterious permanence of Jesus' passover in a phase of pain. Both in his external passion and in the passion of His spirit. The symbolization is not afraid to express opposites simultaneously, love and pain, life and death<sup>12</sup>. These are the two aspects of this oblation that are symbolized in the Cross of the Apostolate: the exterior oblation represented in the large cross and the interior oblation represented in the signs of the heart.

The cross is the altar of sacrifice; the heart is the offering; the dove is the love that consumes the offering; the radiant clouds that wrap around the cross are the representation of the mystery of the Father who accepts the Son's offering.

The Father is involved in the Son's mission, because there is a relationship of reciprocal belonging between them. The Father, Saint Paul tells us, "saved not his own Son, but gave him for us all" (Rm.8:32). He gives Him for love of the world; he raises Him and gives Him the Spirit of reconciliation and Life. And Jesus, at the same time, surrenders Himself to death, very much aware that the Father is with Him, even at the worst moment when He feels abandoned. The Father loves Him and cannot abandon him. (cf. Jn. 5:20; 14:31; 17:10).

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. E. Sadowska, *This beautiful Cross*

*They will look upon him whom they have pierced*

The habitual devotions of the passion tell us that the sacrifice is dependent on pain and vice versa. In reality the passion is not an accumulation of physical pain. What really counts is not pain as such, but a love so great, a love that expands existence so much that it is able to unite what is far with what is near, bringing God close to mankind who felt abandoned by God.

When we become aware of this reality, the Christian hears the prophetic words of Saint John: “They will look upon him whom they have pierced” (Jn. 19:37). This could be the description of the intimate direction of our Christian life: to keep our gaze on the crucified, paying better attention each time, to keep the eyes of our heart fixed on Him, and keep the hope up, because it is precisely the wounded one who loves us.

Within our context, the words of St John “They will look upon him whom they have pierced” come to fruition in an active way when we turn our gaze toward the Cross of the Apostolate; there we find the light that brings us inside the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ, performed at Easter.

We can now better understand what Concepcion would ask of her spiritual children: that they configure themselves to this Cross of the Apostolate, that they carry it within their hearts, that they partake of the Passion of Jesus Christ, inside this division that crucifies us, in this incompatibility we find ourselves: mainly to be able to love the Most Holy Trinity and at the same time to bring love to a world who does not know the Trinity.

Through the Cross of the Apostolate we can sense the God who talks about Himself, of the mystery of His communion. We can see there, clearly symbolized, the mystery of Christ Priest and Victim, who through the Holy Spirit offers Himself up as a living host to the Heavenly Father, to give glory to the father, in our favor. There we can have a glimpse of His priestly feelings, his oblation for the good of the world. In this way we can feel the touch of the Triune God, who reveals Himself to us and propels us to open our hearts to receive that revelation<sup>13</sup>.

In this contemplative attitude we are capable of understanding God’s plan which requires us to be aware of our vocation as human beings. We are truly directed to the Other, to the truly Other, to God, and the more we are within the totally Other, that is to say, in God, the more we are within our own selves. Man feels fulfilled whenever he is not enclosed within himself and stops affirming himself, when he opens completely to God and others.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. F. Torre, *The Cross of the Apostolate: a symbol*, (18 in the Spanish edition).

To summarize: Jesus lived for the Father and He died on the cross in obedience to the Father, for love of those who were separated from God<sup>14</sup> (cf. Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2). He rose and showed himself alive to the disciples, spilling over them the Spirit that he had received from the Father (cf. Jn. 20:22; Acts 1:3; 2:32).

In this way, the cross, symbol of pain and death transforms itself into a symbol of life, whose meaning we see represented in the Cross of the Apostolate. The Spirit is the divine fire that acts on the depths of the mystery of the Cross and comes to consume the offering; invades Jesus burning His heart with an internal fire which transforms Him “in a life-giving spirit” (1Cor. 15:45), and fulfills Him completely. From the heart of Christ springs, as a fountain, this same Spirit that is love, strength and fire (Acts 1:14; 2:1-14).

The reflection of the meaning of the death of Christ on the cross, which is expressed in the Creed with the words “Was crucified”, allows us now to move forward in reflecting about the global event of Easter, the passing from this world through death to resurrection. We move from Good Friday to the Saturday of the apparent absence of God.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. B. Forte, *The Trinity as history*, (104 in the Spanish edition).