

Chapter 3

I BELIEVE IN ONE GOD

The phrase “I believe in God”, which Christians have been using for almost 2,000 years to profess their faith in God one and triune, stems from the Old Testament. Behind it lies the confession of faith of the people of Israel: God is one and unique, whom we should love with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength. (Cf. Dt 6,5)

How did the people of Israel get to the point of professing their faith in an only God? Where did they find that certainty? Perhaps we should first inquire about the different forms in which the “topic” of God has been presented throughout the history of humankind. As a matter of fact, Benedict XVI, in the work on which we based our study, makes an analysis of those forms, which can be summarized into three: monotheism, polytheism and atheism. “Monotheism, polytheism and atheism are three key words which briefly describe the three main paths taken by human history on the question of God.”¹ These three forms affirm the unity and uniqueness of the absolute; what’s different in their idea is how man should behave in front of Him.

For our purpose we shall directly go back to the origin of the confession of faith made by the people of Israel, which is the background of our Christian faith in one God, looking to compare it with the symbol of the Cross of the Apostolate and with the mystical experience of Concepción Cabrera.

The key event that took the people of Israel to the confession of faith in one God is found in the book of Exodus. It’s the biblical passage of the burning bush. It was there that God revealed His name to Moses.

The God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob’s name is Yahweh: “This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations” (Ex 3:13-15) Within this revelation we can find the basis for the idea of God which will permeate through all of Israel’s existence. This is how the name of Yahweh was historically united to the beginnings of the people of Israel.

The wish to see God

The revelation of the name of God brought as a consequence to the people of Israel the wish, the desire, of meeting Him. But we must not forget that even before any revelation, there exists in the human being a need to explain the meaning of his/her existence beyond this world.

Where man experiences his solitariness, he experiences at the same time how much his whole existence is a cry for the “You”, and how ill-adapted he is to be only an “I” in himself.²

¹ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, pg 104

² J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 106

And so from this situation there naturally arises the heart's desire to find rest outside of itself, in love, in the contemplation of eternal truths, in the union with God, the Supreme Good. We can say that the arrow of longing pierces man and it is precisely this way that he gets wings and feels thrust high bound.

That is to say that the origin of the idea of God in the history of mankind is found in the experience of the person him/herself who transcends him/herself. It's the secret religious need which is found within the intimacy of every human being and that launches man to seek the encounter with that which is transcendent, beyond man's own being.

This natural longing, which explains the desire for God, is a need "written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for."³

And so, the need to see God, united to the revelation that God makes of Himself, helps man understand God as a personal being, a God who is near and enfolds us with his gaze.

This revelation echoes not only in man's intellect, but also, and especially, in the interior experience of the Christian, an experience that can be expressed in different ways, sometimes through symbolic language, as we mentioned before. God is not an excuse made up by our own need; He Himself has revealed Himself to man and has become close to man.

To seek the face of God

The desire to see God became in the Old Testament a search for the face of God. And despite God's judgment: "so that you may see my back; but my face is not to be seen". (Ex 33, 23), The Psalms invite us to continually search for the face of God, to rejoice in this seeking and to have recourse to his power (cf. Ps 105,3). The just express their desire to see God mixed in with the pain that flows from the deepest recess of their being: "I am just - let me see your face; when I awake, let me be filled with your presence." (Ps 17, 15). Pious men pray to God that He would "Let the light of your face shine on us" (Ps 4); and with the same meaning: "O LORD of hosts, restore us; Let your face shine upon us, that we may be saved." (Ps 80, 4)⁴

Benedict XVI, in an article published in his book "on the Way to Jesus Christ", talking about that fundamental attitude of searching for God that the people of Israel had, proposes a decisive question, to which he himself gives an answer: "how should we understand this longing to behold in a religion that prohibits images and thus seems to exclude "looking" from worship and from devotions in general? What does the Israelite mean, actually, when he seeks the face of God, knowing that there can be no image of Him?"⁵

The answer lies in the meaning of the words "image" and "face". "Because of its ability to express feelings and reactions, Panim (*face*) designates the subject, inasmuch as he turns toward

³ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 27

⁴ J Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 103

⁵ J. Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 18

others..., that is inasmuch as he is the subject of relationships. Panim is a term that describes relationships".⁶ And, even though it is not allowed to represent God through an image, people still seek his face. That is to say, we long for the presence of a personal God, even if we cannot see his image. Images are abandoned, making room for the concept of person in the context of a relationship. God has a face, because he is a person. This is the revelation of Jesus Christ, in whom we can see the face of God.

Our profession of faith in God one and triune

God is unique, one only Lord, but he is not a God of solitude, but a Trinity God, divine family. Although in the Old Testament there is certainly no kind of revelation of God Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but behind the name of God *Elohim*, a plural, nevertheless in this process there is latent an experience that points toward the Christian concept of the triune God.⁷

The mystery of God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, comes from the Church as a fundamental dogma of our Faith. The acknowledgment of God, one and triune is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them.⁸

The Christian Community, from the first centuries, found the great need to reflect on how She could join the data about God One and at the same time Triune. The First Councils promulgated the doctrinal truths, which would later on become part of the Dogma, but in the first communities, in the sense of the Creed, and by origin, faith is not a recitation of doctrines, an acceptance of theories...it signifies an all-encompassing movement of human existence.⁹

What was clear, in the light of the Scriptures, was a truth of faith, formulated in its essential elements: the Father is the source of life; He sends his Son to communicate His eternal life to mankind, to make them "divine-like" through Jesus the man, and in this way receive the status of adopted children (cf. Jn 3,16; 5,23.36.38; 20.31; Gal 4,4); He also sends the Holy Spirit, so that mankind can know God and call Him by the name Father (cf. Gal 4,6; Jn 14,16.26; 15, 26; 16, 7).

The consequence is clear; man, being image and likeness of the Father and the Son through whom he's been created (cf. Jn 1,3; Col 1,15-17), takes part in the sonship of the Son. In this way Christians become sons and daughters in Jesus the Son; and, as such, also brothers and sisters, so that Christ is the "firstborn among many brothers" (Rm 8,29; cf 1Jn 3,1).

The experience of God

Now we can take a step forward. This doctrine of faith, expressed in a theological manner, is found alive in many different expressions of Christian piety, when we cross ourselves, when we invoke the grace of the Lord that allows us to act in the Spirit as children of the Father, and, especially, in the

⁶ J Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 18, quoting H Simian-Yofre

⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 125

⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 234

⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 88

spiritual experience of many saintly people. One of these saintly people is the Venerable Servant of God Concepción Cabrera de Armida; she lived for the contemplation of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Here is a “contemplation” she repeats several times throughout her writings:

"I saw God the Father (rejoicing eternally in Himself in His infinite perfections, in an ineffable complacency) reproduce Himself with all the ardor of His purity in the Second Divine Person, who is the Word. I saw the Word as a perfect and full reflection of the Father, in the eternal transport of this most holy divine Love which exists between the Father and the Son. I saw their bond of light and of love, the Holy Spirit, inseparable from the Father and from the Son. [I understood everything at one point, no time or division.] Oh blessed Trinity! Who then will be able to comprehend You, if by one single ray emanating from Your transparence the soul is wholly absorbed?" (Diary, 10, 261-263: August 28, 1898). (As translated in “A Mother’s Spiritual Diary”, *Philippin*)

Her knowledge of the Trinity, which emanates from her interior vision, and which manifests an intimate relationship with God, as we have already mentioned, is reflected in the symbol of the Trinitarian Cross of the Apostolate, in the manner of radiant lights and clouds. The symbol shows the transparency of a truth that theology teaches in its own way: God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each in the presence of the others, in total reciprocity, in immediate loving relationships. Concepcion delved deeply, by a special grace, in the mystery of God.

One of her first mystical experiences, related to this mystery, is the vision she had of the gaze of the Father through the image of a face, a face which is located in the apse of the Blessed Sacrament chapel in the church of Mt Carmel in San Luis Potosí. She was deeply moved when she heard a voice say: “My Father is gazing upon you”. This is how she expresses it:

I was being bathed in that gaze, permeating me, purifying me... Don’t know how long this lasted; I wanted to hide, cover myself in a thousand shawls: and no matter how deep I went inside my own nothingness, that which was celestial permeated my body and soul. (Diary 25, 189: Feb 7, 1907)¹⁰

God was talking to her from an image. That gaze of the Father had a profound impact in her soul. Something she’ll never forget.

The father has looked upon me and with that divine look, which cleans whatever it touches, he has made me His, he has purified me so many times. I have received from the Father, whom I adore and love with all the strength of my heart, innumerable graces. My Father in Heaven gave me His Divine Word.¹¹

¹⁰ Here is the same text she writes at a different time of her life: “One day, while I was at the Temple of Mt Carmel, hurting very much because of the penances, the Lord told me: “The Father is looking at you”, and I felt bathed, electrified, humbled. “Call on Him”, he said, “call Him with filial love and when despair hits you, or pains of any kind, when I hide from you and the Precious Dove hides from you, call Him and say: iFather, Father!, place your spirit in his Loving hands and rest in His tenderness””. (*Autobiography* 1, 287)

¹¹ Cf. C. Cabrera, *Sed Perfectos (Be Perfect)*, XXVI, 614-646

This experience of the gaze of the Father is manifested a short time later in the form of light, a light that envelops the Cross of the Apostolate¹², and it pierces as well the heart of anybody who lets him/herself be embraced by it, and they become living images of that cross.

The Trinity in the symbol of the Cross of the Apostolate

From the point of view of God as a revelation to Concepcion Cabrera, the Cross of the Apostolate is a symbol that God gives His Church, and it shows the Trinitarian vision of His being. The symbols of the heart, the dove and the clouds are intertwined inside a frame resplendent with light. The light's different tones represent the three divine persons who permeate each other: the light of the Father envelops the Cross; this light shines in the heart of the Son as if from a fire; the light of the Holy Spirit shines down on the cross giving life to it¹³. As an overview we can perceive, in the image of the Cross, the relationship within the Trinity through the elements that make it up.

For this purpose we must remember that the Cross of the Apostolate is not a motionless image, like a snapshot would be, but rather an image in constant movement, which transcends itself and becomes an invitation and impulse to stay the course we are following.

If we want to express it in technical theological language, in the symbol of the Cross there is an eschatological dynamic¹⁴. This dynamic of movement takes us beyond the visual and material reality, purifying the vision, until we can contemplate the beauty of the face of God.¹⁵

The heart pierced by the lance, crowned with thorns, alive and beating, reveals Christ, and in Him we can sense the image of the invisible God.

The Cross of the Apostolate is a Paschal Cross that joins heaven and earth, an image that integrates the element of the passion and death with the resurrection. The heart is the love of God made human flesh; the flames that envelop it are the expression of the feelings of God the Father, feelings of love for us, human beings, whom he loves so much that he sent His only Son to us. In this regard the image of the heart is transformed also in a concept of relationship, for whoever possesses a human heart is capable of being in a relationship with their neighbor, showing their love.

Concepcion hears Jesus again with expressions that remind us of the Nicene Creed:

“I am Light from Light, which I shine especially over the Cross of the Apostolate. My Heart is the dawn that sheds light on every man, and the Holy Spirit is the resplendent Sun of this same divine Heart. Let the darkness of errors cease [...]; may the Cross of

¹² The gaze of the Father is so fruitful (Jesus would tell me, in delight). He began His work in you; the Holy Spirit in your vision by Himself at first, and above the Cross later, in that symbolism, initiated it (the work), and the Divine Word, I, consummated it in your heart, to spill over to the Works, vocations, in the thousands of souls that belong to them now, and will belong to them (the works of the Cross) in the future (*Diary* 64, 37A)

¹³ Cf. Gisbert Greshake, *Creer en el Dios uno y trino (To believe in God one and triune, not translated into English)* where PG 36, 135 is quoted.

¹⁴ We apply to the image of the cross, words Benedict XVI used to refer to icons (Cf. *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 28)

¹⁵ Cf. J Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 40.

my heart triumph, and with her I, Christ Jesus, with the Father and the Holy Spirit".
(Diary 14, 135: July 20, 1900)

The symbol shows us in its light the eternal "interpenetration" of love and life among Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this mingling of love constitutes the source of all life, love and communion in creation, made in the image of the Trinity. Concepcion Cabrera says the following:

Where does all of creation come from, if not from the fruitfulness of the Father? How did the Holy Spirit make the God-man incarnate in Mary, if not from the same fertility of the one God? Where do grace, miracles, virtues and most holy love come from? And charity in all its forms? And holiness in all its manifestations, if not from the fruitfulness, root, beginning and life of all lives, and everything supernatural and divine? (Diary 55, 135: May 20, 1930)

This divine fecundity which proceeds from the Father is presented in the Cross through the heart of Christ and the fire of the Holy Spirit which vivifies, saves, transforms. Light and life are mutually united. "When we read about God's face shining, God is being addressed in such passages as the source of life".¹⁶ "Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me." (Jn 6,57). "For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to his Son the possession of life in himself." (Jn 5,26)

And so we see how the information of the biblical revelation and the theological reflection mingle with the experience the believer has of God. This reflection about the mystery of the Trinity allows us to delve in the confession of faith, as exposed in the Creed, in each one of the Divine Persons.

¹⁶ J. Ratzinger, *On the Way*, 23