

## Chapter 5

### I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

The evangelist St. Mark introduces his gospel (Mk 1:1) with the double character of Jesus as Christ and Son of God. This is the axis around which our reflection is drafted. The object is to go into the content in depth, in order to subsequently explain the identity and the mission of Jesus through symbolic language.

Continuing the method we started for this work, there are three distinguishable rings that are interwoven: the theological reflection of Benedict XVI about the Creed, the resource of some significant texts about the identity of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, and the contemplation of the lights that shines forth from the symbol of the Cross of the Apostolate.

As a starting point we ask ourselves the following questions: Who is Jesus Christ? What is our understanding when we say the name of Jesus within the context of our faith? What is the image of Christ presented by the Symbol of the Apostles?

The biblical-theological reflection, united to the spiritual reflection of the knowledge of God, will allow us to study in depth the richness that surrounds the second article of our faith. “I believe in Jesus Christ”, since, as we have distinguished, in order to study in depth the mystery of the faith we have to unite the theological study with the experience of life.

Theology is never a purely human discourse about God, but always, and inseparably, the *Logos*, the all-embracing Word in which God declares himself. This is why scientific rationality and lived devotion are two necessarily complementary and interdependent aspects of study.<sup>1</sup>

As for the order of the topics to discuss the mystery of Jesus Christ, it would seem most logical to follow the movement that the prologue of the gospel of St John presents to us. He begins by introducing the identity of Jesus Christ as the Word who is in God and is God, to continue with his incarnation, the work of the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb, to follow with the mission of Christ, his Paschal mystery and to end with the return of Jesus “to the bosom of the Father”.

However, we prefer to maintain the order of the Creed, which begins with the mission of Jesus among us. And so, in the first place we should clarify the meaning of the term “Christ” as it is applied to Jesus in the Gospels.

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, *Your primary service is prayer and the celebration of the Divine Office*, Speech to the Cistercian monks of the Abbey of Heiligenkreuz, Sept. 9, 2007. Cf. J. Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, 82.

The order is the following: we analyze the meaning that is hidden in the term Jesus Christ; we find in it an image that refers us to the text of St John about the open side of Jesus, a symbol of total surrender and the supreme manifestation of the love of God; we conclude with the image of the Heart of Christ on the Cross of the Apostolate.

Specifically we refer to the symbol of the Heart of Christ as the fruit of the spirituality lived by Jesus, that appears in the center of the Cross of the Apostolate. We want to do as Hans Urs von Balthasar said, “a practice of theology on our knees”.<sup>2</sup>

### *Jesus Christ in the confession of faith*

The symbol of the Apostles confesses its faith in Jesus Christ with these words: “I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord”. Three terms designate the being and the mission of the second Person of the Trinity: Christ, Son and Lord. The word *Christ* is a title that when transformed in a given name, identifies Jesus with his mission. The concept of *Son* indicates the relationship that unites Jesus with God his Father. The term Lord given in the Old Testament to God, when we place the word “our” in ahead of it, turns it into the Emmanuel announced by the prophet Isaiah, God with us (cf. Is. 7:14ss) the living God present among us.

The term “Christ” as we were saying, is not a given name, it is a title that indicates the mission, announced in the Old Testament, of the descendant of David: to establish the kingdom of God (cf. 2Sam 7:11-12). When the first Christian community joined this title with the name of Jesus, it declared the knowledge that it had of the person of Jesus Christ. The union of those two terms manifests that in the person of Jesus they identify his person (expressed in the name Jesus) and his mission (expressed in the title Christ).<sup>3</sup>

In Jesus Christ the hopes of the people of God were realized in abundance, giving fulfillment in his person to the Law and the Prophets.

Pope Benedict XVI in his *Introduction to Christianity*, explains the link that unites the terms Jesus and Christ; the personal identity of Jesus and his act of surrender are the bond of union between faith and love, now that the I of Jesus, his person has this quality: his I is not an independent I, but rather is Being completely derived *from* the “Thou” of the Father and lived *for* the “You” of men.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Theologie und Heiligkeit, in *Verbum Caro*, Schriften zur Theologie I, Eistedeln, 1960, 195-224

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 319.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 202-208.

In an advance of what we will explain in the following chapters, the name Jesus, which designates the person, does not explain his identity wholly; it is necessary to add that Jesus, a historical man is at the same time the Son of God. The expression “Son of God” indicate that Jesus proceeds *from* the Father, he is a being-that-comes-from-another and the title Christ indicates that he is a being *for* everyone else.

The concern in the early Church about the true divinity of Jesus springs from the same root as the concern about his true humanity; only if Jesus was really a man like us can he be *our* mediator, and only if he is really God, like God, does the meditation reach its goal.<sup>5</sup>

To understand Jesus as Christ, prophet, shepherd and priest implies being persuaded that he himself has surrendered by his word. The doctrine of Jesus cannot be separated from his being. His person is the word of God. In him the person is the mission and the mission is the person. We stand before an *I* who has identified himself in such a way with his word that there is no distinction between the I and the Word.

This is heart of St. John’s Christology: the identity of work and being, of deed and person, the total merging of the person in his work and in the total coincidence of the doing with the person himself, who keeps back nothing for himself but gives himself completely in his work. He is a totality of Son, Word, and mission; his activity reaches right down to the ground of being and is one with it. And it is precisely in this unity of being and doing that his special character lies.<sup>6</sup>

Having said this, we can understand what Jesus says concerning his messianism: that his messianism is not the one of the son of David, i.e. a temporary messiah, rather it is that of the Son of man who surrendered “*for us*” (cf. Dan 7:14, Mk. 8:32ff)

That is to say, the Christ is not a king limited in space and time; he renounced worldly powers; he saw the meaning of his human existence not in the power and in the auto-affirmation rather in the radical *being for* others.

Jesus is king in that he was crucified; he reigns from the Cross. His royalty is the gift of himself to mankind. The event of the crucifixion of Jesus says more than all the words. The crucified Christ is a reality so full that everything else becomes secondary. From the cross, faith gazes at Jesus not only as someone who has said and done something, but in his person his message can be read: God is love.

*The symbol of the pierced heart*

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 165-166

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 225-226

In order to symbolically express the sacrificial aspect of death on the cross, the evangelist St. John calls attention to something apparently unimportant, but laden with symbolic meaning: the scene of the transfixion of the side of Jesus (Jn. 19:33-34).

This scene is at the center of the history of salvation, in the fullness of times (cf. Gal 4:4-5), centered in the “hour” of Jesus. The “hour” of Jesus is the moment when he fulfills the mission for which he was predestined. This “hour” is that of his exaltation on the cross, the hour of his triumph over Satan, the hour of his passing from this world to the Father (cf. Jn 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). On the cross Jesus fulfills his mission and frees man from subjection to the law and grants us the condition of adoptive children of God.

The expression of St John “they will look upon him whom they have pierced” invites us to the contemplation of the wounded heart and directs us to go deeply into the love of Jesus Christ that is the fundamental motivation of his sacrifice. The image of the heart, aside from being the bearer of affective energy, contains a very rich theological content.

“Heart” indicates the center of the person, the seat of his feelings and intentions. The heart of the Redeemer manifests the love of God for humanity, his will of universal salvation, his infinite mercy. To contemplate the heart of Christ means to adore this Heart, which, after having loved us until the end, was pierced by a lance spilling from the height of the Cross blood and water, source of inexhaustible new life.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus allowed – says Concepcion Cabrera – that they tore his side with incredible cruelty so he could pour in torrents the riches and treasures we need in order to make us happy. Jesus made us happy through sacrifice and pain (AC 12: 297-300: April 12, 1900).

Through love symbolized in the heart, the ultimate goal of the plan of God is manifested through the Son. This was the reason for the incarnation of the Son of God: to make humanity adhere itself to the eternal fountain of divine salvation, to God himself who is love and by means of this adhesion of faith and of love to participate in the divine life.<sup>8</sup>

The Fathers of the Church understood the water and the blood that gushed forth from the open side of Jesus as symbols of the sacraments of Baptism and of the Eucharist. With the water of Baptism, and thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, the intimate love of the trinity is revealed to us. The blood, symbol of the love of the Good Shepherd, is poured out over us through the Eucharistic mystery.

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<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, *The Heart of Christ, love of God for humanity*, angelus, June 5, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ch. A. Bernard, *Spiritual Theology*, 129.

Gazing at the lord's pierced side helps us to recognize the manifold gifts of grace that derive from it and opens us to all other forms of Christian worship embraced by the devotion to the heart of Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

Contemplating "him whom they have pierced" moves us in this way to open our hearts to others, recognizing the wounds inflicted upon the dignity of the human person.<sup>10</sup>

### *The heart of Christ on the Cross of the Apostolate*

In the topic that we are discussing – the interpretation of the Cross of the Apostolate, fruit of the spiritual experience of Concepcion Cabrera de Armida -, the symbolism of the flames emanating from the pierced Heart of Jesus become evident in the center of the Cross: they represent the love that the Heart radiates. In the heart, the image of the Son of God shines forth, because his heart is not separated, torn apart from the person; it is the same risen Jesus; it displays the marks of the immolated offering, the crown of thorns and the lance that pierced it; from it blood and water gushed forth.

The Cross of the Apostolate represents Jesus already immolated, but it also presents him alive, in his current condition: he has passed already to his Father and to glorified life.<sup>11</sup>

This Cross, as we have already mentioned, is the spiritual expression of the life of Concepcion Cabrera de Armida, at nine years of marriage and four children. An event that marks the beginning of the road to transforming union, the first golden link of a chain of love that unites her with Christ.

Concepcion sees Jesus on that Cross; there He is in order to give it life, hidden for those who want to live hidden with him; only the heart is visible in order to attract, in order to soften with love the bark of the cross. Jesus reveals that his heart manifests his whole being "you know that my heart cannot be separated from me" (AC 2, 42: April 1894). "The Cross is seen with the heart to show that the Cross is never bare, rather it always has the heart of God inseparably nailed to it, that is to say His mercy and love." (AC 8:137)

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<sup>9</sup> Benedict XVI, *Letter to the Jesuits about the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the encyclical "Haurietis aquas"*, May 23, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for Lent*, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> "The Cross is not alone – says the Lord – because I never move away from my Cross and wherever the Cross is, there I am. I will be inside it, giving it life, hidden for those who want to live in hiding with me, but I make my heart jump so it is visible on the Cross, to attract, to sweeten the bark of my cross with my love. You know my heart cannot be separated from me (AC 2, 42: April 1894).

Indeed, if the Cross of the Apostolate exercises a powerful attraction it is thanks to the presence of the heart of Jesus, alive and beating. The cross repels when it is deprived of the love of God; the heart attracts.<sup>12</sup> This cross is a summary of the experience of faith of Concepcion Cabrera, symbolizing everything we can love here and in eternity, because the heart of Jesus is inside there, giving it life (cf. AC 2:25; 3:44, 76:90).

“This is why today my heart is overflowing with holy joy – says Concepción – because the world’s dragged by that sacred and holy Cross which will save it. And how could it not if that divine Heart is nailed right there.” (AC 7,170-173; May 4,1896).

These words are a precursor for what Benedict XVI says today: “the Heart of Jesus not only encircles the mystery of the love of God for us, but it also shows us the content of every true spirituality and Christian devotion. We can only be Christian when we look upon “Him who they have pierced” (Jn. 19:37; cf. Zac 12:10).

And so we hear once more Concepcion’s words: “The attraction and the power of the Cross comes from the heart of Christ that lives in it. The Heart gives the Cross, by its touch, a love on fire, sanctifying and giving virtue to the Cross so it in turn can sanctify and inflame souls.” (AC 4:54-55: August 6, 1894).

So then, as we mentioned in the beginning, the theological reflection, united to the spiritual experience of Concepcion Cabrera, about the second article of our faith, “I believe in Jesus Christ” enables us to understand that faith in Christ is not about embracing a doctrine, but about receiving a person who shows Himself through the love of His Heart; faith in Christ is to accept the person as Word and the Word as person.

In other words, “to follow Christ”, to be a Christian, is not to slavishly observe a system of norms, thinking as we do so only of ourselves, but to become freed to simple human goodness. The principle of love, if it is to be genuine, includes faith. Faith and love condition and demand each other reciprocally.<sup>13</sup>

The Heart of Jesus is the fountain from where the water of salvation gushes forth. (Cf. Is 12:3). It exhorts believers to open themselves to the mystery of God and of his love and to allow themselves to be transformed by it. Their relationship with the Heart of Jesus, revives their faith in the saving love of God and allows them to welcome Him ever better into their lives.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. AC 4,110: August 31, 1894; 4,287: October 30, 1894

<sup>13</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 270.

<sup>14</sup> Benedict XVI, *Letter to the Jesuits...*, May 23, 2006.

To turn to this source steers us towards the true knowledge of Jesus Christ and helps us to experience more in depth the love of God, keeping our gaze set on Him until we *live* completely because we experience His love.

This consideration of the love of God in the person of Jesus Christ, in him who unites the terms Jesus and Christ as the expression of the unity between his person and his actions leads us to the confession of our faith in Jesus Christ as *Son of God*, expressed in the symbol of the Apostles.