

Roman Catechism Series

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Credo in Unum Deum

First Article of the Creed

By Matthew Plese

I Believe in One God

The five simple words, “I believe in One God,” by which we start the recitation of the Creed are incredibly powerful and worthy of sufficient reflection word-by-word. Even the Roman Catechism, in its first paragraph on the start of this first article of the Creed, notes that “since great mysteries lie concealed under almost every word, the pastor must now give them a more careful consideration, in order that, as far as God has permitted, the faithful may approach, with fear and trembling, to contemplate the glory of His majesty.”^[1]

Taken from the first-person *Credo* (“I believe”) in Latin, the “I” in the Creed requires that we speak for ourselves. Each individual person must declare his faith publicly and individually, not allowing his statement to be absorbed into the collective “We” of the assembly. Just as we must all individually stand accountable before God, while here on this earth we must individually live a life of grace and individually assert our faith. This is not something that our families, our parents, our priests, or anyone else can do for us. With personal conviction, each of us must boldly and unhesitatingly begin the Creed in the first person: *Credo*.

What It Means to Believe

When we look up the word “believe” in the dictionary, we find it has five definitions: “to accept as true, to judge or regard or look upon as reliable, to be very confident of, to follow a creed or have a faith, to credit with veracity.”^[2] When we use the word “believe” in the Catholic Church, we mean all of those things. Our Faith is a supernatural gift of God which enables us to believe all that God has revealed, not based on our understanding, but on the authority of God revealing. We believe in God, even though we cannot see Him. We believe in the Trinity, although it is beyond our understanding. “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6).

The Roman Catechism explains, “The word *believe* does not here mean *to think, to suppose, to be of opinion*; but, as the Sacred Scriptures teach, it expresses the deepest conviction, by which the mind gives a firm and unhesitating assent to God revealing His mysterious truths. As far, therefore, as regards use of the word here, he who firmly and without hesitation is convinced of anything is said to believe.”[\[3\]](#)

Rather than merely reciting the Creed without considering the meaning behind its words individually, the Roman Catechism further extorts us, the faithful of the Catholic Faith, to utter our *Credo* with the same conviction that spurred on the Apostles to proclaim the truths of God despite certain persecution:

“[H]e who says, *I believe*, besides declaring the inward assent of the mind, which is an internal act of faith, should also openly profess and with alacrity acknowledge and proclaim what he inwardly and in his heart believes. For the faithful should be animated by the same spirit that spoke by the lips of the Prophet when he said: *I believe, and therefore did I speak* [Ps. 115:10], and should follow the example of the Apostles who replied to the princes of the people: *We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard* [Acts 4:20]. They should be encouraged by these noble words of St. Paul: *I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth* [Rom. 1:16]; and likewise, by those other words; in which the truth of this doctrine is expressly confirmed: *With the heart we believe unto justice; but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation* [Rom. 10:10].”[\[4\]](#)

To assert belief in one God rather than many was an irreconcilable rupture with the pagan world to which Our Lord came. Aside from the Jewish people of the time, the peoples of the entire world were given to polytheism almost entirely. In the Catholic Church, the true “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), there is likewise only one God – a single Divine Nature. We do not worship many gods or even several gods or even a few gods; we worship one God alone, that is, the one true God.

And it was the oneness of God that brought about the persecution of the early Christians. Unknown to many, the Romans at first were accepting of the Christians and even invited them to display a statue to Christ in the Pantheon, the pagan temple dedicated to all gods. But the Christians refused to do so, and they refused to accept any pagan deity as real. It was this refusal to accept false gods that brought about the persecution of the early Church.

For us present-day Christians who are told, “Keep your religion to yourself and all will be fine,” we can see a parallel between our need to speak out against error and publicly defend the truth that spurred on the early martyrs, even when threatened with torture. Do we have the conviction to utter our *Credo* in one God in the face of social persecution, the threat of

losing our jobs or being ostracized? Do we have the same conviction to persevere that we can speak the words of King David: “I spoke of Thy testimonies before kings: and I was not ashamed” (Ps. 118:46)?

Monotheism Alone Is Rational

The Roman Catechism appeals to our ability to reason to illustrate that there can only be one God: “From what is said it must also be confessed that there is but one God, not many gods. For we attribute to God supreme goodness and infinite perfection, and it is impossible that what is supreme and most perfect could be common to many. If a being lack anything that constitutes supreme perfection, it is therefore imperfect and cannot have the nature of God.”[\[5\]](#)

The Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas, summarizes this point in his *Summa Theologiae* when he writes that “God comprehends in Himself the whole perfection of being. If then many gods existed, they would necessarily differ from each other. Something therefore would belong to one which did not belong to another. And if this were a privation, one of them would not be absolutely perfect; but if a perfection, one of them would be without it. So, it is impossible for many gods to exist.”[\[6\]](#)

God Himself possesses the epitome of all virtues. We say that He is the most perfect, most benign, most generous, most loving, etc. We also assert that God knows all things, sees all things, directs all things, etc. So, if there was more than one God, then God would be lacking. There would be a different entity that was perhaps more loving or more knowledgeable or more generous.

Regarding the certainty of our faith in God, the Catechism explains, “The knowledge derived through faith must not be considered less certain because its objects are not seen.” Our belief in one God is not a mere opinion. It is the profession of an objective, metaphysical truth.



The Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and of Earth

Why do we call God “Father” in the Creed? The Catechism expounds:

“Even some on whose darkness the light of faith never shone conceived God to be an eternal substance from whom all things have their beginning, and by whose Providence they are governed and preserved in their order and state of existence. Since, therefore, he to whom a family owes its origin and by whose wisdom and authority it is governed is called *father*, so by an analogy derived from human things these persons gave the name *Father* to God, whom they acknowledge to be the Creator and Governor of the universe.”^[7]

What does it mean to create? To create means to bring something out of nothing. Only God has the capacity to produce things from no-things. What did God create? Everything. Creation is the mirror through which God shows us His Divine reflection. God created Heaven and all of what is contained in Heaven. We know that the greatest benefit of being accepted into Heaven is encountering the “Beatific Vision,” which is the ability to see the face of God and live. Seeing God produces the greatest joy, happiness, peace, and love that are beyond imaginable to the human mind. In fact, the definition of being a saint is to possess the ability to see God and not to die from it, a gift which no man earns but which God Himself gratuitously gives (cf. Ex. 33:20).

The Church teaches dogmatically that Heaven is the state of everlasting happiness. It is a dogma of Faith that the happiness of the blessed is everlasting. This truth has been repeatedly defined by the Church, because if it was not everlasting then it would not truly be a place of “happiness.”

Jesus called Heaven the “Kingdom.” We understand that in this Kingdom there are Angels and Saints, the throne of God, and above all the Blessed Trinity. Jesus reigns in Heaven, along with His Blessed Mother who is Queen of Heaven and earth. It is a Kingdom that makes even the most luxurious of earthly kingdoms pale in comparison. In this Kingdom, Christ is the Head of His Church, in Heaven and on earth. We recognize the Pope as the visible head of the Church on earth, that is, the earthly representative (i.e., vicar) of Christ Himself, the invisible Head.

The Pope works to help the Church on earth obtain salvation in Heaven by bringing as many people into the Church as possible. The only sure way to gain Heaven is through the Catholic Church, because the Catholic Church alone was founded by Christ as the guardian of Divine Revelation and dispenser of the saving grace He won for us. Through the Sacraments, which Christ Himself instituted and entrusted to His Church, we receive sanctifying grace - the very life of Christ within us - which is necessary for salvation. As Pope Pius XII articulated so well in his encyclical on the Church, *Mystici Corporis Christi*:

“... We have committed to the protection and guidance of heaven those who do not belong to the visible Body of the Catholic Church, solemnly declaring that after the example of the Good Shepherd We desire nothing more ardently than that they may have life and have it more abundantly [John 10:10]. ...We ask each and every one of them to correspond to the interior movements of grace, and to seek to withdraw from that state in which they cannot be sure of their salvation. For even though by an unconscious desire and longing they have a certain relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, they still remain deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church. Therefore, may they enter into Catholic unity...”[\[8\]](#) (n. 103)

It is often said that the Mass is Heaven on earth. During the celebration of the Mass, all the Saints and Angels are present and praising God along with us. As you sing the Gloria, the Angels who originally sung this hymn of praise at the birth of Christ are there at the Mass proclaiming these words again.

During the Holy Sacrifice, we are united mystically to the perpetual Eucharistic Liturgy that is celebrated in Heaven. We do not actually walk into Heaven, but we are taken to the threshold of Heaven, into the vestibule of the gates of Heaven. Although physically in church, we are spiritually at the gates of Heaven, on Calvary at the Crucifixion, peering into the empty tomb, and participating in the celestial “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Apoc. 19:9). The Book of the Apocalypse, written by St. John the Apostle, describes in Heaven the presence of an altar (cf. Apoc. 8:3), the same altar to which our prayers ascend from our altars here on earth. This is why the Canon of the Mass includes the following prayer after the Consecration: “We most humbly beseech Thee, almighty God, command these offerings

to be borne by the hands of Thy holy Angel to Thine altar on high, in the sight of Thy divine Majesty, that as many as shall partake of the most holy Body and Blood of Thy Son at this altar, may be filled with every heavenly grace and blessing.”

Creator of All Things Visible and Invisible

In addition to Heaven, God created all of what is contained in Heaven. The Angels are diaphanous beings, meaning they are pure spirits without bodies. They were created to praise God, manifesting a state of perpetual adoration of the Most Holy Trinity. They are the attendants of God, “mighty in strength,” who “execute His word, hearkening to the voice of His orders” (Ps. 102:20). They act as messengers and are sent to communicate with humans what God’s Will is in a given situation.

All of the Angels were created by God prior to His creation of man. In Hebrews we read, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister to them who shall receive the inheritance of **salvation?**” (**Hebrews 1:14**). Like humans, Angels have intelligence and free will, the ability to either obey God or rebel against Him. Unlike humans, however, the Angels were given a much greater infused knowledge of God and His mysteries due to their more exalted nature as pure spirits. As such, they were given one opportunity by God to either choose Him or not shortly after He created them. Sadly, as we read in Scripture, many chose to rebel:

“And there was a great battle in heaven, Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels: And they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who seduceth the whole world; and he was cast unto the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.” (Apoc. 12:7-9)

Commenting on this episode, the Roman Catechism explains that “although they were all endowed with celestial gifts, very many, having rebelled against God, their Father and Creator, were hurled from those high mansions of bliss, and shut up in the darkest dungeon of earth, there to suffer for eternity the punishment of their pride.”[\[9\]](#)

Scripture and Tradition indicate that there are various Choirs of Angels. These levels or orders have distinct qualities and have identifiable roles in the Angelic world. St. Gregory the Great (Homily 34, *In Evang.*) gives us a clear idea of the view of the Church’s doctors on the point:

“We know on the authority of Scripture that there are nine orders of angels, viz., Angels, Archangels, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Dominations, Throne, Cherubim and Seraphim.

That there are Angels and Archangels nearly every page of the Bible tells us, and the books of the Prophets talk of Cherubim and Seraphim. St. Paul, too, writing to the Ephesians enumerates four orders when he says: ‘above all Principality, and Power, and Virtue, and Domination’ [Eph. 1:21]; and again, writing to the Colossians he says: ‘whether Thrones, or Dominations, or Principalities, or Powers’ [Col. 1:16]. If we now join these two lists together, we have five Orders, and adding Angels and Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim, we find nine Orders of Angels.”

St. Thomas divides the Angels into three hierarchies, each of which contains three orders, with their proximity to God serving as the basis of this division. In the first hierarchy, he places the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones; in the second, the Dominations, Virtues, and Powers; in the third, the Principalities, Archangels, and Angels.[\[10\]](#)

In addition to creating Heaven and the Angels, God created all of this world as well. It would take an unimaginable amount of space to describe all that God has created. Every galaxy, solar system, planet, and star has been created by God. Likewise, every blade of grass, fruit fly, and microscopic gnat were created by Him. And He created them all from nothing. Whereas some have falsely claimed God used raw matter or pre-existing matter, God Himself is the one substance without a beginning in time. All matter or things were begun by His unique and sole power to bring something into existence out of non-existence. This fact is affirmed in the Catechism: “For God formed the world *not* from materials of any sort, but created it from *nothing*, and that not by constraint or necessity, but spontaneously, and of His own free will.”[\[11\]](#)

The Old Testament opens with the verse, “In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1), and when He had completed His creation of the universe, He “saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). On the sixth day, He created “man in His own image, in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them” (Gen. 1:27). Thus, from the furthest galaxies to the smallest atoms, God is the Creator. And unlike the Deists, who thought of God as a clockmaker who created the clock, wound it up, and left it to itself, God governs all things and preserves them all. “For as all things derive existence from the Creator’s supreme power, wisdom, and goodness, so unless preserved continually by His Providence, and by the same power which produced them, they would instantly return into their nothingness,” says the Catechism.[\[12\]](#)

The Purpose of Creation

Yet, most profoundly, do we ever consider *why* God created all things? God has no need of earthly goods or companions as He is infinitely sufficient and happy in and of Himself. And yet, He did. In an immense act of generosity and love, God has brought all of us into

existence. He has brought every mountain and every lake and every cloud into being. The Catechism explains, “Nor was He impelled to create by any other cause than a desire to communicate His goodness to creatures.”[\[13\]](#)

In one particularly powerful homily I heard a few years ago, while speaking on the topic of the reason for the world’s existence, the priest said the following: “Why Did God create the world? He did so for one reason and one reason alone – for His Son. He created the blades of grasses since His Son would one day walk on this earth. He created the water since His Son would one day use it. He created the creatures of this world since His Son would one day see them on this earth.” The creation of the world was an outpouring of God’s love. And even as immense and powerful as the act of creation was, it pales in comparison to the central mystery of the Christian Faith – the Incarnation of His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who we will cover in the next lesson in this series.

St. Charles Borromeo pray for us!

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[1] Roman Catechism, Part 1: The Creed, Art. I (TAN Books, 1982), p. 14.

[2] <http://www.memidex.com/believe>.

[3] Roman Catechism, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[6] Summa Theologiae I, q. 11, art. 3
(<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1011.htm#article3>).

[7] Roman Catechism, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[8]
http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html.

[9] Roman Catechism, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[10] Cf. Summa I, q. 108, art. 1-7 (<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1108.htm>).

[11] Roman Catechism, *op. cit.*, p. 26-27.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 27.