

Logos and Dia-Logos: Faith, Reason, (and Love) According to Joseph Ratzinger

PABLO BLANCO SARTO*

Reason is a feature that distinguishes Christianity from other religions, as Joseph Ratzinger so often said. The position of religion, as the Jewish-Christian perspective teaches and he stated many times, is positive and complementary: faith admits the constructive criticism of reason, and at the same time human knowledge becomes wider and richer in the light of Christian revelation. In this sense, Ratzinger agreed with Jürgen Habermas that faith and reason can heal each other's "pathologies." Christianity admits the ideas of philosophy, as opposed to other religions that do not: this is the so-called "victory of intelligence" in the world of religion. So now, as Ratzinger says, we need a "new Enlightenment" that is wider and deeper than modernism. He has drawn up a theology of the logos and of the dia-logos, of faith, reason, and love, in analogy with the divine Person of the Logos. Truth and faith are in the relationship with reason, the human logos. Moreover, the idea that "God is love" is inside all humankind.

On 12 September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI delivered his famous polemical address in Regensburg. In spite of everything that was said, the subject of his *Vorlesung* was not Islam, but the importance of reason in Christianity and in other religions.¹ There, he stated that "the fundamental options that relate precisely to the relationship between

* Pablo Blanco Sarto serves on the Theology Faculty of the University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain. He is a philologist, and doctor in Philosophy and Theology. He has studied in Rome, Munich, and Pamplona. He can be contacted at pblanco@unav.es.

¹ See K. Lehmann, "Exkurs. Zum Zitat des Kaisers Manuel II Palaiologos im Disput mit dem persischen Gelehrten Mudarris in der Regensburger Vorlesung von Papst Benedikt XVI am 12.9.2006," in Benedikt XVI, *Glaube und Vernunft. Die Regensburger Vorlesung*, kommentiert von Gesine Schwan, Adel Theodor Khoury, und Karl Kardinal Lehmann (Freiburg: Herder, 2006), 132–133. About this topic, see also: P. Blanco, "Fe, razón y amor. Los discursos de Ratisbona," *Scripta Theologica* 39, no. 3 (2007): 767–782.

faith and the quest of human reason form part of faith itself, and are a development that is in accord with its very nature.”² Faith, reason, and love constitute the three main elements—the three pillars—of the thought of Joseph Ratzinger. Reason and relation, truth and love, *logos* and *dia-logos* take us back to “creator Reason,” to the Logos that existed “in the beginning” (John 1:1), which created through love. *Logos*, truth, and love are all intimately united: there is an alliance between the divine and the human, because as the Word is made flesh (John 1:14), he has to redeem everything that is human, including reason. These are precedents that naturally do not necessarily form part of the pontifical teaching of the present pope.³

Athens and Jerusalem

This proposal is neither exclusively Christian nor Catholic. Ratzinger was in the same line of thought as—for example—the Jewish philosopher Lev Shestov in 1937, and this idea comes from a tradition that goes back two thousand years. “Athens and Jerusalem,” “religious philosophy”: these two expressions are almost identical; they mean practically the same thing. One is as mysterious as the other, and they both disturb modern thought, because of the internal contradiction they contain. Would it not be more adequate to set the dilemma in another way, saying, for example, Athens *or* Jerusalem, religion *or* philosophy? If we were to answer in accordance with the judgment of history, the answer would be unequivocal: the greatest geniuses of the human spirit have rejected, for two thousand years, all the different movements intended to confront Athens with Jerusalem; they have defended passionately the conjunction “and” in the relationship between Athens and Jerusalem, always rejecting the “or.” Jerusalem and Athens, religion and philosophy have always coexisted amicably. And this peace has always been for humans the guarantee of their greatest desires, whether they were satisfied or not.⁴ Hellenism and Judaism

² Benedict XVI, at a meeting with the representatives of science in the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg (13 September 2006).

³ On this topic and the discussion in the larger scholarly debates, see my earlier publications: *Joseph Ratzinger: razón y cristianismo. La victoria de la inteligencia en el mundo de las religiones* (Madrid: Rialp, 2005); “La razón en el cristianismo. Una reivindicación de Joseph Ratzinger,” *Scripta Theologica* 37, no. 2 (2005): 597–613; “Fe, razón, verdad (y amor) en J. Ratzinger: Una teología fundamental sin complejos,” *Communio* 7 (2008): 55–69.

⁴ Lev Shestov, “Atenas y Jerusalén,” *Nueva Revista* (January-February 2005): 99. Maybe we can remember here such key figures as Justin and Clement of Alexandria,

presented this historic union. Ratzinger talks, for example, about the synthesis between what is Greek and what is Hebrew that appears expressly in the biblical translation of the Septuagint.

In the history of Israel, God talks to his people in diverse ways and on numerous occasions, as the theology of the Word teaches us. In the tradition of the Jewish people, the Word—as well as being an instrument for human communication—is above all the revealed mediation of God to his chosen people. The Logos is turned into *dia-logos*, because it is directed to humanity. In this sense, “language is sacred because it is used by Yahweh to reveal Himself to His people. That is why it has mystical value. For the Jews, as also for the other peoples that lived around them in antiquity, the word had meaning in itself.”⁵ The *dabar* offered by God—the revelation in Christ—will be the origin of the faith, which must be received by human beings with free assent. “And the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14); the Word entered history and is constituted as the intermediary between God and his people. Here we find the dynamics of the calling and the answer, *das Wort und die Antwort*, as Ratzinger would say.⁶ This word of God directed to humanity is what gives rise—with the free answer of the believer—to faith.⁷

So, according to Ratzinger, in this way truth is manifest in faith and in human reason—in the biblical *dabar* and in the Greek *logos*—both of which are profoundly united in their origin and in their ends: the eternal Logos. Thus, the answer of faith does not obviate or excuse the free exercise of rationality, but—on the contrary—it requires and reinforces it. The terms mystery and rationality, faith and reason are united in perfect harmony in the interior of the human being, because they both ultimately lead back to the divine Logos. Ratzinger understands *logos* not only as the eternal Word of the Father, but also as his reflection and projection in creation—the *logos*, the truth, the meaning of things—and in the most noble dimension of humankind:

Augustine and Aquinas, the Anglican theologian E. L. Mascall, or Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Fides et ratio* (1998).

⁵ A. García-Moreno, *Introducción al misterio. Evangelio de san Juan* (Pamplona: Eunote, 1997), 252.

⁶ On the concept of faith in Ratzinger, see P. Blanco, “Fe, persona e Iglesia según Joseph Ratzinger,” *Scripta Theologica* 37, no. 3 (2005): 911–927; also in *Monteleone* 894–895, no. 12 (2005): 1–16; Blanco, *Joseph Ratzinger: razón y cristianismo*, 57–106.

⁷ I discuss this in my article “*Logos*. Joseph Ratzinger y la historia de una palabra,” *Límite* 14, no. 1 (2006): 57–86.

endowment with the *logos*, the capacity for word and thought, communication and knowledge, reason and relationship, love and truth. The human person is a logical and dialoging being at the same time. This inclination and disposition to love and know are elevated and amplified at the same time due to the free gift of faith.⁸ So here we see human reason that is opened to faith—the *logos* to *dabar*—which is capable of reaching its total meaning in this area of knowledge.

Rationality thus comes to be a necessity for the human being and for the Christian at the same time: it constitutes an intrinsic necessity for faith, because every act of faith is also a rational and intelligent act that is plainly lucid and conscious, as Ratzinger insists. That is why Peter proposes to provide reasons for our faith, to “give reason for our hope” (1 Peter 3:15); but it is above all Paul who is plainly optimistic in Athens about the possibility of Greek reason.

So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also the altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown God.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.” (Acts 17:22–26)

Ratzinger writes:

The relationship with the unknown word of God presupposes that in some way, man even in his ignorance knows about God. This responds to the situation in which the agnostics find themselves, since they do not know God but cannot exclude him. It also presupposes the idea that man has hope in God and yet cannot advance towards Him with his own strength; that is to say, he needs the announcement, the hand that takes him towards his presence.⁹

That is to say, for total and complete knowledge of God, it is necessary to have faith.

⁸ See, for example, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (St. Louis, Mo.: Herder and Herder, 1969), 48–49, 77, 96, 126–138.

⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 2004), 295.

A Christian Constant

This rationality of the faith constitutes an intrinsic dimension of the Christian message itself and of the essential nature of the missionary dimension. Reason is also a preferential option for Christians from the very outset. How can we recognize God, Ratzinger continues to ask himself, and take God to others?

I think that for this we have to go along different routes. Firstly, there is the route that Saint Paul proposes in the Areopagus: *setting out from man's prior knowledge of God, appealing to reason*. "God is not far from each of us," says Paul. "In Him, we live, we move and we exist" (Acts 17:17ff). . . . The Christian religion is the religion of the Logos. "In the beginning was the Word": this is how we translate the first sentence in St John's Gospel which also refers intentionally to the first words of the Bible itself, to the creation through the Word. But "word" (*logos*), in the Biblical sense, also signifies reason, creative power.¹⁰

Christianity is the religion of the Logos made incarnate through love, and from the very first it drew on philosophy and responded to human wisdom. The first representations of Christ were as Philosopher and Good Shepherd: both dimensions, truth and the love present in the person of Christ, are to be found tightly interwoven in these depictions.

This tendency has also existed in Christianity from the very first, as Ratzinger thinks.

The first phase is the alliance between Christianity and reason; an alliance which is present in the writings of the Fathers, from Justin to Augustine and later: the people who proclaimed the Christian message took the side of the philosophers against religions, against double truths. . . . They saw the seeds of the Logos, of divine reason, not in religions but in the movement of reason which dissolved these religions. But here, a second point of view also emerges, which brings out the relations between religions and the limits of reason.¹¹

¹⁰ Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe*, 298. On reason and knowledge in the discourse of the Areopagus, see V. Gatti, *Il discorso di Paolo ad Atene* (Brescia: Paideia, 1982), 221–226.

¹¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius Press, 2004), 242.

For this reason, Christianity has a basis in rationality, and these two aspects, faith and reason, should actually support each other. In November 1999, Ratzinger bade farewell to the old millennium in Paris by repeating the same notion: after reviewing the history of Christianity in the early centuries, he pointed out that “the victory of Christianity over the religions took place thanks to the demands of rationality.”¹² Christianity has always been based on the synthesis between reason and faith, Athens and Jerusalem, Greek *logos* and biblical *dabar*. “Seen in retrospect, we can say that what turned Christianity into a world religion was the synthesis between reason, faith and life: it is precisely this synthesis which appears in the expression *religio vera*.”¹³ This balance between faith, reason, and life, in which charity plays a major role, is what give Christianity prestige in comparison with other religions.

Nevertheless, Ratzinger also recalls that war has been waged against this original synthesis from two sides. On the one hand, there is the determined opposition from some non-Christian religions, such as some Oriental religions, which defend this hiatus between belief and reason, the conceptual and the symbolic, thought and feeling. They contend that these are two separate worlds, between which there can be no understanding. Against this, the ancient church—Ratzinger says—has always tried to maintain this primordial unity between the two cognitive dimensions, as we have seen above. On the other hand, we may observe the problematic relations between faith and reason in some manifestations of modern thought. Some statements by Luther and Calvin, and later, in a philosophical vein, by Kant, make a separation between these aspects of cognition, feeding into a concept of irrational faith which only belongs to the sphere of feelings, as Hegel, Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger were to maintain, to mention but a few figures, despite the obvious differences between their approaches. The influence of these philosophers on the way people think today cannot be disputed. It can be detected in both rationalism and liberal Protestantism, while at the same time, it brings together theologians of such contrasting tendencies as Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth.¹⁴

¹² Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 182.

¹³ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 184.

¹⁴ Barth said that the belief in the *analogia entis* is the only serious reason for not becoming Catholic: see his *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004),

From his first publication onward, Ratzinger has maintained that philosophy and theology are inseparable, while at the same time he has tried to overcome the purely mechanical reasoning of rationalism which impedes any possible relationship with faith, regarding it as a foreign element that can never come together with rational truth. When he was a young professor, Ratzinger suggested that the God of faith and the God of the philosophers should be brought together, which would maintain the validity of the *analogia entis*. At the same time, Ratzinger reminded us that the Christian faith revolutionized the philosophical concept of God, by establishing at its very core the concepts of person, reason, and love: God is not just thought, but a Trinity of persons who love. In this way, truth (faith and reason) and love are once more closely united, and in faith both dimensions are present: not just the rational dimension, but also the relational one. Along the same lines, he proposes that we need a broader, universal reason that is open to faith, and to all other human activities.¹⁵

Reason, Heart, and Church

We therefore continue from the original synthesis: where the Logos is projected as the *logos* present in all things of creation and, in the human sphere, in faith and in reason. So, to understand the importance of reason joined with faith (as well as the approximation to the theology of religions), Ratzinger's ideas on the act of faith are also

vol. 1, part 1, x. See also Ll. Duch, "Reforma y ortodoxias protestantes: siglos XVI y XVII," in E. Vilanova, *Historia de la teología cristiana*, vol. 2 (Barcelona: Herder, 1985), 205–218; vol. 3, 383–408; J. L. Illanes, "La teología en las épocas moderna y contemporánea," in J. I. Saranyana and J. L. Illanes, *Historia de la teología* (Madrid: BAC, 1995), 238–245, 254–259, 265–267, 387; B. Mondin, *Storia della teologia*, vol. 4 (Bologna: Studio Domenicano, 1997), 128–129, 349–351, 365–371; E. Colomer, *El pensamiento alemán de Kant a Heidegger*, vol. 1 (Barcelona: Herder, 1986), 269–274; vol. 2, 125; vol. 3, 76–86, 365–395, 630; P. Blanco, *Joseph Ratzinger: razón y cristianismo*, 23–30. On this author's theory of religions, see my "Cristo y las religiones en la obra de Joseph Ratzinger," in *La natura della religione in contesto teologico. Atti del X Convegno Internazionale della Facoltà di Teologia, 9–10 marzo 2006*, ed. S. Sanz Sánchez and G. Maspero (Rome: EDUSC, 2008), 423–438.

¹⁵ See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius, 1987), 405–406, 412–416, 423, 434; Ratzinger, *Convocados en el camino de la fe*, 18–25; Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 145–169. Concerning love, see especially the first encyclical Letter of Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* (25 December 2005), and also my article "Amor, caridad y santidad. Una 'lectura transversal' de la encíclica Deus caritas est de Benedicto XVI," *Scripta Theologica* 38, no. 3 (2006): 1041–1068.

interesting. Ratzinger offers a description of the Christian faith in personalist terms: that is to say, he focuses on the effect of faith on the existence and moral condition of the believer, just as the *Weltanschauung* of existentialism sustains the philosophy of dialogue in which Ratzinger was formed. We have to take into account the personal character of every act of faith: it is an action of understanding that we find through a meeting and a personal relationship and, in this way, an act that involves the human person completely: intelligence, feelings, and will. According to Ratzinger, faith will be free, rational, and “sentimental” at the same time. It is genuine knowledge, but it is somewhat peculiar in its origin, as in its reach and in the way it is given. Originally, faith is born from the confidence that is not in any way blind but which, in the transcendent condition, surpasses the limits of reason. At the same time, faith does not exclude the intervention of human intelligence and personal experience, but, logically, faith is not reduced to this.¹⁶

This relational and existential dimension, as well as being rational, is important to an understanding of the fundamental theology of Joseph Ratzinger. But this is also true of the ecclesial dimension. So, the implication of personal existence in the act of faith leads to dialogue with God, which leads to conversion and to confidence in the church. In this way we see that faith does not come only from thought, but also from listening—a related rational act—because it transcends the individual and takes him to the church as a place where Jesus Christ is plainly manifest and the truth is revealed by Christ (this is what Ratzinger calls *Wir-Struktur*). This is another aspect that Ratzinger underlines in his fundamental theology with “no complexes”: faith is the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church, by which we obtain the privileged knowledge that we can reach through reflection and through this trust. This *verstehen*—an understanding—takes as its starting point a *stehen*, of being in the church.¹⁷ In the communion of the church—which is a reflection of the Trinity—all the truth of the

¹⁶ See Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity*, 71; *Faith and the Future* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius, 2009), 23–25, 42; *Natura e compito della teologia* (Milano: Jaca Book, 1993), 55; *Una mirada a Europa* (Madrid: Rialp, 1993), 142–145; *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism: Sidelights on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius, 1997), 20–21; and *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 77–79, 84–95.

¹⁷ See A. Bellandi, *Fede cristiana come “stare” e “comprendere”*. *La giustificazione dei fondamenti della fede in J. Ratzinger* (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1996), 179–304.

faith comes into view. So faith—both rational and relational—is also at the same time “theological” (given from God) and ecclesial, as an answer to the act of giving and revelation that comes from God, which is expressed materially in the sacrament of baptism.

As we can appreciate in his works, Ratzinger characterizes faith from different points of view: the theological one (God gives faith), the personalist view (each believer receives faith in a free and rational manner), and the ecclesial-sacramental view (God gives faith in the church through baptism). So, first, he insists on the precedence of the gift of God in relation to the act of faith made by each believer: in the first place, this is a giving of God, followed by a receiving, an acceptance, a reception of that which has been given; and this takes place only in the church through the sacrament of baptism, as we said before. So faith is clearly a theological, personal, and ecclesial act at the same time. This is Ratzinger’s fundamental theology: on the one hand, we can see many different dimensions, but at the same time the main, constant battlefield is his encounter with secular reason. To conclude, what we have seen so far of Ratzinger’s theology shows that reason has to be available for the requirements of faith. Human reason has to be a universal reason that harmonizes and fits with an equally universal faith, called to be understood, proclaimed, and believed by all (Mark 16:15).

A “New Enlightenment”

This alliance between faith and reason—between the natural and supernatural dimension of truth—is an authentic “Enlightenment” for the Christian faith as a manifest elevation of human reason, concludes Ratzinger. The reason proposed here is as far from the excesses and narrowness of rationalism as it is from the empty horizons and certain irrationalism of postmodernism. This openness of reason may also be reconciled with the simplicity and the sentiment needed for human life and for Christian faith. Intelligence has completely entered the world of religions—also through Christianity—and at the same time reason has received great benefits and wider horizons thanks to Christian faith, which is the true receptacle of divine revelation. That is why it is not enough to have any reason or any Enlightenment; Ratzinger proposes a “truthful reason”—not a technical and purely mathematical reason—that has a universal openness to faith, as well as to the world of feelings and other human activities.

Christian faith has to continually dialogue with secular reasoning, as the then Cardinal Ratzinger used to say. For example, in the famous debate with Jürgen Habermas that took place in Munich in January 2004, Cardinal Ratzinger declared:

In religion there are highly dangerous pathologies, which make it necessary to use the light of reason as an instrument of control, to purify and order religion again and again (as the Fathers of the Church envisaged). But in the course of our reflections, we have also seen that there are pathologies of reason . . . , an exaggerated arrogance (*hybris*) of reason, which is still more dangerous because of its potential destructive force: the atom bomb, or the human being understood as a product. This is why reason must similarly be conscious of its limits, learning to lend an ear to the great religious traditions of humankind. When it is set completely free, and loses its ability to learn in this reciprocal relationship, it becomes destructive.¹⁸

Reason and religion require each other and they must contribute to purifying each other reciprocally, even today, if they do not want to be so destructive.

Professor Ratzinger often used to finish his talks with a literary quotation or an image. We will therefore also finish in this way. In this case we will cite a detective novel, because these have something to do with seeking truth. In *The Blue Cross*, the priest-detective immortalized by Gilbert Keith Chesterton discovers a thief disguised as a priest. When the thief—the famous Flambeau—asks how he knew that he was not a real priest, Father Brown alluded to various vague, pseudopoetic, irrational notions that the thief had tried to use on him: “You attacked the reason,” said Father Brown. “It’s bad theology.” A little while before, the priest had said: “I know that people charge the Church with lowering reason, but it is just the other way. Alone on earth, the Church makes reason really supreme. Alone on earth, the

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization* (San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius, 2007), 29. See also L. Rodríguez Duplá, “El diálogo entre fe cristiana y razón secularizada. El ‘caso Habermas,’” *Estudios Trinitarios* 39, no. 1 (2005): 93–102; V. Nemoianu, “The Church and the Secular Establishment: A Philosophical Dialog between Joseph Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas,” *Logos* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 17–42.

Church affirms that God himself is bound by reason.”¹⁹ Christianity is the religion of reason and love. God is *logos* and *agape*—we can say once again—and God is at the origin of faith, reason, and love, as Joseph Ratzinger has often stated in these rather forgetful times. But a question remains: Is this an idealistic, romantic vision of reason? Is the concept of reason proposed by Ratzinger “anti-modern”—as Habermas declared some time afterward—or “postmodern” in the widest and most hopeful sense, as Walter Kasper indicated?²⁰

¹⁹ G. K. Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing 2004), 18 and 14.

²⁰ See J. Habermas, “Ein Bewusstsein von dem, was fehlt. Über Glauben und Wissen und den Defaitismus der modernen Vernunft,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 34 (10 February 2007): 30; <http://www.nzz.ch/2007/02/10/li/articleEVB7X.html>; W. Kasper, “Glaube und Vernunft. Zur protestantischen Diskussion um die Regensburger Vorlesung von Papst Benedikt XVI,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 4 (2007): 219–228.

