

1) What is the Enlightenment proposed by Ratzinger?

As I have noted in *Joseph Ratzinger: Reason and Christianity* (Rialp, 2005), and as Vincenzo Ferrone has demonstrated in *Lo strano Illuminismo di Joseph Ratzinger* (Laterza, 2013), one could say that Ratzinger is the last Enlightenment thinker because of his defense of reason, yet the first postmodern thinker because of the concept of reason he proposes: an open reason, an “expanded reason.” Faced with a void not only of faith but also of reason, the Bavarian theologian calls for a “new Enlightenment,” founded this time on broader concepts of reason and freedom. Reason is not only mathematical and instrumental; it must also be capable of understanding human realities such as art, love, freedom, or knowledge itself. It is not only *ratio* but also *intellectus*. Likewise, freedom is not merely freedom of choice; it has a deeper existential dimension. It is not only freedom-from, but also freedom-for. These two concepts, upon which the Enlightenment is founded, once broadened, could lead us to a new Enlightenment—one that takes seriously the legitimate critiques of postmodernity and that creates a new culture capable of embracing the foundations of Christianity in an updated form.

2) The reasonableness of love. How are Reason, Love, and Truth connected to one another?

This was the theme of one of his encyclicals, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009). In it, the Bavarian pope explained that love without truth collapses into pure emotionalism, sentimentalism, or arbitrariness. But the opposite is also true: truth without love is harsh and cruel. For this reason, these two concepts—truth and love—became something of a mantra throughout his pontificate. They are two principles that must remain united and inseparable. Reason is the bond that unites these two dimensions of reality: reason is not foreign to love but enables us—together with faith—to gain access to truth. Love, truth, and reason are harmonized so as to draw us closer to reality and to its deepest core: God himself.

3) Does love precede faith, or vice versa?

“A great love is the child of great knowledge,” Leonardo da Vinci said. However, it is also true that love is vision; it allows us to see more sharply. We sometimes think that having faith means closing one’s eyes, but it is precisely the opposite: it means seeing more, seeing further. Love, especially when it is not true, can blind us, but it can also sharpen our gaze and allow us to see more clearly. Saint Paul says that “faith works through love” (Gal 5:6), and therefore every true faith must culminate in love. Does love precede faith? I do not know—it depends on each person and on the circumstances—but in my opinion, one first glimpses the goal toward which one is heading, and then becomes capable of directing one’s steps in that direction. And it is there that the true encounter occurs, the one that culminates in love.

4) Ratzinger chose the motto “Cooperatores Veritatis,” first as archbishop and later as pontiff; over time, this increasingly became the subtitle of his long life. As someone writing his biography in Spanish in three volumes, what key images do you identify that correspond didactically to this motto?

The first image would be that of two hands breaking chains, since Ratzinger is aware of the liberating power of truth. “The truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32) was the favorite Gospel phrase of John Paul II, and it could also be that of the theologian Ratzinger. At times we want to be free without truth, and this leads us to even worse forms of slavery. Only freedom with truth is capable of loving, since love is the culmination of freedom. Or, as Ratzinger said, “love is the encounter between two freedoms,” and this encounter takes place in truth.

The other symbol could be the bear of Saint Corbinian, which appears on his episcopal and papal coat of arms. This bear carries the saddlebags of the bishop of Freising to Rome and is then—Ratzinger recounts—set free there. It is not known whether the bear remained in the Apennines or returned to the Alps. In Ratzinger’s case, however, since he considered himself “a beast of burden of the Lord,” he remained wandering the streets of Rome, carrying that burden of truth. It may seem like a heavy burden, but—as Saint Augustine said—truth is wings that allow us to fly high.

5) Continuing with your work on his biography, have there been moments in your research that surprised you most? What traits of his personality emerge? Can one speak of a personal “charisma”?

I was particularly struck by his childhood and adolescence. At first, he appeared to be a young man from a somewhat clerical Bavarian family. But one quickly becomes aware of the harshness of the Nazi period and the Second World War, which allowed him to mature humanly and to discover his vocation to the priesthood. I was also impressed by his honesty, because—so to speak—he lost many opportunities in life and much easy popularity because of his love for the truth. But that love of truth is not solitary; it is inseparable from love. Love without truth can fall into emotionalism, sentimentalism, or arbitrariness, but truth without love is harsh and cruel. Truth and love: I believe this was a discovery of the young Ratzinger that guided his entire life.

6) How is the work and research on sources for writing the complete biographical work progressing? In what places and with what kinds of tools does one need to work in order to undertake this writing?

Since not all original documents are currently available, I must work with published sources and direct testimonies from those who knew him. A great deal has been published about Ratzinger, both favorable and critical, so the material offers elements for outlining a fairly precise profile. Moreover, having diverse perspectives helps to understand the figure more deeply. The problem that arises is one of proximity: the pontificate brought Ratzinger great

notoriety, while at the same time producing partial or distorted interpretations. I believe the time has come to move beyond a political or ideological reading and to proceed toward a more historical and theological one. It seems to me that this decisive moment is approaching, and in this sense, I wish to offer my contribution.

7) A customary question: which readings of Joseph Ratzinger–Benedict XVI would you recommend rediscovering today?

In my view, the best of Ratzinger is found in *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007–2012). This is clearly the book of his life; it contains a synthesis of his thought and a personal meditation on the figure of Jesus. *Introduction to Christianity* (1968) is also frequently cited, but it seems to me more conditioned by its historical context, since it is a text closely tied to the historical and personal moment in which it was written. I usually recommend beginning with the interview-books, which offer a good synthesis of his thought, and ending with *Jesus of Nazareth*, which is also a work that presents his full complexity. In between, one can include other texts according to each reader's interests—on God, on the Church, on the world, on the human person, and on humanity's eternal destiny.

8) Recently, the international conference “Evangelization, Believing, Thinking according to J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI” was held at the University of Navarra. How are studies—particularly in Spanish—developing in Spain, and what do you especially recall about the relationship between Joseph Ratzinger–Benedict XVI and Spain (its university and his apostolic journeys)?

We were providentially fortunate that Joseph Ratzinger visited our university to receive an honorary doctorate when he was still a cardinal. However, he chose to stay for several days, which allowed him to get to know it in depth. He held numerous meetings with professors and students that left not only fond memories but also, I would dare say, an indelible mark. Our university counts Joseph Ratzinger among the members of its faculty. As pope, he wished to visit Madrid and Barcelona, as well as Valencia and Santiago de Compostela, thus gradually coming to know the cultural and ecclesial reality of our country. He had never visited Spain before, yet he chose to return up to five times. This fills us with pride. In this way, he also left all Spaniards with the memory of a pope who was, in a certain sense, also one of ours. He will always remain among us in memory as a pope whom we learned to love.