



Efter udnævnelsen af pave Benedict XVI interviewede John D. Spalding den tyske, katolske teolog Uta Ranke-Heinemann, som kender Ratzinger fra fælles studier i München.

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“A Humble Intellect”

Controversial German theologian Uta Ranke-Heinemann explains why she's glad that her former classmate has been made pope.



John D. Spalding

Like many, I was stunned to learn yesterday that Cardinal Ratzinger, the great Enforcer of church doctrine, had been elected pope. Once the shock wore off, one of my first thoughts was, "What does Uta make of all this?"

By Uta, I'm referring to German theologian Uta Ranke-Heinemann-one of Pope John Paul II's most outspoken critics. She had also been a classmate of Joseph Ratzinger's, when they were doctoral students together at the University of Munich in the early 1950s.



The daughter of the late Gustav Heinemann, president of West Germany from 1969 to 1974, Uta went on to become the world's first woman professor of Catholic theology when she was given a church-appointed chair at the University of Essen. She also became the bestselling author of several controversial books, including "Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven" and "Putting Away Childish Things," both of which sold millions of copies around the world. In 1987, the church declared Uta ineligible to teach, after she declared the virgin birth to be a theological belief and not a biological fact. She still holds a chair in religious studies at Essen-a state chair.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, of course, did not run afoul of the church, which is one reason why he is now the pope and Uta Ranke-Heinemann is not.



I thought of Uta yesterday because--to make a long story short--I met her in April 1994 when I was working for Harper San Francisco, which had just published "Putting Away Childish Things." Harper had organized a U.S. book tour for Uta, two days into which she claimed to have suffered a "nervous breakdown" and threatened to cancel the tour unless someone was sent to escort her from city to city. I was put on a plane the following day. Over the next two weeks, I heard a great deal about Pope John Paul II (little of it good)--and about Cardinal Ratzinger, of whom she spoke highly.

I reached Uta, now 77, by phone late last night at her home in Essen, Germany. We spoke for more than an hour. Here's some of what she had to say about the new pope.

What was your reaction when you learned that Cardinal Ratzinger had been elected?

I never in my life would have imagined that I would be happy over the election of a new pope. But I am happy for Cardinal Ratzinger--or, I should say Pope Benedict XVI--because we have had a long-standing mutual respect for one another.

You're not the only person who might be surprised by your response. After all, you were one of the sharpest critics of John Paul II, whom Ratzinger served as chief theological adviser...

Well, yes, there is obviously a discrepancy between my respect for Ratzinger and my total disagreement with [John Paul II](#). I asked myself this question earlier--why on earth have I always liked Ratzinger, for more than 51 years, while over the past 26 years John Paul II constantly got on my nerves? I confess I'm not sure I know the answer.

Let's back up. When did you first meet Ratzinger?

We were doctoral students together at the University of Munich in 1953 and 1954, which was the first time a [woman](#) was allowed to get a doctorate in Catholic theology. And our respect for each other deepened when we had to defend our theses in Latin. In preparation, we translated our theses together from German into Latin.

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And John Paul II had none!"**

What was the new pope like as a theology student?

He was very intelligent. He was the star student--the star-male student; there were very few female students--and we all admired his intelligence. But there was something more about him I admired. He was a rather shy student, not obsessed with his ego. I liked his humble intelligence. I still do like many passages in his books, and I've quoted them in my books. And all my life, many people have been astonished that I've always sort of defended Ratzinger, even though I've said that many of his opinions are totally wrong.

Was he theologically conservative as a student?

Well, when I studied theology I was a sheep. I believed everything I was taught, and Ratzinger, of course, did as well. But soon he became a very progressive theologian. And at the Second Vatican Council he served as the theological adviser to Cardinal Frings of



Cologne, a very beloved and progressive voice, along with Karl Rahner and others. Ratzinger was chosen because of his modern perspective.

But under John Paul II, the repression of women and a kind of anti-sexual pessimism reached its highest peak, and Ratzinger didn't protest this in any way. I still can't quite figure it out.

Why?

The enormous difference between John Paul II and Ratzinger is intelligence. Ratzinger is more, much more, intelligent. Quite frankly, John Paul II was tedious without end. I couldn't stand it any more. He was obsessed with Mary. "Mary, Mary, Mary," he repeated over and over and over. I mean, I feel much for Mary myself, because she lost her son. But John Paul II said Mary was glad to see her son on the cross and that she would have put him there herself because it meant our salvation. I tell you, Ratzinger would not say such a stupid, horrible thing! No, he has much more taste than that. Ratzinger has much more of what the French call *esprit de finesse*. And John Paul II had none!

How do Ratzinger's views on Mary differ from John Paul II's?

Let me put it this way. At Munich, Ratzinger did his doctorate with professor Söhngen, and I did mine with professor Schmaus. This was in 1954-at the time of Pius XII's dogma about Mary being received into heaven. Söhngen quoted Jerome who, around 400, said: "I woke up and sighed: the world was Arian." (Arius was the great heretic who denied the divinity of Jesus). And similarly, Söhngen said about Pius XII's dogma, "I woke up and sighed: the world was Marian." So, none of us, including Ratzinger, Söhngen's main doctoral student, were excessive Marians.

How Ratzinger's views on Mary developed later on with [John Paul II](#), who spoke non-stop about Mary-I cannot understand it, and I regret it. But my faithfulness to him and his to me has always endured.

Ratzinger was not among those who took away your teaching chair...

No! He would have never done such a thing! He was too intelligent. Cardinal Franz Hengsbach from Essen took my chair because I denied the virgin birth. Ratzinger would have insisted that it was my personal opinion that Mary can't be both a virgin and a mother at the same time-which was what I had taught my students for 17 years as professor of New Testament and old church history at the University of Essen. Ratzinger would have supported me. As it turned out, I was the first [woman](#) to receive a chair-and the first woman to lose a chair.

In fact, after I lost my chair and was excommunicated in 1987, Ratzinger was the only one, of all those bishops and cardinals, to write to me in a friendly way, offering support.

And you defended Ratzinger...

When I was in Italy to promote my book, "Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven," I read an article about me in an Italian newspaper, and it stated that Ratzinger and I had been students together. But the article misquoted me as having said that he "always had the aura of a cardinal, and the highest intelligence, with a total absence of humanita"--



humanity. But what I had actually said was he "always had the aura of a cardinal, and the highest intelligence, with a total absence of the erotic." So I wrote a letter to the paper correcting them, in defense of Ratzinger, because I can't stand to see someone done wrong.

Do you think the election of Ratzinger will affect the future of the church in any significant way?

I don't see any future for a church in which all shepherds are men, and all women are sheep. How could that be a universal church? It's a mutilated construct!

What will happen then under Ratzinger?

The church will continue as it always has. Ratzinger will not change 2,000 years of male domination. But perhaps he might make one tiny change for the better. He might permit the use of condoms in AIDS-ravaged Africa. Those women in Africa who are told by their priests that they will go to hell if they use condoms-well, those women are told they're the martyrs of this millennium.

I believe there's a chance Ratzinger will concede that and permit the use of condoms by those who are AIDS infected. I hope he does.

But there are many church teachings regarding sexuality he won't touch...

Right, and I think this is where the church is really wrong. I don't like the church's interference into things that are none of its business. Jesus did not police sexual intercourse, which is what the church does!

John Paul II added a new church law to the Corpus Iuris Canonici. And in it, you'll find a horrible canon, canon 1084, which discriminates against paraplegics. This canon forbids men who are in wheelchairs, who are unable to have erections, from marrying. According to this canon, a man cannot marry unless he can have an erection in the way the church wants him to have one. Even if he can generate semen, and thus produce children, he still cannot marry!

So no theological surprises from Ratzinger...

To me, Ratzinger is an enigma, because on the one hand he is so intelligent, and on the other, well, I can't understand how he can believe the assertions of Christianity that are such enemies to reason. God becoming man! I can only laugh at the arrogance of men- to shrink God into a creature so small. Think about it- three persons in God. Only arrogant Christians are able to count God-1,2,3- and to make this God in their own image and likeness as father and son. That doesn't seem ridiculous to them at all, but if you were to suggest that God could be a woman-well, they'd laugh in your face!

What do you make of his choice of name-Benedict XVI?

The name doesn't mean much to me. I do know that in 1336, Pope Benedict XII made hell longer than it already was! He said that hell, as an eternity of torment, begins immediately after death! No longer postponed at least until the Day of Judgment. But I don't think we should make much importance about the name he's chosen.



You used to call Pope John Paul II your "theological Mr. Sandman," because you'd listen to him on Radio Vatican to help you fall asleep. Will you still be able nod off to Radio Vatican now that Cardinal Ratzinger has the job?

[Laughs] Well, yes, that is a problem. I don't expect Ratzinger to become my new theological Mr. Sandman. But I'm a terrible sleeper anyway, and I will sleep badly no matter who is pope.

Have you come to terms with John Paul II now that he's gone?

It's interesting. I did reconcile myself with John Paul II after he died. But with Ratzinger, I am already reconciled with him in life. Why? I don't know. Perhaps because, like Socrates, the more I know, the less I understand.

Uta Ranke-Heinemann, født 1927 i Essen. Datter af den senere Bundespræsident Gustav Heinemann. Boede 1944-45 i teologen Rudolf Bultmanns hus i Marburg, hvor han underviste hende i græsk ved at læse Platon med hende. I årene 1947-1953 studerede hun protestantisk teologi i Basel, Oxford, Montpellier og Bonn. Hun konverterede til den katolske kirke i 1953 og fortsatte sine teologiske studier (nu katolske) i München, hvor hun i 1954 blev dr. theol. Samme år giftede hun sig med den katolske religionslærer Edmund Ranke (fætter til den senere kardinal og primas af Polen Jozef Glemp). 2 sønner.

I 1970 blev hun den første kvindelige professor i katolsk teologi (først i Neuss, senere i Duisburg og til sidst i Essen). Da hun i 1987 i en fjernsynsudsending om Mariavalfartstedet Kevelaer betvivlede, at Maria biologisk kunne være jomfru efter Jesu fødsel, fratog biskop Hengsbach hendes tilladelse til at undervise i katolsk teologi. Derefter fulgte samme år hendes ekskommunikation. Hun fik dog et andet professorat ved universitetet og engagerede sig mere og mere i fredsbevægelserne.

Hendes to vigtigste bøger er:

- Eunuchen für das Himmelreich – Katholische Kirche und Sexualität, 1988 (oversat til 12 sprog). Ny og udvidet udgave 2004)
- Nein und Amen – Anleitung zum Glaubensszweifel, 1992 (ny og udvidet udgave med undertitlen Mein Abschied vom traditionellen Christentum, 2007).

Kaare Rübner Jørgensen - 16.04.08

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