

Joseph Ratzinger's Theological Retractations

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An adept systematic theologian, Lam has written a book that captures the nature of Ratzinger's theology. As a bonus, Lam incorporates not only the essential theological concerns of Ratzinger, but also Bonaventure (Ch. 1) and St Augustine (Ch. 3), making precise reference to numerous writings penned by all three minds.

Lam outlines the intention of his book as "reconsiderations" (18) of Ratzinger's thoughts. In chapter 1 he introduces Ratzinger's early interest in establishing the link between Catholic and Protestant perceptions of revelation which led to Ratzinger's insistence on ecumenism.

Bonaventure's writings are then presented with focus on salvation history with Jesus as the centre of time (49). It is this that influences Ratzinger's understanding of revelation as God's continual communication which goes beyond scripture and tradition (53).

From these early efforts, Ratzinger was well equipped to contribute to the Second Vatican Council, and his efforts with *Dei verbum* did not go unnoticed, with his insistence on "a more pastoral-historical account of revelation" (56).

For one who has often been criticised and depicted by the media as being ultra conservative, Lam argues that Ratzinger was a man ahead of his time in theological debate. Two examples given include Ratzinger's insistence in placing Christology in its Trinitarian context (69) and arguing that "tradition must not be considered only affirmatively, but also critically" (69).

Lam has interspersed the theological descriptions of Ratzinger's teachings with stories and characters that allow the reader to be informed, engaged and even amused. These include the rivalry between Schmans and Sohnger, with Ratzinger the unfortunate student caught in the middle (Ch 1) or with Ratzinger's challenge to Josef Gieselmann's theories (61-62). Yet the most captivating story is the love affair we see emerging between Ratzinger and the writings of Bonaventure and Augustine.

In chapter 2, Lam outlines Ratzinger's developing argument of Christology as Spiritual Christology. In Scriptures, "Ratzinger argues that the people depicted Jesus according to their historical knowledge or categories" (96), and goes on to suggest that ecclesial faith plays an important role in developing the memory of Jesus and salvation (97-99).

Lam notes that "Ratzinger develops a spiritual Christology which sees in Jesus Christ, the Church and history as an indivisible inner unity" (113) and boldly claims that for Ratzinger, "Christology is nothing else than the interpretation of Jesus' prayers" (116). It

then follows the creed expresses the importance of Jesus as God, and justice becomes an imperative for Christian living (130).

This section of Lam's book could do with a greater fleshing out of Ratzinger's understanding of what Scripture has to reveal about Jesus, which is less developed compared to Ratzinger's ecclesial argument of Christology.

Chapter 3 moves into a discussion on ecclesiology. Lam dedicates most of this chapter to Ratzinger's systematic approach to Augustine's work, which informed Ratzinger's ecclesiology and Church model, as people "who are united visibly through the sacrament of the Eucharist" (179). This importance of Eucharist was continually developed over time. Delving into the question of suffering and sacrifice, which finds its visible expression in the Eucharist, Ratzinger later understood "sacrifice" as an act of the living worship in accordance with the truth (193).

Lam does not shy away from the controversy that has plagued Ratzinger, but puts forward the criticism of conservatism (194). Lam then attempts to justify Ratzinger's approach, claiming it was not against the liturgy but against the "activist participation" (195) that Ratzinger was concerned. One may note that this issue is not so far removed from evangelical concerns today. For Ratzinger (and Augustine) the reception of the Eucharist was an act of consecration, "adoration and faith" (199), making the congregation participants at the depth of human existence (199).

Lam provides a continuous defence of Ratzinger's theology, clearly articulating the depth of his theological insights and holding Ratzinger up as a great thinker of his time. The book can be seen as a polemic that "redeems" the pontiff emeritus. Yet perhaps Lam may need to more adequately address the strong concerns of other theologians in regards to the conservative nature of Ratzinger's writings.

This is not a book for a general audience. With its technical terms and various theological concepts, it is a source of information for seasoned theologians who will come away with an enlightened perspective on Ratzinger.

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