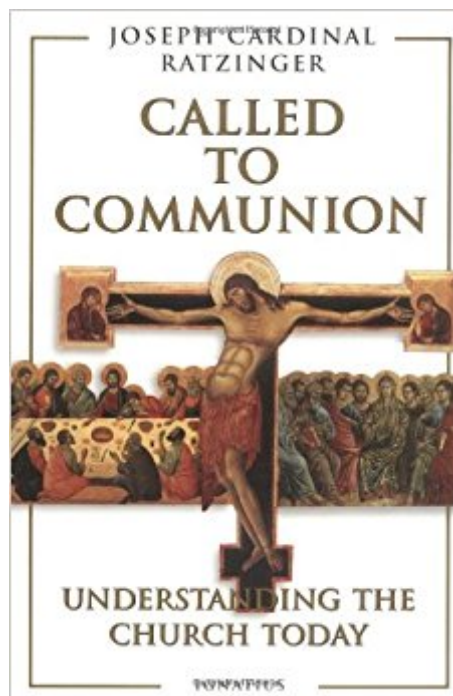




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Called To Communion: Understanding The Church Today



Synopsis

This is a book of wisdom and insight that explains how providential are the trials through which the Catholic Church is now passing. The need of the Papal Primacy to ensure Christian unity; the true meaning of the Priesthood as a sacrament and not a mere ministry; the necessity of the Eucharist as the Sacrifice of the Savior now offering Himself on our altars; the role of the Bishops as successors of the Apostles, united with the successor of St. Peter, the Bishop of Rome; the value of suffering in union with Christ crucified; the indispensable service of the laity in the apostolate - all these themes receive from Cardinal Ratzinger new clarity and depth.

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Customer Reviews

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Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) is recognized as one of the most brilliant theologians and spiritual leaders of our age. As pope he authored the best-selling *Jesus of Nazareth*. Prior to his pontificate, he wrote many influential books important for the contemporary Church, such as *Introduction to Christianity* and *The Spirit of the Liturgy*.

A pretty good introduction to ecclesiology, Roman Catholic style. Say what you will about Benedict XVI - he is a very bright, learned man who writes well. Since most of this book is based on talks he has given, it's a bit easier (a bit, mind you) for us non-theology types to read and understand; plus

it's not too long. Our diaconate class was assigned this book as an introduction to ecclesiology, and I really enjoyed it.

Another treasure from Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger). Very insightful and urged me to search my soul. I am amazed at how enthused I become every time I read one of his books.

Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today starts off with three theology lectures for a course on universal vs. particular Churches for bishops in Brazil, followed by an address to the Synod of Bishops on the priesthood, a talk on ecclesial reform to conclude an annual meeting in Rimini, and finally a homily preached at a seminary in Philadelphia which is added to "clarify once more the spiritual orientation of the whole book" (from the Foreword). All of these events took place in 1990, but the material is as relevant, if not more so, today. The stated goal in the Foreword of offering "a sort of primer of Catholic ecclesiology" to "bring clarity and help in the crisis of ecclesial consciousness" is fulfilled in spades. The nature of the book and the audiences it was directed toward originally does not allow Cardinal Ratzinger to go into the level of detail I would have like to have seen, but nevertheless he is quite successful at giving the reader a good overview of Catholic ecclesiology, particularly as it relates to the roles of bishops, priests, and the nature of true reform in the Church. In the first chapter he establishes the origin of the Church in Jesus, of course, by using not only Gospel testimony, but also Paul's doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ, and the beginnings of Church functioning in the Acts of the Apostles. Chapter Two deals with Petrine primacy and the unity of the Church. The author acknowledges the ecumenical difficulty of this question, but goes on to solidly show the status of Peter as "Rock", as head of the Twelve, and as keeper of the "keys" which he deals with at the greatest length of the three points. Succession is one of the areas that would have been worth exploring more, but his appeal to early Christian writers Irenaeus and Eusebius is effective, and he hits a home run with this observation: "[I]t is impossible to avoid the idea of succession once the word is transmitted in Scripture is considered to be a sphere open to the future" (p. 67). The next chapter gets to the heart of the theology lectures: the universal and particular Churches and the role of the bishop. Unsurprisingly, the Eucharist is seen as the heart of ecclesiology - it is the unifying factor. Orthodox and Protestant views are contrasted with each other and the Catholic approach, and the conclusion is reached that "communio is catholic, or it simply doesn't exist at all" (p. 82). The bishopric is traced back to Peter, James, and Paul, and then as now, the bishop is called to be a missionary of the whole Church, not just his local Church, and he must be ready to suffer as his Lord did. The essence of the priesthood

is the topic of the fourth chapter. This is a very full chapter. He bemoans the fact that a new look back tried to justify the priesthood by looking at its biblical roots and deeming it a functional role only. He provocatively states that this view was reached by Reformation-era arguments and exegesis largely nourished by Reformation presuppositions. But while Cardinal Ratzinger recognized that the ministries seemed ill-defined in the early Church, he sees the foundation of ministerial office in apostleship: Jesus sent the apostles and gave them everything they had - he conferred the mission and himself as mission. Apostolic succession is not treated in depth, but he uses solid passages from Acts, Peter, and Corinthians to stress the sacramental nature of bishops and priests. He closes the chapter with some deeply moving reflections of a more spiritual nature (a must read for all priests). The last chapter deals with renewal of the Church, contrasting futile and authentic reform. It is the best chapter in the book and one I'd like to get in the hands of every Catholic or anyone who wants to understand the pope's authentic view of reform and renewal. A democratic Church that so many long for will never work: "A church based on human resolutions becomes a merely human church. It is reduced to the level of the makeable, of the obvious, of opinion. Opinions replace faith. And in fact, in the self-made formulas of faith with which I am acquainted, the meaning of the words 'I believe' never signifies anything beyond 'we opine'" (pp. 139-140). True reform is based on a full faith itself in the freedom that the Lord offers which is our true freedom. Reform begins with each person through personal morality (liberation from sin, not guilt), forgiveness (imagining Jesus), and expiation (purification through pain and suffering in communion with Christ). The epilogue continues the theme of the last chapter, emphasizing the dangers of "factional strife" within the Church, instead calling us to be "coworkers of God" (it is clear where he came up with his episcopal motto "Fellow worker in the truth"). This book is relatively short at 165 pages but very rich. It is worth getting for everyone who wants to understand the authentic mind of the Church as enunciated by the current pontiff.

The author clearly and carefully teaches the reader the true meaning of faith as a theological virtue - but especially how faith interacts with service in the Church. It is Christ's Church and not ours to mold into what we think is best for the moment, or place, or people. God's people belong to him and we need to remember that.

In this short book, Cardinal Ratzinger writes paints several images as to what roles different people within the Church must play, for instance the episcopate, the laity and clergy. He also focuses on the Eucharist and its importance within the faith. He analyzes where things have gone wrong and

what must be done to correct these deviations. Most often if not always the solution is to reach back to Christ and recapture His intention for what His Church should be. In particular I found useful the chapter where he elucidates the primacy of Peter not because he was the best and brightest of the apostles, but because he was the one chosen by Jesus for that role. Ratzinger's prose is beautiful, even in translation. At times it can be a bit dense, but it's always engaging, and well worth reading with a pen in your hand. I especially recommend this book to the "but why can't we" Catholics out there. He answers pretty much every major objection people raise as to why the Church is moving and continues to move in a certain direction and why certain shifts can't happen.

Very good but you have to have an interest in learning. This man is very intelligent. It is not light reading but well worth reading.

As usual, Ratzinger draws us into the heart of the church and helps us better understand and love her.

Collected interventions of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger to the Bishops of Brazil in 1990, the book is called a "primer of ecclesiology". The book preserves the oral quality of the original presentations, but Ratzinger the cardinal and the theologian is as profound as ever in these pages. He touches all the main themes of the theology of Church and offers the Communion model for his discussion. This allows him then to examine the vocational imperatives (rather than the organizational roles) of bishops and priests for the renewal and "ongoing reform" of the Church local and universal. Actually, "Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today" is an excellent little volume, appropriate for study and for meditation both.

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