

CARDINAL STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI UNIVERSITY IN WARSAW

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

Kyeyune Vianney

(D-4054 UKSW)

**THE CREDIBILITY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS A COMMUNION IN THE
WORLD ACCORDING TO JOSEPH RATZINGER/BENEDICT XVI**

Doctoral Dissertation in Fundamental Theology

(Summary)

Supervisor: Rev. Prof. UKSW Dr. Hab. Waldemar Cisko

Auxiliary Supervisor: Rev. Dr. Rafał Pokrywiński

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General Introduction

The main goal of this thesis is to expound the profundity of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI's Fundamental ecclesiology, showing how his *communio*-theme brings out the exceptional credibility of the Church in the world. This involved studying the indispensable duty and ability of the Church in the world of bringing all people into communion with Trinitarian God, and showing how their communion with God unites them with one another. In that way, the research indicates the Church's ability to unify the fragmented humanity into a universal whole.

Among the many concerns that cover Ratzinger's theological thought the Church is central. It is therefore, not surprising that it was likewise central in his pontificate. Although the emeritus Pope did not devote a systematic study to the issue of the credibility of the Church, nonetheless we find in his ecclesiology reflections on the credibility of the Church. According to him, the credibility of the Church lies in her nature as a communion. That is why for him the Church defined as a communion is a Church well understood. *Communio* is an equivalent of a patristic understanding of the Church as a *Koinonia*. This patristic Greek word *koinonia* unites two meanings; the "Eucharist" and the "Congregation" as Ratzinger testifies: "The Fathers summed up these two aspects – Eucharist and gathering in the word *communio*, the Church is communion; she is the communion of the Word and Body of Christ and is thus communion among men..."¹ Communion "refers first of all to the Eucharistic centre of the Church, and so again returns to the understanding of the Church as the most intimate place of the encounter between Jesus and mankind, in his act of giving himself to us."² Thus, drawing from the Fathers of the Church especially St. Augustine Ratzinger's ecclesiology is nothing but Eucharistic.

CHAPTER ONE

¹ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church today*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), p. 76.

² Joseph Ratzinger, *Eucharist, Communion and Solidarity: Bishop's Conference of the Region of Campania in Benevento*, Italy, (Vatican: 2002), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020602_ratzinger_eucharistic-congress_en.html

In the first Chapter the researcher analyzes the concept of communion as understood by Joseph Ratzinger; The concept of communion being one of the notions defining the really essence of the Church, Ratzinger labors to explain it from its profane and semantic meaning as “*koinonia*” to the Church self understanding as the Eucharist and Congregation.

1.1.Communion (*Koinonia*)

The term communion was the most appropriate in bringing out the mystery of the Church and it is the starting point not only for understanding Catholic ecclesiology but also its renewal.³Through communion with Jesus Christ the people of God come together and become one body of Christ. And gathered by Christ they form a community of faith, a congregation (*ecclesia*). Communion is the life of the Church which flows directly from the Trinitarian communion of the divine Persons. He writes that; “guided by her legitimate shepherds, the Church lives in the world as a mystery of communion in which to a certain extent, the Trinitarian communion itself is mirrored.”⁴Trinitarian communion refers to divine love, therefore, Jesus Christ human persons are brought to share in the divine love, in the love of God. Trinitarian communion is the model of Christian unity. Although the three divine persons are distinct and unique, they are one, united in a single perfect communion of love and truth expressed by their common will and activity.

1.1.2. Foundation of the Church Communion

As far as the foundation of the Church is concerned, Ratzinger makes it clear that the Church is historically rooted in the work of Jesus Christ. He systematically explains how Jesus Christ while on earth, in a direct and deliberate manner, proclaimed and founded the Church as the true communion of the world lasting until the end of time. By appointing the Twelve as the foundation and protagonists, Christ created a new community of faith. He established the Church

³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of the Church understood as communion* (Vatican: 1992). no. 1.

⁴Cf. Benedict XVI, *General Audience: The Gift of Communion*, (Vatican: 29th March 2006) https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20060329.html. Retrieved on 7th September, 2020.

directly in a clearly defined manner, giving it a common purpose, object, concise power and appropriate means. Ratzinger explains in details how the Church from her origin is a community, which was gathered by Jesus Christ, sustained down the ages by her communion in Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

According to Joseph Ratzinger, the act of founding the Church can be recognized on the event of Jesus' Last Supper: The Lord himself gave his disciples the liturgy of death and of his Resurrection and thus bestowed on them the feast of life. It is in the event of Last Supper that he renewed the covenant of Sinai. What was then only a symbolic start became total reality, the communion of blood and life between God and man. Thus the last Supper anticipated the Cross and Resurrection and at the same time necessarily presupposed them. Therefore, the Church came into being, "when the Lord had given his body and his blood under the forms of bread and wine."⁵ Whereupon he said, "Do this in memory of me". The command of Jesus to his disciples that; "Do this in memory of me", calls for a responsibility which is supposed to be accomplished in an organized manner after the resurrection of the Lord.

Christ is the Paschal Lamb, the servant of God, who dies for many and in this sacrifice redefines the covenant on Sinai. He dies on the cross when paschal lambs were slaughtered in the temple. He thus, became the paschal Lamb. Here the essence of the Church was established. The first Passover night was the hour of the birth of God's new People. Jesus dies on the cross as a substitute for the whole world. The new people are united from within by the Lord's Body, which is the new temple, the place of God's presence. Here is the communion of the table with the Risen one, gathering all as God's new People.

1.1.3. Trinitarian foundation of the Church communion

The Church is created by three different aspects but of one divine action of our salvation; the grace of Christ, the love of the Father, and the Communion of the Spirit. Therefore, communion with the Church is participation in the Trinity. This divine communion is the source and model of the fraternal communion that must unite all Christians with one another. Because God is communion he can give communion. From the Trinitarian communion flows the relationship of

⁵ It should be noted that Ratzinger ecclesiology is so much Eucharistic in nature. For him the Church was instituted by Christ himself during the Last Supper. Actually for Ratzinger, the Church is a Eucharist.

people to God and the development of the interpersonal relationships. By being in communion with God, man enters into communion with all other men who live in the same communion. The Triune God, who is communion makes human communion greater and more profound. Here we focus on our union with the Son of God, who comes to mankind through the proclamation of the Church. This is the starting point of fellowship (communion) among men and then merges into communion with the one and Triune God. Man comes to communion with God through the realization of God's communion with the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, "the incarnated Son is the 'communion' between God and men."⁶

Faith in Jesus Christ makes us enter into his own vision, which works in us and opens us to love God and our fellow human beings. It is communication with Jesus that opens a person to the love of God and other people. It is Christ who reveals to us that God is love in the Trinitarian communion. God is wholly and only love. He is infinite and eternal love. It is this eternal love that the Church proclaims, unconditional love which human persons experience through their encounter with Christ. Since all things derive from love, aspire to love and move compelled by love. It is love alone that makes us happy because we live in a relationship, and we live to love and to be love.⁷ Therefore, having experienced the love of Christ, human persons are compelled into a communion with God and into a communion with other fellow human persons. Consequently this communion of love is extended to one another and eventually brings all of them together. And form a community bound together by the love of God and love of one another.

1.1.4. Eucharistic foundation of the Church Communion

Ratzinger's Eucharistic ecclesiology therefore, focuses on Christ as the one who willed and founded the Church, as well as the one who nourishes and builds her up in the Spirit. Being a Christian means nothing but sharing in the incarnation. One having become a Christian he or she

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, p. 77

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Address during the Angelus on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity*, (Vatican, Saint Peter's Square 7th June 2009), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20090607.html, Accessed on the 30th September 2021.

becomes part of the one body of Christ, the Church.⁸ Since there is one body, Christians who are many are made one body since they all partake on this one body in the Eucharist. By his Eucharistic action, Jesus establishes a new relationship between his disciples and God; in so doing he draws them into his mission. The disciples then become a people through communion with the Body and Blood of Jesus, which is simultaneously communion with God. Thus the new covenant people take origin from the Body and Blood of Christ. The Church is God's new people united within by the Lord's body. For Ratzinger true communion between human persons is only drawn from their communion with Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist. The one body of Christ brings all people together into a deep and strong communion. Unity is therefore drawn from the Eucharist as the source binding all the partakers into one body.

Drawing from St. Augustine, Ratzinger teaches that by eating the one bread Christians become what they are eating. For him this bread (Eucharist) is special food, and therefore, it is superior to man and stronger than he is. The man who takes this bread is assimilated to it, is taken into it, is fused into this bread and becomes bread like Christ himself. Therefore, since the bread is one, the many partakers become one body.⁹ Thus the Eucharist is never an event involving just two people Christ and me, no it is a communion of the many. Eucharistic communion is aimed at a complete reshaping of one's own life. It breaks up man's whole life and creates a new communion.

At this point according to Ratzinger, the connection between the concept of communion and understanding of the Church as the body of Christ becomes very clear. This indicates therefore, that the Christian community originates from Christ. It is dependent on him, he constitutes the conditions for its existence.¹⁰ One enters into the community of being with Christ by receiving Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. By coming into communion with Jesus Christ one is not only opened to being with God but also it is an opening which brings one into communion with other fellow sharers in the Eucharist. In that way it becomes visibly clear that communion among human beings with one another flows from man's communion with God. Communion stems

⁸ Ratzinger explains that "men's partaking of the communion between man and God, is what the Incarnation of the Word is"(Ibid, 77)

⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, p. 78.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 79

from the Eucharist were the many get united in the single body of Christ. The Eucharist is then the permanent origin and center of the Church.

The Eucharist gathers Christians from their state of separation into the unity of the one bread and the one body. In other words the Eucharist unites all partakers into one single body of Christ.¹¹ The many become one people through the Eucharistic fellowship by partaking on the same one table the Lord spreads for all of us. In that way Church become's a network of Eucharistic communion as she is ever and again united by the one body all of us partake on.¹² The communion of the Church is rooted in Christ's offering himself to men, thus coming into communion with them, which in turn enables them to be in communion with each other. The Eucharistic communion makes the Church a true communication of men with each other.¹³

CHAPTER TWO

In the second Chapter, the author describes how Christ established the Church as visible community. In expounding the communitarian origin of the Church, the author explains the historical fact that Jesus Christ when on earth, he himself proclaimed and founded the Church in a direct and deliberate manner as the true fellowship of the world, lasting until the end of time.

1.2. Church as a community of Faith

Christ intended and founded the Church on the foundation of the apostles as a community of faith, hope and charity. According to Benedict XVI, Jesus having understood himself as the new Moses who realizes God's new covenant with men, he founded a new religious community, of which the apostles became the protagonists of the twelve generations. He therefore, established the Church as a visible model community governed by the law of love. Since a community is established for a common purpose, the purpose of the Church is the salvation of all meaning that the purpose of the Church is to sanctify man. And the object of the Church is the whole world.

¹¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *God is near us*, (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2003), p. 114.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 115.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 7

In his preaching Jesus “above all addresses Israel (Mt 15:24) in order to gather it together for the eschatological time that arrived with him.”¹⁴Ratzinger explains that the number of apostles being twelve is significantly symbolic this alludes to the twelve tribes of Israel.¹⁵Throughout his earthly ministry Jesus strived to bring together the people of God. Although Jesus during his earthly preaching appealed to personal conversion, he aimed at establishing a community of the People of God whom he came to gather, purify and save.¹⁶Ratzinger explains the Jewish interpretation, of the gathering and cleansing of men for the Kingdom of God as part of the immanent Kingdom. By referring to the postexilic prophecy, Ratzinger reminds his readers that the Kingdom was to be preceded by the return of prophet Elijah or anonymous “angel” whose role was to prepare people for this Kingdom. Therefore, it is not surprising that John the Baptist gathers and purifies the community for the approaching Messiah. Thus according to Ratzinger the Kingdom of God is nothing else but Jesus Himself.¹⁷

It is important to note that from the beginning Jesus’ community of disciples is not an amorphous mob. It is rather a clearly defined community with the twelve disciples at its center. Benedict emphatically asserts; “it is clear that the entire mission of the Son-made-flesh has a communitarian finality. He truly came to unite dispersed humanity; he truly came to unite the people of God.”¹⁸According to Benedict Jesus’ intention to gather together the community of the covenant is evidenced by the institution of the Twelve. This institution of the Twelve was to fulfill the promises made to the Fathers who always spoke of unification, convocation and unity.¹⁹He established the community of the twelve so that together with him they may be heralds and witnesses of the coming of the Kingdom of God, which is the Church with Christ as the head and the Christians as the body of this Church. The Church is therefore nothing but a community of those who are called and gathered together by Christ through faith in him.

¹⁴Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Christ and the Church*, (Vatican, March 2006), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20060315.html, accessed on 19th October 2021.

¹⁵Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion; understanding the Church to day*, p. 25.

¹⁶Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Christ and the Church*, (Vatican, March 2006), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20060315.html, accessed on 19th October 2021.

¹⁷Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion; understanding the Church to day*, p. 23.

¹⁸Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Christ and the Church*, (Vatican, March 2006), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20060315.html, accessed on 19th October 2021.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Very important to remember is that when the apostles of Jesus became aware of their becoming a new community, they requested him (Jesus) for a special prayer. According to Ratzinger therefore, “the request for a prayer thus expresses the disciples’ awareness of having become a new community that has its source in Jesus. They appear as the primitive cell of the Church, and they show us at the same time that the Church is a communion united principally on the basis of prayer....”²⁰By teaching his disciples a special prayer and how to pray, Jesus broke from the temple community when he transformed the Passover of Israel into an entirely new worship. Ratzinger writes: “Jesus announces the collapse of the old ritual and ... promises a new, higher worship whose center will be his own glorified body”.²¹ Thus Jesus established a new Covenant. Jesus’ institution of the Eucharist replaces the temple²² and the Passover. The temple was the center and the guarantee of Israel’s unity, which was enacted through the common celebration of the Passover. Likewise the Eucharist becomes the new meal which unites the new people of God. According to Ratzinger, “the Body of the Lord, which is the center of the Lord’s Supper, is the one new temple that joins Christians together into a much more real unity than a temple made of stone could ever do.”²³Ratzinger goes ahead to teach that Christ’s institution of the Eucharist on the evening of the Passion, was not only a making of a New Covenant but also a concrete foundation of the new people. The people come into being through this covenant relationship with God. By instituting the Eucharist Jesus drew his disciples into his relationship with God and thus into his mission.

It is on the community of the twelve that the risen Lord conferred the power to forgive sins as we read in Jn 20:23. By doing so, Jesus portrayed his will for the Church’s existence and mission. The apostles then are the most evident sign of Jesus’ intention of founding the Church. Therefore, a Church built on the foundation of the apostles and sustained through their unbreakable succession is the living sign of Christ’s presence among his people. Many New Testament epistles especially St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians present the Church as a structure built as a communion upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The calling of the

²⁰Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion; understanding the Church to day*, p.24.

²¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, (Düsseldorf, 1966),p. 79.

²² The Temple dominated Jerusalem for more than thousand years and the center of religious and economic life, a place of pilgrimage. This is somehow reflected in the origins of Christian worship. The original Christians in Jerusalem participated daily in temple worship. (Rafal Pokrywinski, *Old Testament Christology*, <https://get-money.academia.edu/RafalPokrywinski>. Accessed on 9th February 2022)

²³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes*, (Düsseldorf, 1966), p. 79

apostles marked the first steps of Jesus' ministry. We can already see that the Nazarene began by forming a community around himself in preparation of the future Church he was to institute during the eve which preceded his passion.²⁴

1.2.2. The Primitive Church

Just after the death of Jesus Christ, the disciples retreated in the cenacle as already a complete small community of believers in Jesus. According to Ratzinger already this community reflects a genuine “*qahal*”, a covenant assembly with diverse orders, which is at the same time a mirror of the entire new people. Very important to note is that this convocation abides with one mind in prayer. Here prayer means that this primitive Church is fully aware that they are a new community that has its source in Jesus. Prayer is uniting them, bringing them into a communion with Jesus Christ and thus leading them to a shared openness to God's will. On the Pentecost, the congregation of Jesus' disciples appears to all as an already made community, with its doctrine that Christ is the true Messiah. They preached from place to place that Jesus Christ is the Lord to be worshipped, and the savior in whose name we can be redeemed. The new converts must accept this doctrine. Secondly, this new community of the primitive Church appears to have its own rites, especially baptism different from Jewish baptism and John's baptism, the laying on of hands and the breaking of bread. Ratzinger teaches here that there are already two mainstays; that is, word and sacrament appear as the living edifice of the Church.

According to St. John's first letter, it is clearly shown that the primitive community of believers was well aware of the possible tensions among their communion (1Jn 2:19). It becomes therefore inevitably clear that if a family of God's Children is to live in unity and peace, it ought to have someone to keep it in the truth and guide it with wise and authoritative discernment. So this is role of the ministry of the apostles. It is the responsibility of the structure of the apostolic succession to guarantee that the Church endures in the truth given by Christ, from whom the capacity of love comes. Peter is already taking the leading role, he appears as one who speaks and acts, in that way, exercises the responsibility committed to him by the Lord to strengthen his brethren. This is a sign that the new community of believers, the primitive Church already has

²⁴ Benedict XVI, *Jesus, the Apostles, and the Early Church*, p. 13.

leadership, Peter as the top most leader, and other leaders who are the apostles or disciples appointed by the apostles.

Therefore, through its visible hierarchical nature, the Church's communion is protected and safeguarded by the Pontiff and the college of bishops. From the time of her birth the Church as a communion has through the ages proved to be a visible sign of the Spirit of Christ, and thus an invisible principle of the unity of humanity. Ever since it was instituted, the Church has always been a community living in communion with its founder Christ himself. This historical communitarian nature of the Church therefore makes it much credible in the world where humanity yearns to live a true communitarian life. From his creation man desired to live in communion with one another. It is by living with fellow human person(s) that man feels fulfilled (Genesis 2:20-25). It is in the Church that man can have guarantee of a communitarian life lived in faith, hope and charity.

1.2.3. The Primacy of Peter

Then comes in the question of Peter's Primacy and his successors, which has had for a long period of time exceptional importance and has been a very big topical discussion. It has not only been one of the most stumbling blocks towards communion, but also carries ecumenical significance and more so, the starting point of ecumenical disputes. It was actually the major issue in the events culminating into the schism of 1054 and it is the central theme of the long-time Catholic –Orthodox dialogue which is driven by the desire to re-establish full ecclesial communion. The break-up of ecclesiastical unity and the consequential division of Christianity greatly affected the credibility of the Church.

Ratzinger is one of those who have always sought to justify Peter's Primacy and its continuation in the bishops of Rome. Actually Peter's Primacy is one of the themes where Ratzinger's reflection on the credibility of the Church comes out well. From the time of its birth, the Church of Christ which subsists in the Catholic Church has consciously preserved in fidelity the Apostolic Tradition and the faith of the Fathers as regards the origin, nature and purpose of the ministry of Peter. This is exactly what Benedict XVI justifies with scriptural evidence. In his treatment, he points to the distinctively Petrine passages of scripture as evidence to support his interpretation of the Primacy. According to Pope Benedict XVI, the three metaphors that Jesus

uses are crystal clear; “Peter will be the rocky foundation on which he will build the edifice of the Church; he will have the keys of the kingdom of heaven to open or close it to people as he sees fit. Lastly, he will be able to bind or to loose, in the sense of establishing or prohibiting whatever he deems necessary for the life of the Church.”²⁵

CHAPTER THREE

The researcher in the third chapter has expounded the communal structure of the ecclesiastical offices. In so doing the researcher has analytically explained the nature, position and role of different ecclesial offices, bringing out Ratzinger’s prior and ontological primacy of the universal Church.

1.3. The Church Structure and offices

According to Pope Benedict XVI, the Church is hierarchically-organized, organically structured, and she is being guided by her pastors at different level.²⁶ Between these structures there is a brotherly relationship which promotes dialogue and consensus. This kind of structural organization promotes brotherhood, love and unity which makes the Church credible in her services to the people as it brings different communities into one single communion.

In the Communion of the Church there are ministerial offices and various roles played by ordained ministers. This sacramental office in its various degrees that is to say; bishop, priest, deacon, is the fundamental institutional factor in the Church and thus the permanent organization that gives the Church its distinctive shape. Nonetheless, the lay faithful people also have an indispensable place and roles to play in the Church of Christ. The structural organization of the Church has a divine origin. It was intended by Christ himself, who founded the Church and left it in hands of the apostles under the leadership of Peter. It must therefore, be perpetually recreated by God who instituted it. It is not at the Church’s disposal and in that way the Church cannot reset it up on its own initiative.

According to Pope Benedict XVI, the development of Episcopal ministry was guided by God’s spirit who helps the Church in the discernment of the authentic forms of apostolic succession.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Benedict XVI, *General Audience: The Gift of ‘Communion’*, (29th March 2006).

Therefore, the succession in the role of Bishop is presented as the continuity of the apostolic ministry, which guarantees the permanence of the apostolic Tradition, word and life, entrusted to us by the Lord. Benedict emphasizes that the apostolic succession, verified on the basis of communion with the Church of Rome, is for that matter the criterion of the permanence of the particular Churches in the tradition of the common apostolic faith, which from the origins has come down to us through this channel.

Benedict emphasizes that only those ordained by authentic bishops are true ministers in the Catholic Church. This must be emphasized because many people today purport to be ministers in the Church when they were not validly ordained by a bishop of the Catholic Church. A bishop of the Catholic Church must be in communion with the Roman Pontiff, and again in communion with the college of bishops. By putting emphasis on apostolic uninterrupted succession, Benedict wants to protect the credibility of the Catholic faith. He is fully aware that a Church rooted in the apostolic succession and teaching is the only credible Church.

Cardinal Ratzinger puts emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit who places men in the ministerial office. And since they are conferred by the Spirit, their office is therefore, sacramental. He notes again that it is not “a delegation on the part of the community, which for reasons of utility entrusts individuals with its communal functions, but the gift of the Lord, who gives personally what only he can give.”²⁷ Ministerial priesthood is not granted by the community. No it is only a gift which Christ grants to those he has chosen. This makes the Catholic Church more credible especially in the contemporary world which is having many self-appointed pastors.

Eucharistic ecclesiology naturally gives much attention to the Church’s ministerial offices. This is due to the fact that no Eucharistic Celebration which can be conducted without a presiding minister. Uniquely to Ratzinger’s approach, his theology of ministerial office does not develop from reflection on the Eucharistic assembly, as with the case of the pure Eucharistic ecclesiologists of the Orthodox tradition, but rather from a wider, and more diffused, picture of the Gospel community. For Ratzinger, the Church is composed of three elements; Confession of the faith, communion in the sacraments, and obedience to the apostolic ministry which Christ

²⁷Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church today*, p. 118

founded. In line to the Church offices, he emphasizes that obedience to the apostolic ministry is an intrinsic feature of the Church.²⁸

1.3.2. The Primacy of The Pope

The hierarchy, as the supreme governing body of the Catholic Church, consists of the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, and the Bishops joined together with him and never without him (Canons, 330, 331, 336) in one apostolic college to provide for the common good of the Church. The Roman Pontiff in the exercise of his office is assisted by the college of Cardinals, and further by the departments also called “dicasteries” of the Roman Curia.

In defense of the Primacy of the Pope, Ratzinger asserts that; Since the Primacy is rooted in the profession of faith in Christ, it involves witness which directly calls for personal responsibility. Witness verifies a person’s martyrdom as a sign of witness to the crucified who is victorious upon the cross. The aspect of the Primacy upholds the unity of the Catholic Church, which helps her to stand credible in the face of the secular power which is always particular. Although a general unification of the Christendom around the papacy understood as the successor of Peter in Rome is unlikely in the near future, nevertheless the Pope somehow plays unifying function which extends beyond the communion of the Roman Catholic Church.

The German theologian asserts that: Although the Pope’s full powers are many times opposed by some Christian denominations, “the pope personally remains in view of the whole world a point of reference with regard to the responsibility borne and expressed for the Word of faith, and thus he remains a challenge, noticed by all and concerning all, to seek greater fidelity to this Word and furthermore, a challenge for unity and to take responsibility for the lack of unity.”²⁹ This makes the Catholic Church credible that even in division itself, the papacy remains with the unifying function. Actually this function in the final analysis no one can ignore in the surveying the historical drama of the Christendom.

Ratzinger asserts that though some Christian denomination are not under the direct leadership of the Roman Pontiff, the pontiff remains as the world symbol of unity for the entire Christendom.

²⁸ Aidan Nichols; *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI; An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger*, p. 98-99.

²⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Primacy of the Pope and the Unity of the People of God*, *International Catholic Review*, p. 116.

And he is a challenge for the non-Catholic Christians to yearn and achieve the concrete unity to which the Church is called and which ought to be her identifying feature in the world's eyes.³⁰

1.3.3. The Role of the Bishop

Bishops, possess the fullness of priestly orders; together in communion they are called college of Bishops and they are the successors of the apostles. They are constituted pastors in the Church; they are the teachers of doctrine. The typical role of a bishop is to provide pastoral governance for a diocese. The pope himself is a bishop of Rome.³¹In the Catholic Church; authority rests chiefly on the bishops, while priest and deacons are their co-workers, assistants or helpers.³²

The bishop has two inter-related functions. As the head of a local Church, he ensures its ecclesiality and unity; as a member of the *ordo episcoporum*, he ties it into the communion of the larger Church. It should be noted that the status of a bishop is shaped according to the same basic structure of communality as is the status of the Christian; a person is a bishop from and toward others. According to the German Theologian, one encounters a double definition of the basic structure of communality derived from the Trinity, namely, being from and being toward, that is to say; an individual to be a Christian he must derive status from the local congregation; likewise the local Church needs the larger Church in order to be considered a Church. Just as a Christian is Christian only by standing in communion with other congregations; in the same manner, a bishop is a bishop by standing in communion with other bishops.³³ It is important to note that the relationship between the local and larger Church is achieved through the office of the bishop, who serves as its representative to the larger Church. One is a bishop only if he is accepted by the communion of Bishops as a bishop; and then one remains in that communion which is understood both synchronically in terms of its Catholicity, and diachronically in terms of apostolicity.³⁴ The communality of office deriving from the whole Church is both expressed and secured through the sacramentality of Episcopal consecration. This is because one can

³⁰ Ibid, p. 128.

³¹Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Roman Catholicism ; Structure of the Church: The College of Bishops* (Retrieved on 27th February, 2021)

³² Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 874 -896, Cf. also "Hierarchy" in John Hardon, *Modern Catholic Dictionary*

³³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, pp. 116, 164, 204, 206).

³⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre: Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie*, p. 256.

receive consecration only from bishops standing both synchronically and diachronically in communion with other bishops.³⁵

1.3.4. Primacy of the Universal Church over the Local Church

According to his *communio* ecclesiology, Ratzinger emphasizes the primacy of the universal Church. In his endeavor to bring out the priority of the Universality in the communion of the Church structure, Ratzinger reiterates that apostles were not bishops of particular local Churches. He makes it clear to his readers that the apostles were responsible for the whole world and for the whole Church that was to be built. This is the reason why the universal Church precedes the local Churches which only came into existence as its concrete realizations.

According to the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, the universal Church is not a result of the communion of the particular Churches, but in its essential mystery it is a reality ontologically and temporally prior to every individual particular Church.³⁶ Therefore, the universal Church cannot be received as a federation or a sum of the particular Churches.³⁷ The Congregation went ahead and made it clear that the Church of Christ which we profess in the creed is the universal Church, the world wide community of the Lord which is present and active in the particular Churches. It is made of a diversity of persons, groups and places. These particular Churches are constituted after the model of the universal Church.³⁸

Ratzinger is fully convinced about the historical and ontological priority of the universal Church. He insists that this was the teaching of the Church Fathers which according to them the universal Church precedes creation, and it is the one that gives birth to the particular Churches.³⁹

³⁵ The consecration binds the new bishop into entire *ordo episcoporum*. The consecratory sacrament is thus the expression and simultaneously also the guarantee of standing together within tradition from the beginning. (See; J. Ratzinger; *Theologische Prinzipienlehre: Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie*, P. 256, Cf. also; J. Ratzinger; *Theologie und Kirche*, p. 84.)

³⁶ Ratzinger, who was head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith at that time, had used this statement before, in books published in 1989 and 1991, long before the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's letter of 1992. (Killian McDonnell, *The Ratzinger/Kasper Debate: The Universal Church and Local Churches 'Theological Studies'* 63), 228.

³⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of the Church understood as communion*, no. 9

³⁸ *Ibid*, no. 7.

³⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, "The Ecclesiology of the constitution *Lumen Gentium*," in *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 134.

1.3.5. Ministerial Priesthood

In the tradition of the Church and communion ecclesiology, the specific duties of the priestly ministry are essentially three; teaching, Sanctifying and governing. Through ordination priests are appointed to serve Christ, who is Teacher, Priest and King, and in that way, they share in his office,⁴⁰ by which the Church on earth is built up to be the people of God; the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

1.3.6. The Lay Faithful

The Lay Faithful people (Laity) are all the members of the Church except those who have been ordained as deacons, priests or bishops and those who belong to religious institutes approved by the Church. Therefore, the Lay faithful not only belong fully to the Church; they are the Church because they belong to Christ through baptism.⁴¹

Pope Benedict XVI asserts that for the Church to take root in people's land and lives, and even develop actively, it was because of the commitment of the lay faithful. From the time of the Apostles it has been the commitment of different families, spouses, Christian communities of the lay faithful who have offered the necessary 'humus' for the growth of the faith.⁴² According to Ratzinger, Jesus' most favorite image for God's community of the new people is that of the family of God. Today a Christian family is considered to be the smallest Christian community, the basic unit of the Church. Benedict XVI, sees the family as a "particular realization of the Church, saved and saving, evangelized and evangelizing community. Just like the Church, it is called to welcome, radiate and show the world the love and presence of Christ."⁴³

Benedict XVI, discloses that in first Centuries the Church community used to assemble in houses of the lay faithful to listen to the word of God to celebrate the Eucharist. He gives the example of

⁴⁰*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 1

⁴¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 9. (Vatican, 1988), p. 15.

⁴² Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Aquila and Priscilla*, (Vatican: 7th February 2007) https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20070207.html. Retrieved on the 17th March 2020).

⁴³ Benedict XVI, *Address to Participants at the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family*, (Vatican: December 2011), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20111201_pc-family.html, Accessed on 20th October 2021.

some of those families in whose houses the early Christians used to gather. Among these was the couple of Aquila and Priscilla as we read in 1Cor 16:19.⁴⁴

CHAPTER FOUR

In the fourth chapter, the author critically looks at the Church and the world. And then critically analyzes the situation and conditions under which the Church is operating in the contemporary world. He observes how the social-political world and secular systems in the world are affecting the communion between God and man and between man and fellow man.

1.4. The Church and the World

The relationship between the Church and the world is yet another fascinating endeavor in the writings of the German theologian. One of Ratzinger's ecclesiological concerns is the place and mission of the Church in the modern world. The theologian makes effort to bring out the self-understanding and practices of the Catholic Church. In the same measure he analyses the world, indicating the challenges brought about by modernity. Among others, Ratzinger is much bothered by the progressive erosion of the Christian heritage, dictatorship of relativism, Marxist ideologies, radical individualism, liberalism, collectivism, atheism coupled with vague religious mysticism, agnosticism and syncretism.⁴⁵ These have not only affected people's relationships with God, but they have also greatly divided humanity. These different ideologies have greatly fragmented mankind at all levels of human strata. Actually, currently, human relations are fractured by divisions at all levels of human existence.

In the world of today, it does not require much observation to recognize that many people are living 'as if God did not exist.' People are becoming more and more divorced from God, their creator and author of authentic communitarian living. The current fractured communion between human persons and God is evidenced by peoples' undermining of the Church communion, which eventually result into: eclectic approach to faith, individualistic tendencies, egocentredness, broken family bonds, lack of love and solidarity, unhealthy egoistic competition, to mention.

⁴⁴Benedict XVI, *General Audience: Aquila and Priscilla*, (Vatican: 7th February 2007) https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20070207.html. Retrieved on the 17th March 2020).

⁴⁵Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Homily During Mass Before the Conclave in 2005*. Vatican Website, April 18, 2005. www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html

Thus, humanity's quest for a true community, and authentic relationality becomes inevitable. Humanity by nature is meant to live in communion with one another. Man in the world struggles always to live in relation with one another. But unfortunately, man's efforts to live in communion with one another are still futile. World interpersonal relations in recent past have been affected greatly by disunity, chaos, confusions, and destruction brought about by relativistic tendencies, Marxist ideologies, world and civil wars coupled with interpersonal conflicts. Unity among the people of the world is still a big existential-challenge. The council Fathers noted with concern about the conflicting forces in the world that have continuously left humanity divided. "Although the world of today has a very vivid awareness of its unity and how one man depends on another in needful solidarity, it is most grievously torn into opposing camps by conflicting forces."⁴⁶

That is why Ratzinger maintains that the Church as a communion is the only credible institution which can bring about the desired unity and solidarity in the world. For him, the rediscovery of this ancient concept of communion in the Twentieth Century and making it central in the Second Vatican Council documents is a clear sign that the Church is an icon of a true community. A community which promotes unity, solidarity and dialogue at all levels of human strata, communication and listening to one another and active involvement of all people from family to the universal level. Isn't this the kind of community that the world is yearning for? Where people can dialogue and listen to one another in spite of their differences? A world where each person loves and respects another? Ratzinger maintains that unity in truth remains the always prior condition of every responsible exercise of human freedom, rights and of every form of political praxis that truly enhances human solidarity.⁴⁷

According to Benedict XVI, it is the Church to foster and promote unity in today's divided and dispersed world. He expresses an urgent need to nurture and also witness to unity in this "modern divided and scattered world."⁴⁸ Although Benedict XVI admits that there are elements of disunity in the Church like it has always been the case in history, nonetheless according to him, the Church remains as the only credible and reliable source of true unity and solidarity the

⁴⁶*Gaudium Et Spes*, no. 4

⁴⁷ James Massa ; *The Communion Theme in the writings of Joseph Ratzinger* (ETD Collection for Fordham University, 1996), p. 21.

⁴⁸ Secretariat of the Head of the Ukrainian-Greek Catholic Church in Rome; <https://ssjoachimandanna.org/2019/09/11/lets-foster-unity-in-todays-divided-and-dispersed-world-pope-benedict-xvi-to-the-delegation-of-the-synod-of-bishops-of-the-ugcc/> Accessed on 09th September 2021

world is yearning for. This is because the unity the Church preaches flows directly from the triune God.

It is unfortunate that the world desires and seeks unity, after abandoning and excluding the really source of unity. The world abandoned God and sought answers from pagan social- political and economic world ideologies and systems; in the name of Marxist socialism, communism, just to mention. Now the world is being divided by different ideological waves such as collectivism, radical individualism, atheism, religious mysticism, agnosticism and syncretism.⁴⁹

Generally in his writings and addresses Ratzinger/Benedict XVI centralizes on the theme of God in the lives of the people. That is why in his keynote address at the commencement of his pontificate, he spoke of different kinds of deserts we experience in the world and he emphasized one in particular; which is the desert of God's darkness, the emptiness of souls that are no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast.⁵⁰ Commenting on the post-modern period, the Holy Father wonders what drama humanity is experiencing in the world today. "He notes that there is a strange forgetfulness of God, the exclusion of God, rejection of God, absence of God, an eclipsing of the sense of God, a new paganism."⁵¹ The Pontiff acknowledges that, "the true problem of our time is the crisis of God, the absence of God, disguised by an empty religiosity, the *unumnecessarium* to mankind is God."⁵²

The adversaries of Jesus did not deny his good works but they denied the fact that these good works pointed to something more, to something beyond the works themselves. They denied the fact that these good works point to his unique relationship with God the Father. "...believe the works that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." (Jn 10:38). Jesus always invited his hearers to believe the truth of his identity, unfortunately many failed to perceive his divinity and thus rejected the significance of what they saw and heard.

⁴⁹Joseph Ratzinger, *Pro eligendo Romano Pontifice Mass*, 18th April, 2005.

https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html. Accessed on 12 March 2020.

⁵⁰ Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate*, 24th April 2005. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato.html. Retrieved on 12th March 2020.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Stanislaw Rylko, *The God-Question in the teaching of Benedict XVI*, Opening Address of the 25th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council of the Laity. Rome 24th November, 2011.

When the world fails to recognize God's good works in the world, it automatically fails to recognize the Church's contribution to the welfare of the world. Ratzinger says that "we should not be surprised if the attitudes toward Jesus that we find in the Gospel of John 10:33, continue today in attitudes towards his Church."⁵³ Benedict XVI, asserts that without God human beings neither know which way to go nor even understand who they are. He says human beings by themselves cannot establish an authentic humanism. To the Pontiff, a humanism which excludes God is an inhuman humanism.⁵⁴ This is due to the fact that the relationship between human beings depends on their relationship with God. Man's failure to recognize God as his creator, and that each human person was created in God's own image, leads him into a real crisis because the bond between humans is only brought about by God.

CHAPTER FIVE

In the last chapter, the researcher elaborates the indispensable role of the Church in the world, showing how the Church has the capacity to restore everlasting peace, unity and tranquility which God intended for man from the beginning of the world. This can be done starting with Christian solidarity which will eventually lead humanity to the desired communion.

1.5. Indispensable Role of the Church in the World

As a solution to the obstacles of communion and unity in the world, Benedict XVI reminds all the people that Jesus brought God to the world that the world may know his face and also come into communion with him. Benedict exhorts the world to open up for God and allow him enter the strata of their lives. Benedict is fully convinced that it is the exclusion of God that antagonizes the world leading people into disunity. It is only therefore through the Church that true communion can be achieved since to him the Church is the visible sign of God's presence in the world.⁵⁵

The Church's mission is to reach out to all humanity, to make Christ present in the world to bring all people into communion with the triune God through Jesus Christ and thus, communion

⁵³Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Homily during Mass marking the 40th Anniversary of Gaudium et Spes*, (Vatican, St. Peter's Basilica, 2005),

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20050318_ratzinger-gaudium-spes_en.html, accessed on 3rd September, 2021.

⁵⁴ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 78.

⁵⁵ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, no. 35.

with one another. The lives in the world as a mystery of communion: This communion is a free gift of the Father in Jesus Christ which is realized, expressed and brought about by the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶

The Church is a communion uniting men and women, brought together by word and sacrament. Through the Eucharist they are united vertically with the triune God and horizontally with one another, and thus become one body. Thus communion brings about communication, unity, dialogue, and mutual participation in the world. The Church as catholic; transcends the cultural and religious confines and opens all people to the universal Kingdom of God. Therefore, the Church of Christ is unique, universal and all-inclusive; it is the universal Church which is realized in every local Church. This “Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic; she reflects in herself the source of her journey: the unity and communion of the Trinity.”⁵⁷

According to Pope Benedict XVI, “what makes the Church catholic is the fact that Christ in his saving mission embraces all humanity.”⁵⁸ Therefore, those who accept and follow Jesus and drawn into his humanity and into communion with God. Thus, they “enter a new kingdom proclaimed and anticipated by the Church, a Kingdom that conquers fragmentation and dispersal.”⁵⁹ Christ wants all humanity to be under one sheep-fold. By his saving action Jesus unites all humanity into one single people in order to save them.

1.5.2. Solidarity a true meaning of Communion in the World

Although “Eucharist” and “communion” are biblical words and have their roots in Christian tradition, Ratzinger sees “solidarity” a concept from outside to be next to them. Solidarity as a concept was originally developed among the early socialist. It was these activities of love and Charity coupled with the ethical studies of Pope John Paul II that slowly transformed and Christianized the concept of solidarity.

⁵⁶ Benedict XVI, *The gift of Communion, General Audience*, (Vatican: March 2006), http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20060329.html Accessed on 10th May 2021.

⁵⁷ Benedict XVI, *Ordinary Public Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals*, (Vatican Basilica: 2012), http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121124_concistoro.html, Accessed on 22nd May 2021

⁵⁸ Benedict XVI, *Ordinary Public Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals*, (Vatican Basilica, 2012), http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121124_concistoro.html, Accessed on 22nd May 2021.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 1.

According to Benedict XVI, solidarity “refers to the virtue enabling the human family to share fully the treasure of material and spiritual goods.”⁶⁰ For Ratzinger in the Christian solidarity means; loving, caring, and feeling for the needy and the poor, being concerned for one another, richer countries feeling concerned about poor countries. It also involves being aware that when we give, we receive, and that we give what we have been given, and what has been given to us does not belong to us alone.

What is very much important in solidarity is the act of giving. Sharing at all levels, spiritual, ethical and religious is part of solidarity between individuals, peoples and nations. The act of giving can transform the world from hatred to love, from violence to peace and from conflicts and divisions to committed unity. This act of giving is exactly what we experience in communion and the Eucharist.

Through the act of giving himself which was an act of love, Christ transformed and defeated violence and death. Therefore, he proved that his love for humanity is stronger than violence and death. In this transformation we further see a broader transformation of death into resurrection, of the dead body into the risen body. It is a fact that during the Last Supper, Jesus had already anticipated his death and had already accepted his death on the cross.

During the Eucharist the gifts of bread and wine are transformed so that in them Christ himself who gives himself becomes present in his act of self-giving. The Eucharist transforms those who receive it in authentic communion and the end result is unity. The separated individuals who live in conflict with one another or beside one another, transform with Christ and in him as an organism of self-giving, to live in view of the new world.

CONCLUSION

The Church’s credibility to bring about the desired permanent unification of humanity is rooted in communion. This communion with God and with one another can be best expressed by being lived out in commitment, Charity, love and justice which slowly leads to the unification of mankind. The acts of sharing strengthen the brotherly bonds not only between Christians alone

⁶⁰ Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants in the 14th Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, (Vatican: 3rd May 2008). https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080503_social-sciences.html. Accessed on 12th May 2021.

but also between Christians and non- Christians. The spirit of giving eventually creates strong friendships which give birth to communion, first with God through faith. Communion with God creates communion among believers themselves. This communion with God can be best expressed by being lived out in commitment, Charity, love and justice which slowly leads to the unification of mankind.

Benedict on the act of giving draws us back to the Eucharist as the source of our communion. He puts emphasis on the fact the Church draws her life from the Eucharist. That is why from the beginning the Church is rooted in the Eucharist. Christ gives himself in order to bring humanity into communion with God and into communion with one another.