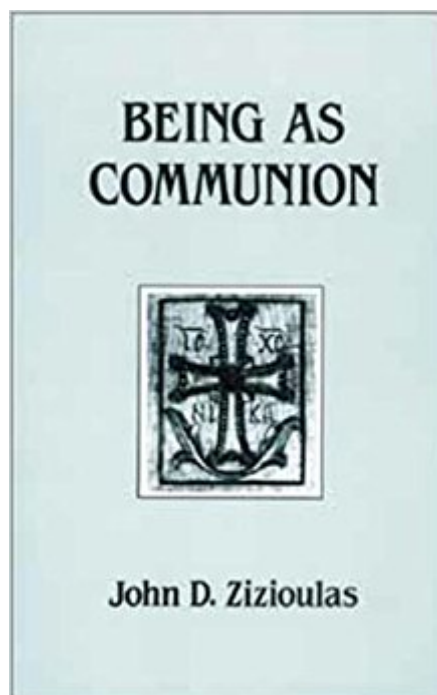




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# **Being As Communion: Studies In Personhood And The Church (Contemporary Greek Theologians Series, No 4)**



## Synopsis

The voice of John Zizioulas may turn out to be the fresh voice for which theology and especially ecclesiology have long been waiting. In the context of a complete theology, which includes extended consideration of the major theological topics the Trinity, Christology, eschatology, ministry, and sacrament, but above all, the Eucharist the author propounds a fresh understanding, based on the early Fathers and the Orthodox tradition, of the concept of person, and so of the Church itself. His consideration of the local church as 'catholic' in the literal sense, and the need to understand the universal Church not as a superstructure but as the communion of all Churches, provides the program for the ecclesiology of the future. Yves Congar has written that he considers the author to be 'one of the most original and profound theologians of our epoch' and that he 'presents a penetrating and coherent reading of the tradition of the Greek '

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

'A superb example of the creative use of Scripture and tradition to address contemporary tensions.'--Rowan Williams --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

John Zizioulas is Metropolitan of Pergamon in the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

While not strictly a book on the Trinity, but on Ecclesiology, it contains arguably one of the most important conceptual developments on the Trinity written in the 20th century from an Eastern

Orthodox (or any denominational) perspective. Utilizing the theologies of the so-called "Cappadocian," Church Fathers Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea, Zizioulas explores the connections between "being," or "existence," (ontology) and the "community," or "communion," implied between the persons of the Trinity, and its implications for the Church and our conception of personhood. For example: "To say that the Son belongs to God's substance implies that substance possesses almost by definition a relational character...If God's being is by nature relational, and if it can be signified by the word 'substance' can we not then conclude almost inevitably that, given the ultimate character of God's being for all ontology, substance can be conceived only as communion?" (p.84) In other words "person/hypostasis became capable of signifying God's being in an ultimate sense." (p.88) This volume covers a wide range of theological topics, from Theology Proper, Revelation, Jesus Christ, humanity, etc... but all theological topics find their locus, says Zizioulas, in the doctrine of the Church, which finds its structure in the ontologico-communal vision of the Trinity. While Zizioulas has been criticized on many accounts (e.g. Patristic specialists note his interpretation of the Cappadocian's Trinity of "relation," is definitely mediated via his presupposed understanding of communion and hence his turning of the Cappadocians against the Latin "Augustinian" understanding of the Trinity is both too sharp and fundamentally misunderstands pro-Nicene Trinitarianism) we should, I suspect, take Miroslav Volf's advice and attempt to take Zizioulas' theological understandings on their own merit, rather than disregarding them because their pedigree is suspect. Overall this is a must read for anyone interested in 20th century Trinitarianism as the "Zizioulas dictum," (a term coined by Stanley Grenz) that being is communion has become so commonplace since the publication of this book that it is often perpetuated without even citing Zizioulas as its source and inspiration anymore. Buy this book and read it!

This is a fine piece of systematic theology. Zizioulas builds his reflections on personhood, the church and the ministry on the basis of communion. The importance of conceiving the church as a eucharistic community is at the centre of his ecclesiology. As a Protestant, this work goes behind the the sectarian attitudes that I can see at work in my denomination, and exposes the flaw in seeking unity only through confessional means. I sense a deep sadness in his writing about divisions between Christians, an attitude that I share. I eagerly await his next work on the eschatological ontology.

This book is perhaps the best that I've seen or even heard of as far as attempting to explain the

Orthodox ethos and "philosophy" in a way that is accessible to western intellectuals.

It's an Orthodox classic with a great take on the concept of "person", both divine and human.

This is a great book. Thanks.

seminal

Bishop Zizioulas presents a very systematic defense of the Eastern Orthodox understanding, and relevance, of Trinitarian theology. He shows how the starting point of the Trinity is not the essence, as is often the case in western theology, but with the persons- Father, Son, Spirit. Commenting on western, essence first approach, he writes: "This interpretation represents a misinterpretation of the Patristic theology of the Trinity. Among the Greek Fathers the unity of God, the one God, and the ontological 'principle' or 'cause' of the being and life of God does not consist in the one substance of God but in the hypostasis, that is, the person of the Father. The one God is not the one substance but the Father, who is the cause both of the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. Consequently, the ontological 'principle' of God is traced back, once again, to the person." (page 40-41) This line of thought runs thru the whole text, linking personhood with being in the ontological sense. Moreover, he draws various ecclesiological conclusions about the role of the bishop in the church catholic. He builds a eucharistic ecclesiology around some of his reading of the Greek Patristic tradition that fits well with much of modern Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic thought. This book has had a very wide influence among theologians. Some other books that may be of related interest are: *God For Us*, by LaCugna (although I think she misses the point of the Cappadocians); *The One the Three and the Many*, by Gunton; *The Tripersonal God*, by O'Collins; *The Eucharist Makes the Church*, by McPartlan; *The Sacrament of Salvation* by McPartlan; *Theology in the Russian Diaspora*, by Nichols; *Altogether Gift*, by Downey; *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, by Werner Elert (very thorough); *After Our Likeness*, by Volf; *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ*, by Tillard; *God as Communion*, by Fox and *The God of the Gospel of John* by Thompson. These books all concern themselves with the ideas of how communion and fellowship are defined and experienced within the life and teachings of the Church based upon the life of God, in Whom we live, move and have our being. Some are very original. I would also recommend the works of Kallistos Ware, Volume One and Two of his *Collected Works* for similar themes. Ut Unum Sint. Enjoy!

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