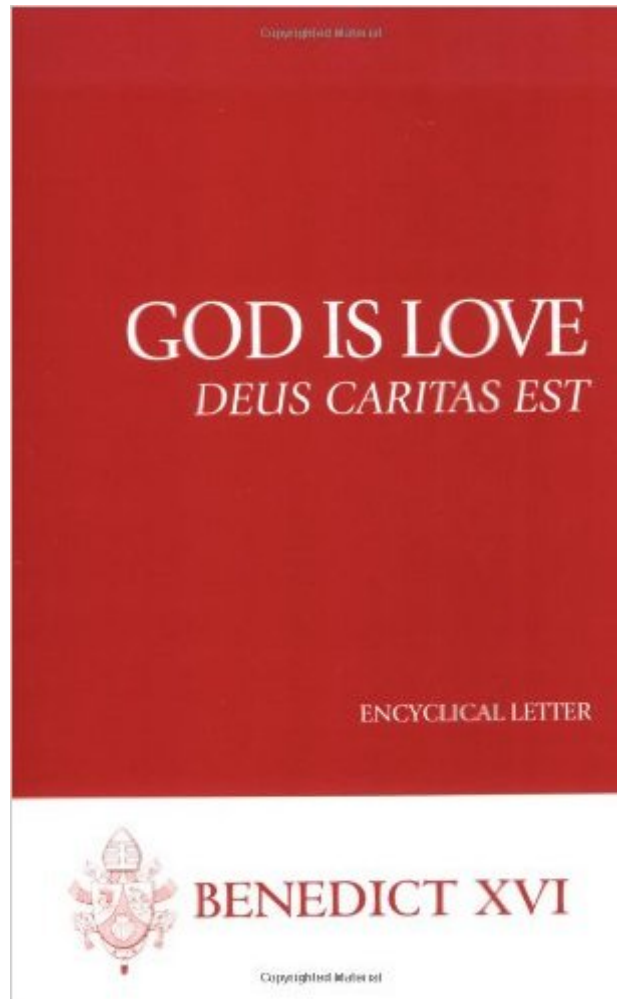


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# God Is Love (Deus Caritas Est) (Benedict XVI)



## Synopsis

With his first encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI hopes to overturn that perception and describe the essential place of love in the life of the Church.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I am shocked, absolutely shocked, that no one has reviewed Pope Benedict XVI's first papal encyclical, "God Is Love". At the very least you would expect a Catholic or two to show up and say a few words about the supreme pontiff's elegant treatise on the transformative power of God's love. It's been nearly eight months since the Vatican released it! Where are the reviews? Sad, sad, sad. Well, I'll write a review for Benedict's epistle even though I'm not a Catholic. Nor am I a Jew, a Muslim, a Buddhist, or a Protestant. I'm just an agnostic, albeit one who holds sympathies for the Catholic Church, with a bachelor's degree in religious studies (degrees in history too, but that doesn't count here). I decided to read "Deus Caritas Est" (the Latin title) when I realized I have never read a papal encyclical. They serve several important purposes within the Catholic Church. One, encyclicals tend to lay the groundwork for a pope's legacy. Two, they attempt to offer answers to serious temporal problems facing Catholics around the world. Three, they explain certain policy decisions taken by the leadership. Four, and lastly, encyclicals often clarify hazy doctrinal issues that arise from time to time. Benedict divides "God Is Love" into two parts. The first, and most difficult, section involves a theoretical discussion on the various aspects of love. According to the pontiff, there is two of major importance. The first, eros, is a grand, soaring love that has little to do

with giving of oneself. Agape, the second form of love, is more contemplative and grounded, a love that is more concerned with giving than receiving. Both forms of love are healthy and good in and of themselves, but Benedict admonishes the modern tendency to embrace eros as it pertains to bodily pleasures. Love without the spiritual component found in Christianity, the pope argues, is an empty love that causes more harm than good. Only when we realize that eros and agape go together, that they are two sides of the same coin, do we understand the depth and greatness of God's love. He also contends that it is through God that both loves become united for the benefit of mankind.

Benedict cites a number of sources--Virgil's Eclogues, Nietzsche, the Old Testament, and the Gospels among them--in his examination of the various aspects and definitions of love. It's pretty obvious the new pope is quite the theologian. After the tough slog through the first part of the encyclical (Benedict himself admits it is a difficult trek), the second part feels like a piece of cake. This section discusses how Catholic charities must channel God's love to help ease humanity's sufferings. There's some standard stuff in here one would expect from the head of the Catholic Church--love thy neighbor, don't puff up with pride or feel superior because you help the needy, and admonitions to stay the course in an increasingly dark and dangerous world. Good and true, such advice. Benedict goes further, however, by urging Catholic charities to retain their religious character, to avoid Marxist cant about foregoing charity in favor of a nebulous social justice down the road. He also points out that Catholic organizations should watch out lest they become part of the state and the political process (read: shun secularization). "Deus Caritas Est" concludes with a very short examination of saints and charity. He cites Martin of Tours, Francis of Assisi, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, Mary, and others as examples of how love and charity should work in the earthly realm. Also included in an appendix is an introduction Benedict wrote for the edition of the encyclical published in *Famiglia Cristiana*.

I remember back when Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI. The media went nuts over his selection. They blasted him for being a conservative, and there were many dark insinuations that this pope would attempt to take the Catholic Church back to the Middle Ages. His association with a certain youth association in Germany at the end of World War II hinted at something far bleaker, although anyone with half a brain understood that membership in this group was mandatory and meant nothing about this man's character. It was just another smear tactic employed by liberals angry over the Church's refusal to ordain female priests and its failure to get with the program and endorse abortion. After reading this encyclical, though, I'm starting to wonder about this pope's conservative credentials. I was hoping for a vigorous attack on the alienation inherent in modernity, or at least the very least secular liberalism and its manifold evils. No such luck. He touches on a few of the destructive behaviors in the present day, such as

drugs and loose morals, but not in any substantive detail. Perhaps his next encyclical will deal with these issues in greater depth. I usually reserve a final paragraph in my reviews for criticism of the product. How the heck can I do that here? I'm reading something written by THE POPE! Not only that, he's a pope who is a noted theologian. Who am I to criticize his use of source material or pick apart his arguments? I leave it to better men than I, ones with a Ph.D. in theology, to critique the whole agape versus eros theory proposed by the pontiff. I will offer up one slight suggestion that might have made the first part of the encyclical easier to read. It seems to me that I might understand his arguments better had he defined the terms eros and agape much earlier in the text. The epistle just launches into the theory without defining the concepts until several pages later. Who knows how this happened? Maybe translation problems are to blame. It's a small point, I know, but that's all I'm going to say in the negative. In the positive, "God Is Love" is an inspirational read even for Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

On the feast of St. Paul (1/25/2006), the first encyclical of Pope Benedict was published, "Deus Caritas Est" or "God is Love." Writing clearly and simply as always, the Pope discusses one of the most complicated subjects on earth: Love. In Part I, he traces the origin of love in salvation history and philosophy. He explains that physical love must be transformed into spiritual love and only then are we united to God. He states that "love is possible, and we are able to practise it, because we are created in the image of God." Benedict XVI shows in Part 2 that love cannot remain merely individual but must be extended to helping others through works of charity. All levels in the Church must exercise charitable service with not only professionalism, but "heartfelt concern." "Only if I serve my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me." With this letter, the Pope lays the foundation for his papacy as a gentle pastor and a humble teacher. explaining that we must live the greatest of all commandments: "Love of God and love of neighbour [which] are inseparable."

It's one thing to be an analytic, or an intellectual, or a learned theologian. It is quite another to also be a gifted communicator of great ideas. Pope Benedict is both. What an unpacking of the experience of Love. In Part I, he is firm yet hopeful, profound yet readable, divinely wise yet thoroughly human in this exposition. In what amounts to a two-for-one, Part II is a brilliant exposition of true acts of charity and the proper, complementary, yet distinctive roles of the Church and the State. This is a true catholic (universal) letter of Love.

In this encyclical, Pope Benedict alludes to the prevalence in our world of the abuse, even hatred shown to the body which results from the dichotomy established between the body and spirit by modern culture and philosophical systems. He also mentions the hatred expressed by certain religious groups as being a result of a failure to realize the relationship established between God and man in Jesus and the expression of this relationship in physical terms. He shows that as embodied spirits we cannot have a mere spiritual love of God and neighbor, but it must become enfleshed through our physical care for Christ present in our neighbor. On the other hand, any concept of love that reduces it to physical sexual expression voids the human person of its image of God in which it was created - the image of God manifested perfectly in Jesus and that gave its life completely in the flesh. Pope Benedict relates well the relationship between manifestation of Christian love and the Eucharist. Since we are all united in the one bread in Christ, then each individual is in a sense owed the same love as we owe to Christ. In effect, we cannot love God without a true kenosis or outpouring of ourselves for our neighbor manifested in a concrete form. In this way the dichotomy between eros and agape that is an effect of the world's worship of the flesh is eliminated and true incarnational salvation is brought about.

Fantastic and beautiful. This is the first book I read from the Pope and I could not put it down. Love is so important to us and Ratzinger makes you believe in it like no one else can. Very readable and straight from the heart of a great man. This book blew me away and made me feel that God no matter what is always there for us all we have to do is believe. All Catholics and Christians in general should own a copy of this. With all the hate and violence going on in this world it's good to know that love is still the most powerful and beautiful thing out there.

A clear and concise illumination of the theologic reason for this statement. It actually is not in the creation story but derives from it. It was also fun to read. See the mind of the new pope at work. The press accounts of him being a dour, humorless conservative are wrong,

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