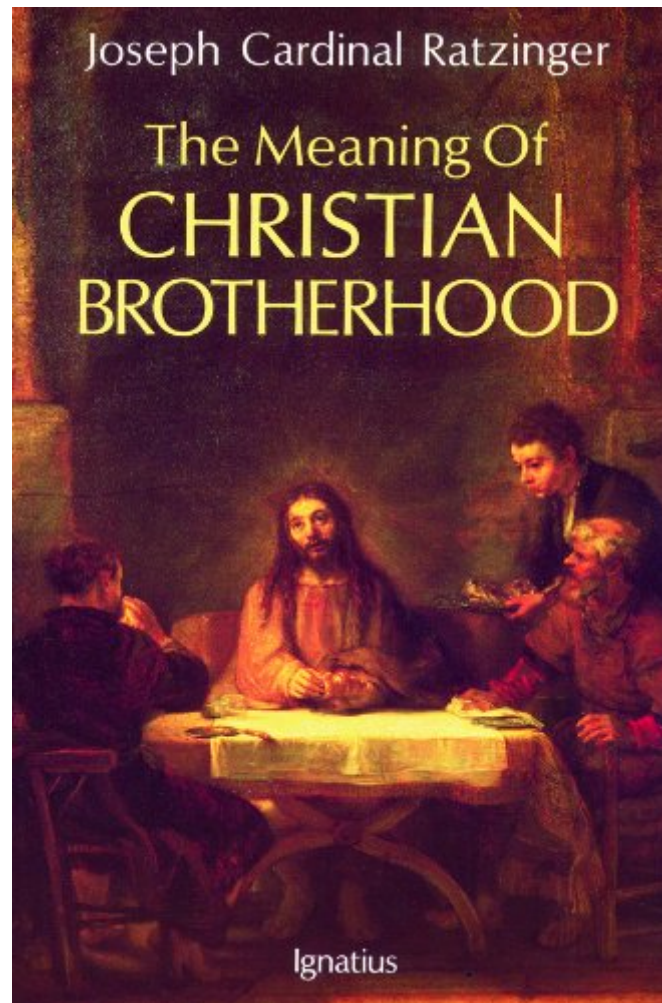


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The Meaning Of Christian Brotherhood



Synopsis

Written over three decades ago, Cardinal Ratzinger's profound treatise on the true meaning of Christian brotherhood is perhaps even more timely and important now as a clear statement on the biblical grounds for cooperation among believing Christians. In treating Christian brotherhood from the perspective of salvation history, Ratzinger opens up the meaning of both the Old and New Testament in this most essential area. After establishing the distinctively Christian sense of brotherhood (vis-à-vis Judaism, Hellenism, Stoicism, the Enlightenment, and Marxism), he shows how fraternal charity can only be perfected through God's fatherhood, Christ's divine sonship, and our brotherhood in Christ.

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Customer Reviews

Cardinal Ratzinger amazes me yet again in this well thought out book on the meaning of Christian brotherhood. In this short (90 pages) book Ratzinger sets out to analyze what the word brother means in the Christian view of the world. He starts with an analysis of how the word was used throughout history, from the ancient Greeks to the Jewish community. He then moves to the New

Testament and analysis how Jesus uses the word, how it is used by Paul and finally by John. Ratzinger then analyzes how the term was used by the Church fathers, and their unique take on the subject. Throughout this process, Ratzinger gives great biblical insights connecting the Old Testament to the New Testament and informs the reader of the differences between the biblical understanding of brotherhood and our contemporary understanding of it, whether taught by the enlightenment, or Marxist philosophy. He also mentions some external elements that may have dictated certain definitions, when involved with analyzing the historical understanding of brotherhood. Ratzinger also gives a general overview of how unique and contrary to common understanding this teaching was at the time. Ratzinger then demonstrates how this view is incorporated into Christian theology. He emphasizes the need to first properly understand the fatherhood of God, and how this is necessary to properly understand Christian brotherhood. How it is necessary to see this brotherhood through God's fatherhood and Christ's divine sonship by means of the Eucharist. He also briefly touches upon how vastly different this fatherhood concept in Christianity is from other forms of fatherhood found in other religions. He then gives the historical barriers that were destroyed because of this newfound understanding.

Although this book was written almost fifty years ago, it still speaks quite forcefully today--perhaps it is even more relevant to our global village with its global conflicts. Ratzinger begins by examining understandings of brotherhood from Ancient Greece to modern Marxist and Liberal traditions and highlights the tendency towards understanding brotherhood as either something closed in on itself, yet full of meaning and ethical ramifications, or something so open and nebulous that it becomes a synonym for "humanity"--though these impulses have often been held together in a sort of dualism. He then proceeds to argue that the Christian idea of brotherhood, based on God's fatherhood of Jesus Christ, has the potential to be universal while remaining concrete. Using Karl Barth's doctrine of election, Ratzinger argues that Christian brotherhood is not automatically universal, because we are not naturally in Christ and thereby children of God. Christian brotherhood is therefore not simply a synonym for "humanity", but describes the faithful. Yet, as Jesus Christ was elect for the others, Christians have been brought into Jesus Christ, allowed to say "Our Father," for the sake of those still outside him. Thus, though there is a boundary to Christian brotherhood, the Christian ethic knows of no rigid distinction between the "in" and the "out" because service to the other, whether that one is a brother or not, is the Christian ethic. Those who are not Christians will certainly find much with which to disagree, in particular the assertion that Jesus Christ is the making known of both true God and true humanity, but those who are interested in the meaning of Christian

brotherhood, both as an idea and as an ethic, will find much in this little book.

Pope Benedict XVI's book "The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood" is divided into two sections: Part One is "A Historical Analysis" of the meaning of brotherhood as expressed in some of the great cultures that most directly and profoundly influenced modern Christianity. This section is also divided into a further two sections, the first having to do with "the idea of brotherhood before and outside Christianity", which is a survey of the meaning of brotherhood as cultivated by Ancient Greece, Old Testament believers, Hellenism, and Enlightenment and Marxist thought and the second portion having to do with "the development and the idea of brotherhood in early Christianity" which includes a treatment of brotherhood in the words of Christ, New Testaments writings, especially the Pauline texts, and the Fathers of the Church. The first part is obviously necessary if Pope Benedict XVI (at the time of writing: Father and Professor Ratzinger) is to give a just nod to the historical development of this idea. Indeed, I think he does this very well and his use of historical events and cultural customs is particularly helpful for developing an understanding of a historical meaning. However, I must admit, I found this part of the book to be very dry reading. Part Two, "An Attempt at Synthesis", is a treatment of "the basis of Christian brotherhood: faith", "the removal of barriers within the brotherhood of Christians", "the limits of brotherly community", and "true universalism." This is by far the most engaging and helpful portion of the book as it is essentially a call for the restoration of and the living out of this basic Christian idea of brotherhood.

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