

# Text for the Times: Christ the Source of Unity

*We are realizing ever more sharply the scandal of the divisions in Christianity, ever more urgently the need to work towards reconciliation and unity. The Ecumenical Movement is gaining ground, finding its widest expression in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity from the 18th to the 25th of January. Only Christ himself through his Spirit can perfect his movement towards peace, inspiring, accepting and making use of our penitence, humility, love and efforts to understand one another. But this is not the primary breach within the People of God: that between Jews and Gentiles is earlier and more fundamental still, a continuation into contemporary history of a separation that was necessary at one stage of the history of salvation. Here too Christ is, and is to be, the source of peace and reconciliation.*

The cause of our drawing near to one another is Christ, this is why St Paul says, 'He is our peace, who has made us both one'. He uses an emphatic way of speaking in order to express better the fact that Christ is the cause of our peace, as Christ himself says in John 14. 27, 'My peace I give to you'. We use this way of speaking when we mean that the whole of an effect depends on a particular cause, as for instance when we say of God that he is our salvation, meaning that whatever there is in us of salvation is caused by God. So here, whatever there is in us of peace is caused by Christ, and consequently our drawing near to one another too, for it is only when a man is at peace with another that he can approach in security and come close to him. This is why he says that Christ is our peace.

The way in which he did this was by removing what divided us – 'He broke down the dividing wall.' To understand the text we have to imagine a single great field in which many men are gathered: through the centre of the field stretches a high wall, so there seems to be not one but two peoples; if someone were to remove that wall he would join that multitude together and they would become a single people. Now apply that here. For the world is like a field full of people, and in this field there is a wall, some men on one side of it, some men on the other. This wall Christ removed and, there being no longer a gap between them, they became one people.

The *purpose* of this drawing together is that those who were divided might become one. What is to become one must be united in some other one thing. Since the Law divided them, they could not become one in the Law. But Christ succeeding to the Law as the reality succeeds to that which has prefigured it, re-created them in himself, re-created them in one new man, himself, new because the grace he brought was new and because the commands he gave them were new.

And so St Paul goes on to show how they have drawn near to God too – ‘reconciling us both in one body to God’. For you must realize that to love your neighbour is the way to peace with God, as St John says, ‘he who does not love his brother whom he sees, how can he love God whom he does not see’. And St Augustine says: ‘let no one think that he is at peace with Christ, if he is at odds with his fellow-Christian’.

So St Paul has shown how Christ has made peace between men themselves, then between men and God – reconciling both peoples, now united, in the one body, the Church, to God.

(St Thomas. Commentary on Ephesians 4. 13–16).  
*Translated and abridged by Benet Weatherhead, O.P.*

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