

The Blood in the New Testament

Two great themes dominate *Ephesians* -- *the unity of all things in Christ and the Church as the symbol and agent of that unity*. In fact the word *one* occurs some eight times in the Epistle, four of which are to be found in chapter 2 immediately after the mentioning of the blood of Christ in verse 13. In fact all of chapter 2 is divided as follows: 2:1-10 concerns the call of Israel which has been called to completion of faith in Christ Jesus. The author joins himself to the Jews who were called to firm belief in Jesus Christ. He tells them that they were chosen so that they might be brought to life through Christ. Then in 2:11-12 he turns his attention to the Gentiles who had not been part of the promises or the covenant of old. In fact they had been far off and excluded from the community of Israel without hope and without God.

It is precisely through the *blood of Christ* that the Jew and the Gentile are made one in the peace of Christ. In 2:13-17 the author cites Tristo-Isaiah 57:19: "Peace, peace, to the far and to the near, says the Lord; and I will heal him." This text is found in the context of Messianic comfort for the afflicted. Ephesians 2:13-16 reads: But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ. It is he who is our peace and who made the two of us one by breaking down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart. In his own flesh he abolished the law with its commands and precepts, to create in himself one new man from us who had been two and to make peace, reconciling both of us to God in one body through his cross, which put that enmity to death.

Christ Jesus is the center in whom the Jewish and Gentile Christians come together for Christ is the instrument, the channel through whom God works his will, elects, redeems, forgives, blesses and imparts new life and builds up the Church. *In Christ* is the formula of God's activity through Christ. The Christian is incorporated into Christ through Jesus' blood. The Christian takes upon himself the same life-spirit which Jesus had. The Christian shares in the life of Jesus. *In the blood of Christ* is an expression in which the word *in* has the value of mediation. There is a living connection between the believer and the source of life. Blood served as the vehicle of life according to the Israelites and was the medium of purification and expiation for sin (Lev. 17:11) and a guarantee for the Covenant (Ex. 24:8).

The New Covenant has been sealed by the blood of Jesus as expressly stated in Mt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25; Luk. 22:30; Mk. 24:24. The New Covenant as announced by Jeremiah's prophecy 31:31-34 has as a principal effect the remission of sins *for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more* which is brought out in Eph. 1:7. Messianic peace was another element of the New Covenant announced throughout the history of the Chosen People as brought out by Isaiah 54:10...*my covenant of peace shall not be removed* says the Lord, who has compassion on you. This peace which is implied in Eph. 2:13 is made explicit in the following verses which are a hymn about Christ who is our Peace and the bearer of peace due to the shedding of his blood. The verse presents the work of Christ as a gathering together of pagans to God and to the Jews and the Jews and pagans together being gathered to God. It is in the corporate dimension wrought by the blood of Christ that this togetherness is achieved.

It should be noted that the passage which we have briefly looked at is an epistle which speaks about the unity of pagan and Jew alike in Christ Jesus. Jesus' blood is said to be the unifying element of peace for both groups. Why didn't the author speak merely about the death of Christ as the unifying element? Why didn't the author speak about the ascended Christ as the unifying element? Why did he choose the blood?

The point being made is that *blood* with its symbolism of life and its counter-symbolism of death was meaningful for the people for whom the New Testament was written. That is why the author of Ephesians in speaking about the unity of pagans and Jews mentions the blood. It was meaningful to both pagans and Jews. There is a universal recognition of its symbolism according to Dennis J. McCarthy "Il simbolismo del sangue," *Sangue e Antropologia Biblica*, 1981. Blood evoked unity in Biblical times and when one strips away the veneer of sophistication, it does the same today.

Jesus Christ's blood is the focus for life. The blood of Christ brings real unity and peace. Why the blood of Christ and not merely to say his life? Biblical people were down to earth people; they dealt with the concrete, the real, the sensible. They were not interested in abstract terms for abstract terms were rather incomprehensible. Blood was tangible, visible, sensible. It was the vehicle God desired to couch his language about salvation. It was a fit means to convey God's message both to Jewish and Gentile Christians. They could understand its "unifying" symbolism. By the eucharistic sharing of Christ's blood, Christians were united to Christ for they shared his life and at the same time they were fully incorporated into the Body of Christ (the Church). Why the blood? God willed it.

All praise and honor and blessing be to the blood of Jesus, now and forever. Amen!

(Fr. Patrick J. Sena, C.P.P.S., "The New Testament and the Blood of Christ", *Precious Blood Spirituality Workshop, Rome, 1986, pp. 78-84*)