

The Ilkley Retreat November 2000

This is a sheet to help with the period of reflection on the Community. The main thrust of the talk was about the reason for our community together. It differs from other groups because of its unique closeness to God, who is the meaning and purpose of the universe. You might like to think quietly of the mysterious way in which Christ belongs to our Community, and it belongs to Christ. His relationship to me, and to each member, means that even the most humanly distant people are brought very close to me. This is what the early Church found had happened to Gentiles and Jews.

Ephesians 2:11ff

Do not forget that there was a time when you, who were Gentiles...were separate from Christ and excluded from membership of Israel, aliens with no share in the Covenants of the Promise, limited to this world, without hope, and without God. But now, in Christ Jesus, you that used to be so far off have been brought close, by the blood of Christ. For he is the peace between us, and has made us into one entity, and has broken down the barrier that kept us apart, by destroying in his own person the hostility, that Law of commandments and decrees. His purpose in this was, by restoring peace, to create a single new humanity out of two that had been divided, and through the Cross, to reconcile them both to God in one body. In his own person he killed all hostility. He came to bring the good news of peace to you, who were far off, and peace to those who were near at hand. Through him, then, we all have, in the one Spirit, free access to our Father.

So you are no longer aliens, or foreign visitors: you are fellow-citizens with the holy people of God, part of God's household. You are built upon the foundations of apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone. Every structure knit together in him grows into a holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built up into a dwelling-place of God in the Spirit.

- You might think of ways in which you have had to cancel differences, bridge chasms that were opening up, remake relationships that had been damaged or non-existent. Can you remember what you were aiming at or trying for?
- The Letter has a very firm understanding of what Christ does, and what he wants of his Church. Can we think, pray, work together, build our Community, until it understands itself like this?
- Try to give the Letter some practical relevance. Who is *far off from us* in the University? Who precisely are our *foreign visitors*? What is it like for them – does the presence of our Community affect them?
- Can we properly leave this understanding on a spiritual level, referring to something over and done with, in the theological past? Or might we have the experience of actually *breaking down the barriers that kept us apart*, joining in the ministry of Christ to *restore peace*, to *bring good news*, to do some *knitting-together of structure* which will really be a *dwelling-place of God in the Spirit*?
- The language of Ephesians is very violent in this passage: blood, cross, break down, destroy, hostility, kill. How would this language apply if we did follow the Gospel more closely? Jesus said: *The servant is not greater than the Master; where I am, my servant will be there too.*