

Word and Sacrament with special reference to the Eucharist - a Disciples Perspective

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I

It is always necessary to begin any paper about a Disciples paper on anything by pointing out that there are scarcely any universally accepted statements of the Disciples view on a given topic; instead one can refer to positions which have been widely adopted, sometimes stated in the work of leading Disciples authors, less frequently set out in agreed common statements, particularly for ecumenical conversations. In the matter of Eucharistic theology Disciples do not differ greatly in this respect from many other Protestant Churches. In previous papers for this Dialogue I have usually offered a historical survey: in this one I shall still draw on the historical material, but because the degree of ecumenical consensus in the twentieth century was so great by comparison with earlier periods, I shall build on that consensus to offer a personal perspective, which I hope would still be regarded as representative, notwithstanding the significant differences in theological ethos between the U.S.A., the United Kingdom, the British Commonwealth of Nations and the emergent churches of Africa and Asia. In particular, I shall draw on hymnody as evidence of popular devotion in many of our congregations.

I begin with one possible approach to this topic, mainly because I do not intend to say very much more about it than one brief paragraph. It is well known that the Protestant Reformation laid great emphasis on the preaching of the Word, such that it was usually considered that the celebration of the Lord's Supper was not complete without a sermon. (So far as I am aware, there was never the same emphasis on the necessity of a sermon at baptismal services, but that may reflect pragmatism and popular expectations when infants were being baptised. In the case of believers' baptism, by contrast, the service was seen as a vital opportunity for preaching.) In this respect the context of Disciples as a breakaway movement from Seceder Presbyterianism was very significant, and preaching was a general expectation. However, Disciples differed from Presbyterians in emphasising from the beginning the importance of a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. Richard Harrison has pointed out that the Presbyterian practice of a quarterly or biannual celebration at the turn of the nineteenth century was true of Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists and even Episcopalians in the U.S.A. (and the same was true in Britain too). Indeed because of the lack of trained ministers, formal preaching may have been less frequent in the early Disciples frontier churches than the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which was presided over by the locally ordained elders.¹ One of the less often noticed features of the Evangelical Revival, or the First and Second Great Awakenings, is that the stimulus to religious revival often occurred during the preparatory services for Communion in the summer Presbyterian Communion seasons — this was true of the Cane Ridge Revival of 1801, for example — but Communion was not a characteristic emphasis of revival preaching, as it assumed its distinctive nineteenth-century form.² But I take it that the

¹ Richard L. Harrison, Jr, 'Reformed Roots of Disciples Worship' in James O. Duke & Anthony L. Dunnivant (eds), *Christian Faith Seeking Historical Understanding: Essays in Honor of H. Jack Forstman* (Macon, Georgia 1997), 217.

² See Leigh E. Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism* (2nd edn., Grand Rapids 2001).

main purpose of our discussion this week is not the question of whether there should always be a sermon or homily at Communion. Rather we should focus on the fact that Disciples do not make a rigid separation between Word and Sacrament in their understanding of the rite.

A text for this paper might be ‘For he is your living Word’ — the words which come in the middle of the Preface to the Eucharistic Prayer in Prayer A of the Church of England’s *Common Worship*, authorised for use in 2000. (The words actually go back to the ‘Series 3’ Order for Communion authorised in 1973.) They are not found in that form in either the new Roman Catholic order for Mass nor the main Reformed orders. The full context, following the *Sursum Corda*, is as follows:

It is indeed right, it is our duty and our joy,
at all times and in all places to give you thanks and praise,
holy Father, heavenly King, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.
For he is your living Word;
through him you have created all things from the beginning,
and formed us in your own image...³

There is an interesting parallel in the book, *Celebrate with Thanksgiving*, by Disciples liturgical scholar, Keith Watkins, who in his first model prayer according to Pattern One, has at exactly the same point:

Holy God, with glad and joyful hearts
we offer you our thankful praise.
By your living word you created the heavens and the earth,
gave life to every living thing,
and declared that all was good...⁴

The fundamental reality referred to here is the understanding of Jesus Christ as the Word of God as set out in the prologue to John’s Gospel: ‘All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people’ (Jn 1:3-4 NRSV). This understanding is developed particularly in Jesus’ words in chapter 6: ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty’ (Jn 6:35). But the same idea is also found in the letter to the Hebrews: ‘In these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds’ (Heb 1:2), just as it is in the letter to the Colossians: ‘He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created...’ (Col 1:15-16). This idea of the living or life-giving word of God, expressed and revealed in Jesus Christ, is much more than preaching. It is much more than any human act of worship. But precisely because the heart of the Gospel is a message of new life—of reconciliation where before there was alienation—no understanding of the eucharist can be complete without taking full note of this dimension. The verses just quoted from Colossians lead to a climax in vv 19-20: ‘For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross’. The Lord’s Supper has at its heart the

³ *Common Worship* (London 2000), 184.

⁴ Keith Watkins, *Celebrate with Thanksgiving: Patterns of Prayer at the Communion Table* (St Louis, Missouri 1991), 78.

words of Jesus, ‘This is my body that is for you...This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’; and this is understood by St Paul to mean that ‘as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes’ (1 Cor 11:24-26). So the whole action of the service depends upon Christ, the living Word, who makes the Gospel that is proclaimed real once again for each believer; just as the new life to which we are raised in baptism is life in Christ, and therefore eternal.

II

Next I shall draw out some of the implications of this fundamental reality as they have been expressed in the Disciples tradition. I begin with Alexander Campbell’s essay on ‘Regeneration’ in *Christianity Restored* (1835), later reissued with some modifications as *The Christian System*. As is well known, Disciples differed from Baptists in affirming that baptism was for the remission of sins, thereby attributing an effective action to baptism that was rarely, if ever, claimed by Baptists, or indeed Congregationalists. Campbell developed his arguments for that position primarily in his essay on ‘Remission of Sins’, with extensive references to the Fathers of the Church. But in his essay on ‘Regeneration’ Campbell left the Fathers on one side and concentrated on the evidence from scripture alone. In the early nineteenth century when he was writing there had been a controversy over baptismal regeneration in England, because Anglican evangelicals took offence at the blunt statement by a minister following the Order for Baptism in the Book of Common Prayer after baptizing the child, ‘Seeing now...that this child is regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ’s church etc’, on the grounds that this left no room for saving faith. Campbell, however, does the opposite: he quotes this prayer to show ‘unequivocally that the learned Doctors of that church used the words *regeneration* and *baptism* as synonymous’; and in doing so they were simply following patristic practice. He went on to draw out a number of word parallels, including the final pair, that ‘what is called ‘*saved*’ in one, is called ‘*cleansed*’ in the other; and what is called ‘*the renewal of the Holy Spirit*’ in the one, is called ‘*the word*’ in the other; because the Holy Spirit consecrates or cleanses through the word.’⁵ Campbell concluded his essay with a long quotation from Augustine on the importance of a proper understanding of the Holy Scriptures, a reference to Luther’s favourite maxim, ‘Bonus Textuarius, Bonus Theologus’, and two other New Testament verses: ‘Of his own will he has begotten us, *by the word of truth*, that we might be a kind of first fruits of his creatures’ (James 1:18) and ‘Having been regenerated, not by corruptible seed, but by incorruptible, *through the word* of the living God, which remains’ (1 Pet 1:23).⁶ Now there is no doubt that Campbell’s background in Locke’s philosophy breathes through most of this essay, as it did through most of his work, but despite that, the underlying message is encapsulated in a few words at the beginning:

It is in the person and mission of the INCARNATE WORD, that we learn that *God is love*. That God gave his Son for us, and yet gives his Spirit to us,—and thus gives us himself—are the mysteries and transcendent proofs of the most august proposition in the universe...The Christian is a new *creation*, of which God is the *Creator*.⁷

Campbell therefore clearly makes the key link between Word, Spirit and creation.

⁵ A Campbell, *Christianity Restored* (Bethany, Virginia 1835), 270-2.

⁶ *Ibid*, 308-9.

⁷ *Ibid*, 260.

As has been stated, the universal Disciples practice has been to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly. Whilst such frequency does not of itself guarantee what might be called a 'high view' of the Supper, without such frequency of celebration it is difficult to regard the Supper as central to Christian worship. In his essay on 'Breaking the Loaf' Campbell himself made the point that 'much depends upon the *manner* of celebrating the supper, as well as upon the *frequency*' and he urged the necessity of a Christian order.⁸ His essay concluded with an extract from his Memorandum Book describing a service, which was in his view a model of good order. This congregation apparently had two elders, one of whom presided, and Campbell described the central part of the service as follows:

The president arose and said that our Lord had a table for his friends, and that he invited his disciples to sup with him. 'In memory of his death, this monumental table,' said he, 'was instituted; and as the Lord ever lives in heaven, so he ever lives in the hearts of his people. As the first disciples, taught by the Apostles in person, came together into one place to eat the Lord's supper, and as they selected the first day of the week in honor of his resurrection for this purpose; so we, having the same Lord, the same faith, the same hope with them, have vowed to do as they did. We owe as much to the Lord as they; and ought to love, honor, and obey him as much as they.' Thus having spoken, he took a small loaf from the table, and in one or two periods gave thanks for it. After thanksgiving, he raised it in his hand and significantly brake it, and handed it to the disciples on either side of him, who passed the broken loaf from one to another, until they all partook of it...He then took the cup in a similar manner, and returned thanks for it, and handed it to the disciple sitting next to him, who passed it round; each one waiting upon his brother, until all were served.'⁹

This is one of the earliest models of a Disciples communion which survives, though inevitably services became much more formal than that quite quickly. Nor should it be taken as a pattern of normal Disciples communion services today. Harrison has shown the close similarity between the normal Disciples pattern and the contemporary Presbyterian orders.¹⁰ However, it is significant that the memorial element in the supper was immediately linked to the fact that the Lord ever lives in the hearts of his people, thereby making a past even a present reality.

It was also common in the early years for communion to be celebrated before the sermon was preached. Nothing could be further from the practice characteristic of many Baptist and Congregational churches of having communion after the main service, often with an opportunity for those who did not wish to stay to leave. Although this would not be regarded as liturgically appropriate today (and it was not the pattern in the service described by Campbell), Dr Blakemore suggested that at the end of the 1950s communion preceded the sermon in two-thirds of Disciples churches in the U.S.A. and Canada (though it is not clear upon what evidence that suggestion was based).¹¹ By the 1980s Keith Watkins interpreted the two orders in rather

⁸ Ibid, 339.

⁹ Ibid, 341-2.

¹⁰ Harrison, 'Reformed Roots of Disciples Worship', 221-4.

¹¹ W.B. Blakemore, 'Worship and the Lord's Supper' in W.B. Blakemore (ed), *The Revival of the Churches* (St Louis, Missouri 1963), 232. This was volume 3 of the Reports on The Renewal of Church by the Panel of Scholars, which sat between 1956 and 1962.

different ways. ‘In the congregations with communion early in the order, worship is a service of the Word with an intensified communion interlude’, he wrote, ‘suggesting that this reflected a view of the church as primarily a community shaped by revelation in the form of doctrine and ethics. ‘In the congregations with communion at the conclusion of the order, worship is understood as the Lord’s Supper interpreted by the Word of God.’ This view was consistent with the sacramental approach to worship, emphasizing ‘God’s self-disclosure in nature and history, asserting that salvation comes from participation in a community that embodies the divine Spirit’.¹² That seems to me to be too neat a schematization, but it probably reflects the greater emphasis in North American Protestantism in the twentieth century on a more subjective, ethically-angled understanding of Christianity, to which the emphases of the Liturgical Movement would have seemed more sharply opposed.

Another emphasis, which was not mentioned in Campbell’s model service, but which certainly characterised the British strands of the movement, was the invariable use of the Words of Institution. These, usually in the form from 1 Corinthians 11, are typically used in the Reformed style as the ‘biblical warrant’ for the service, after a hymn based upon the theme of communion, rather than as part of the Prayer of Thanksgiving. The words of our Lord have always been seen as a sufficient explanation of the purpose of the rite, but it would be wrong to see their use as an indication of a memorialist understanding. Rather the content of the words themselves, with the reference to the new covenant, recall and renew the relationship inaugurated in baptism. I will return to the significance of the words of communion hymns (which correspond liturgically to the offertory hymn in the Catholic tradition) presently.

From the beginning Disciples have also emphasised that the Lord’s Supper is a communal celebration. Hence there are many ways in which those present participate. One obvious way is by the singing of hymns; another is the traditional opportunity that was given in many congregations for anyone to lead in prayer during what in Britain were called ‘the prayers of the Church’. These might be typically intercessions, but they could also be acts of praise or supplication. In the congregation in which I was brought up these could last for up to ten minutes — far too long for modern taste! I find it interesting that, after a period when there was a desire for more ‘ordered’ prayer (at least that is how it was often expressed), in recent years we have witnessed a revival of the practice of inviting anyone to express an intention in prayer; and this is true across all churches, not simply Disciples. Members of the congregation would also read the lessons, and the elders would assist in the serving of communion. It is in this sense that Disciples have typically understood ‘the priesthood of all believers’. William Robinson argued that the early Christians came to the Lord’s Supper as priests.

It was priestly worship more truly than any Jewish worship was, as the writer of Hebrews argues; for they were *all* priests and their Lord was eternally the High Priest of their Confession. It was therefore sacrificial worship. Nothing is more mistaken than the notion that Christian worship is non-sacrificial because it centres in the one sacrifice for sin, once for all offered. That one sacrifice is itself eternal in the heavens. He was *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*. True, Christian sacrifices are different in character and quality from all other sacrifices, as the one Christian Sacrifice differs from all others in that it is a living Sacrifice

¹² Watkins, *Celebrate with Thanksgiving*, 20-1.

and it is God, and not man, who makes the offering. But they are none the less sacrifices, as the writer to the Hebrews argues.¹³

This understanding is expressed in his own communion hymn, ‘Thee we praise, high priest and victim’ (7). So, in Disciples’ understanding, it is not just the minister or president who celebrates the Lord’s Supper; the whole people of God re-enact the Lord’s Supper together.

A further element in that commonality of the whole people of God across space is the use of the lectionary. From the beginning it seems to have been customary to have a reading from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament in each communion service. I have been unable to trace an exact date for the beginning of the use of lectionaries, but there is evidence from the end of the nineteenth century. In Britain it may have been due to the small number of full-time ministers and the heavy reliance of the churches on local preachers. In order to bring some kind of order into the way in which worship was conducted and to ensure that there was a regular coverage of the whole of scripture, rather than the same few favourite passages, a suggested lectionary was published. It was not, of course, binding, but it does seem to have been widely used. Under the influence of the liturgical movement in the twentieth century, a weekly Gospel reading was added. In Britain the Churches of Christ adopted the lectionary prepared by the Joint Liturgical Group in the 1960s, and more recently this has been replaced by the Joint Common Lectionary. I sense that there has not been the same enthusiasm for the lectionary in the U.S.A. and any use of it was generally later than in the British Isles; but it is now commended in North America. It is also interesting to note that the use of a lectionary was not confined to any one stream of the Stone-Campbell movement: in Britain, when the conservative Churches of Christ broke away, they produced and published their own lectionary in their magazine, *The Scripture Standard*.

A separate paper could be written on communion hymns in the Disciples tradition, but there is no time for that. I believe them to be important, however, as expressions of the common beliefs of the people. As indicated earlier, it is customary to have a hymn before the prayers of thanksgiving for the bread and wine; and Disciples hymnbooks have typically had a larger selection of such hymns than is found in the books of many other traditions. To have thirty or forty would not be uncommon. The Australian book of 1931 had nearly sixty; the British book of 1908 had thirty-seven, which was reduced to thirty-four in 1938. The *Chalice Hymnal* (1995) has forty-seven; *Rejoice and Sing* (1991) has thirty. (Compare this with eighteen in the British *Methodist Hymn Book* of 1933, or nineteen in the British *Congregational Hymnary* of 1916.)¹⁴ Nevertheless the number of Disciples hymn-writers has been relatively few. In the British case one man, G.Y. Tickle, stands head and shoulders above anyone else. I have included in the appendix a number of hymns: first, those written by Disciples authors, and then those that have often been found in Disciples hymn books going back to the mid-nineteenth century. What is particularly significant is that all these hymns, with the exception of that by William Robinson himself (which was written in the early 1940s), were in the British 1908 hymnbook; in other words they reflect an established spirituality associated with the Lord’s Supper, antedating the twentieth-century liturgical movement and the theological influences, with the discussion of which I shall conclude this paper. I remarked in a previous session of this Dialogue that

¹³ W. Robinson, *A Companion to the Communion Service* (Oxford University Press 1942), 28.

¹⁴ The number of communion hymns has risen generally in all British Churches since the Second World War as a result of the influence of the liturgical movement.

Disciples have had less difficulty in affirming Christ's presence in the bread and wine than in offering any theological explanation of it, and cited the realistic imagery of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hymns in support of such a view. I shall not pursue this point further now, and I invite you to look at the full texts of the hymns I have set out at your leisure.

Let me simply draw out one or two key themes. Obviously many of the hymns evoke the events of the night on which our Lord was betrayed and his crucifixion. John Morison's hymn (10), which was cited by Campbell, is almost a paraphrase of the institution of the Lord's Supper, and fits into the conventional eighteenth-century paraphrase model. Tickle's hymn, 'Lord of our highest love' (3), which is perhaps the most widely known of all the Disciples hymns, also evokes the events of the night before the Passion quite dramatically. From this point of view, one might argue that the emphasis on memory is very strong. Nevertheless in each case the emphasis on memorial is always stretched to the theme of new life. Thus in Tickle's hymn the emphasis is actually on the present — 'Thyself the living Bread' and 'May...all new strength receive'. Similarly in Greenwell's 'Lord Jesus Christ! we do confess' (2) there is a strong emphasis on the events of the Passion all the way through the hymn until the last verse, with its climax: 'Hence, while we banquet at Thy board/ We seek a *manifested* Lord' (my emphasis). There is a parallel to this in a little book on the Lord's Supper by J.B. Rotherham, published after his death in 1910, where, having begun with a chapter on the commemorative aspect of the Supper, he moves on in the next chapter (based on John 6) to affirm that 'The Lord's Supper is more than a memorial: it is a feast as well—a feast upon a sacrifice—and the sacrificial victim is the Messiah Himself', and he concludes, 'The feast is abundant; the life is real; the participation is festive. It is no bare memorial. The feeding is not confined to the figurative feast; but with living partakers, it culminates there...The Living Bread still comes direct from heaven.'¹⁵

The life-giving theme is also prominent in Tickle's 'Son of the living God' (4). After the allusion to Philippians 2 in verse 1, 'who stooped to death that life might evermore abound', he moves to the theme of new life through the resurrection in verse 2. (It should be noted that Disciples attached importance to the Lord's Day, not on sabbatarian principles derived from the Old Testament, but because it was the day of resurrection and therefore of new life.) So the climax is the prayer to Christ as Bread and Wine of heaven to come and 'Refresh our souls with food Thy grace hath given'. If one was being pedantic one might object to the use of the verb 'feel' in the last line as being rather weak, betraying the influence of the Romantic emphasis on feeling. I would have been inclined to put 'know', but it is worth remembering that it is verse and not prose, and that from a nineteenth-century perspective 'feel' conveyed the sense of a more total involvement of the person than 'know'.

What is striking about the next two hymns by Tickle is that the emphasis has shifted from recollection of the past to anticipation of the future. 'We close the feast' (5) is very much concerned with the Messianic banquet. 'When to Thy table' (6) deliberately contrasts our experience of communion with the bitter meal of the Passover, and the final two verses again look to the future, with the emphasis once more on the life-giving bread of heaven. Moreover, the final two lines, 'We thank Thee, Lord, for this bright hour/That tells of all Thy saving power', (whatever one may think of the trite image of the 'bright hour') present a clear statement of the belief that the Lord's Supper *as a whole* is a complete statement of Christ's saving work. So the

¹⁵ J.B. Rotherham, *Let us Keep the Feast* (London, n.d. [1910]), 28, 35-6.

words of Elizabeth Charles's hymn, 'No Gospel like this feast' (12) sum up a sentiment which Disciples would readily share, that the Lord's Supper is a complete proclamation of the Gospel. Elizabeth Charles was not a Disciple, but an Anglican and the daughter of an English MP. But I included her hymn as one of several from other traditions, which appeared in early twentieth-century books. (Perhaps significantly Charles's hymn never made it into *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, but it did get into the *English Hymnal*.) Others included Aquinas (albeit in a somewhat 'cleaned up' translation!) and Bernard of Clairvaux, as well as more obvious writers, such as Isaac Watts (albeit in the form modified in *Scottish Paraphrases*) and Josiah Conder, both of whom were Congregationalists.

The last point in this part of the paper concerns Eucharistic prayers. The Disciples tradition has been for very simple prayers of thanksgiving, reflecting God's goodness in creation, thanksgiving for the work of Christ in redemption, and invoking the blessing of the Holy Spirit on the bread and wine and on the assembled congregation. In the twentieth century more developed model prayers have been published in various Orders of Service, either officially sponsored or the work of individual liturgists. The commonest emphasis in such prayers, particularly in the early part of the century, was on the pleading of Christ's sacrifice. Thus one of the prayers suggested in the Order of Service for the Lord's Supper published by the British Churches of Christ in 1964 was as follows:

Almighty and merciful Father, having in remembrance the work and passion of our Saviour Christ, and pleading His eternal sacrifice, we Thy servants set forth this memorial, which He has commanded us to make. We humbly beseech Thee to send down Thy Holy Spirit to sanctify to us this bread, to be broken in memory of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.¹⁶

Such an emphasis is based on the theology of the Letter to the Hebrews.

The alternative pattern, which has been more characteristic of the later twentieth century, is to emphasise the renewing and life-giving power of God's creative Word. Thus the 'Prayer over the Loaf' in the Model Prayers under Pattern One from Keith Watkins, which I referred to earlier, is as follows:

Holy and loving God, we thank you for giving us this loaf,
 emblematic of Jesus' body given for us.
 He shared our life and showed us your love.
 Then he died upon the cross,
 freely offering his life so that we could be forgiven.
 By your word and Holy Spirit,
 bless this bread,
 that Jesus' own words may be fulfilled:
My body given for you.
 May we and all who eat this bread
 receive forgiveness of sins
 and be fed with the bread of eternal life.
 For we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.¹⁷

¹⁶ *The Lord's Supper: The Service of Holy Communion — IV Additional Prayers* (Birmingham 1964), 4.

¹⁷ Watkins, *Celebrate with Thanksgiving*, 79

This alternative reflects the shift away from an exclusively atonement-centred theology that has characterised twentieth-century main-line Protestantism.

III

Finally, I want to discuss some of the theological emphases among Disciples, which have been responsible for the kind of changes I have described. The material prepared under the auspices of the Faith and Order Movement in the 1930s is an appropriate place to begin. The First World Conference on Faith and Order was held at Lausanne, Switzerland in 1927, and the Churches which had been represented were invited to respond to the Report of the Conference. The Disciples' response did not contain any reference to the sacraments, but that from the British Churches of Christ was rather fuller. It referred to the four elements characteristic of Christian worship throughout the ages: the reading of the Gospels and the Apostolic writings, usually accompanied by a sermon, the offering of gifts, prayers and the Breaking of the Bread. Then it commented

The whole Church, being a priestly body, it is its duty and privilege to offer spiritual sacrifices. We come, not only to receive grace from God, but to offer worship to Him through the merits of our Lord's sacrifice, which at this service we plead. And so this service is an offering by the royal priesthood of worship, the fruit of our lips, of ourselves, our bodies, souls and substance, which is a reasonable and living sacrifice. This is acceptable through His intercession and sacrifice, upon which sacrifice we spiritually feed.¹⁸

The main hand in this response was almost certainly that of William Robinson, and he wrote the chapter on 'The View of Disciples or Churches of Christ' in the preparatory volume for the Edinburgh Faith and Order Conference of 1937. Robinson was apt to be somewhat magpie-like in picking up contemporary theological trends, and in this chapter he laid the primary emphasis on an understanding of Christian revelation as essentially *personal*, but not, it should be noted, individual. Thus he asserted that 'Christianity is good news about God's action as Holy Energy *personally* directed and morally conditioned. Such holy energy, acting in the field of human experience, must work sacramentally, allowing for what is objective (God's part) and for what is subjective (our response).'¹⁹ The fact and nature of God's action in the life and death of Jesus Christ meant that there need be no psychological uncertainty on the part of Christians as to whether they were in a state of grace. Moreover God's holy action was 'perpetuated and conveyed in dramatic symbolism in the breaking of the Bread and the pouring of the Wine'.²⁰ This is why Robinson continually argued that Disciples emphasised 'the *real action* of God within the Sacraments rather than the *real presence*'.²¹ Similarly he regarded the whole service ('confession, prayer, intercession, lections, exhortation, giving, all of which centre in the setting forth of Christ's Passion and Death and in the sacred fellowship of eating and drinking')²² as 'an act of thanksgiving (eucharist)—the place where the earthly and the heavenly planes meet in sacramental action'.²³

¹⁸ L. Hodgson (ed), *Convictions* (London 1934), 74-5.

¹⁹ R. Dunkerly (ed), *Ministry and the Sacraments* (London 1937), 263.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 264.

²² *Ibid.*, 262.

²³ *Ibid.*, 264.

Robinson also drew heavily on the sacramental theology of the Congregationalist, P.T. Forsyth, and almost certainly took the emphasis on action from him. He included an extract from Forsyth's book, *The Church and the Sacraments*, alongside Calvin, Knox, Owen, Campbell and others at the end of his own *Companion to the Communion Service*. Part of it was as follows:

A Sacrament is as much more than a symbol as a symbol is more than a memorial. It is quite inadequate to speak of the Sacrament as an object-lesson—as if its purpose were to convey new truth instead of the living Redeemer. It is not an hour of instruction but of communion...It does something. It is an *opus operatum*. More, it is an act of the Church more than of the individual. Further still, it is an act created by the eternal Act of Christ which made and makes the Church. At the last it is the act of Christ present in the Church, which does not so much live as Christ lives in it. It is Christ's act offering Himself to men rather than the act of the Church offering Christ to God...

If the elements are and remain material the act which uses them is spiritual. Therefore it is real. Whatever is symbolical, the action is real. In so far as our action is symbolical, it is symbolical of Christ's Act, not of His essence. But it is symbolical in the ancient sense of the word symbol. It does not simply point to the thing signified, nor suggest it, but conveys it, has within it, brings with it, gives it, does something, is really sacramental. We do not enact a small 'mystery' or tableau of Christ's sacrifice; but Christ, the redeemer, in His Church's Act gives Himself and His saving Act anew (to us, not to God). When you reflect after Communion, 'What have I done to-day?' say to yourself, 'I have done more than on any busiest day of the week. I have yielded myself to take part with the Church in Christ's finished Act of Redemption which is greater than the making of the world.'²⁴

It is easy to see from this how Eucharistic theology was shifting in Britain in the first third of the twentieth century, at a time when the U.S.A. was more pre-occupied with fundamentalism than sacraments; and that catches quite pointedly the difference between what might be called 'liberal evangelical theology' in the two countries. This was the sacramental theology in which British Churches of Christ ministers were trained—and there was no alternative option available. Moreover Robinson moved to Butler University, Indianapolis after the Second World War, and his teaching influenced a generation of Disciples ministers also.

In the United States a generation later we get two different slants from the Panel of Scholars' Reports. I have already referred to W.B. Blakemore's essay on 'Worship and the Lord's Supper'. He began that essay with a discussion of the changed attitude to worship among Disciples in the early twentieth century, which he traced to aesthetic changes as a result of greater prosperity and work on the psychology of worship, particularly based in Chicago. The pioneer was a Unitarian, Von Ogden Vogt, but his Disciple next-door neighbour, E.S. Ames, developed his own approach, which was carried further by Dr Edwin Osborn and embodied in his *Christian Worship: A Service Book*, published in 1953. But as significant as either of these approaches, in Blakemore's view, was the 'sharpening of historical consciousness regarding Christian

²⁴ P.T. Forsyth, *Lectures on the Church and the Sacraments* (London 1917), 216, 220; quoted in Robinson, *Companion*, 54-5.

worship'.²⁵ Most of the rest of his essay was taken up with a development of this, including a significant discussion of the difference between memorial (*mnemysnon*) and remembrance (*anamnesis*), noting that the Church adopted the latter term rather than the former. He clearly thought that British scholars had over-emphasised the significance of the actions in communion.²⁶ 'The role of remembrance,' he wrote, 'is not that it brings the Lord into our presence, but that remembrance opens our eyes to him into whose presence we have already been brought by faith.'²⁷ Thus his conclusion was that 'communion is that actual participation in heavenly and divine things that by its bestowal of grace makes us a little more fit for earth'.²⁸ Once more, however, Blakemore was discussing the Lord's Supper as a whole and not attempting to attach particular significance to different parts of the service.

The other essay on this subject in the Panel of Scholars' reports was actually by a British scholar, James G. Clague, who was teaching at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis at the time. In effect, he represented a modified version of Robinson's views, under whom he had learned his theology in England, before moving to the U.S.A. As a result of discussing the early liturgies of the Church he advanced two significant conclusions: first, that the Church's 'devotional life centered in the Lord's Supper, both as the concrete symbol of the earthly life and sacrificial death of its Lord and the place where its own life was renewed'; and second, that 'the gift of God is God himself who is received in faith, in the act of communion which commemorates the once-for-all act of God's giving, and at the same time is the means of that gift being continually received anew'.²⁹ Here once again there is the emphasis on life-giving and renewal. When a few pages later he wrote that 'The Lord's Supper is an act, an act of the church and not of the individual. It is an act created by the eternal act of Christ which made, and which makes, the church',³⁰ he was echoing Forsyth, whom he indeed quotes directly on the following page. He repeated Robinson's point about real action in his concluding paragraph, and used the same quotation from Walter Scott's *The Messiahship*, that Robinson had used in his chapter in *Ministry and the Sacraments*: 'What, then are Baptism and the Lord's Supper? I answer that they are the crucifixion, or death, burial, and resurrection of the disciples, *repeating* themselves in the life and profession of the disciples, and proclaiming to the ages that he, that was to come, is come'.³¹

A generation later there were further reflections among North American Disciples on the Lord's Supper. I have already referred to Keith Watkins's book, *Celebrate with Thanksgiving* (1991). An earlier book, *The Feast of Joy* (1977), discussed the significance of the Lord's

²⁵ Blakemore, 'Worship and the Lord's Supper' in Blakemore, *The Revival of the Churches*, 227-34 (quotation from 230).

²⁶ Ibid, footnote 14, 250.

²⁷ Ibid, 247

²⁸ Ibid, 249.

²⁹ J.G. Clague, 'The Place of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper' in R.G. Wilburn (ed), *The Renewal of Theology* (St Louis, Missouri 1963), 293, 296.

³⁰ Ibid, 299.

³¹ W. Scott, *The Messiahship* (Cincinnati 1859), 284, quoted in Clague, 'The Place of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper', 300; cf Robinson in Dunkerly, *Ministry and the Sacraments*, 263. (For some reason, either by oversight or an error unnoticed at proof stage, Clague omitted the phrase '*repeating...disciples*')

Supper in the Free Churches, with particular reference to Disciples; and James Duke and Richard Harrison published a little book on *The Lord's Supper* in 1993 in the 'Nature of the Church' series published by the Council on Christian Unity. The latter was partly intended also as a resource to facilitate the study of a report by the Commission on Theology of the Council, which was received by the General Assembly of 1991, entitled *A Word to the Churches on the Lord's Supper*.

Keith Watkins picked up a point from Raymond Brown's Commentary on John's Gospel in relation to the understanding of John 6. Brown suggested that Jesus offered two explanations of his words 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:35). The first is metaphorical in John 6:35-50: 'Without food the body withers and dies. Without something to believe in, something to hold on to when life is threatened, something to pull one forward towards goals and dreams, life is flat and soon becomes unbearable'.³² The second explanation comes in verse 56, 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him'. Here 'eating and drinking are no longer presented as two ways of saying the same thing. Rather, Jesus asks people literally to eat his flesh and drink his blood'.³³ It would be more accurate to say that the second is an affirmation rather than an explanation, since no answer to the question, How is this possible?, is offered. Brown draws a parallel between this chapter in John and the regular Sunday service of preaching and the Lord's Supper: the first part of the service emphasises faith which comes as Christians hear Jesus' teachings; 'in the second part of the service Christians stand again at the foot of the cross when they break bread, his body, and drink from the cup, his shed blood'.³⁴ This is the regular re-creation of the dynamics of Jesus' encounter with the crowd. It is worth noting in passing that Disciples in various continents have linked 'standing at the foot of the cross' with sharing in the bread and wine at communion, which is not the usual way in which that imagery is invoked in evangelical preaching.

The Word to the Churches on the Lord's Supper is a more general text, written implicitly (rather than explicitly) in the light of the Faith and Order Lima statement on 'Eucharist'. One paragraph is particularly relevant for our discussion:

The sacraments of the church are God-given means for the proclamation of the gospel which come down to us from the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ. Unlike other forms of proclamation such as preaching, they are not only a telling of the gospel story and its meaning but are a visible and tangible enactment of the gospel. Here words, actions and physical elements combine to disclose God's gracious love in Jesus Christ.³⁵

The pre-eminence of the Lord's Supper as a *combination* of Word and Sacrament is clearly affirmed. There is a happy coincidence between these words and one of the conclusions of Jean-Marie Tillard's book, *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ* (2001). Writing of Augustine, Tillard says,

The word announced and received is therefore essential for the church. To highlight the Eucharistic character of the word does not in the least relativize its

³² K. Watkins, *The Feast of Joy* (St Louis, Missouri 1977), 24.

³³ Ibid, .

³⁴ Ibid, 25.

³⁵ Paul A. Crow Jr and James O. Duke, *The Church for Disciples of Christ* (St Louis, Missouri 1991), 146.

role. Word and sacrament together form communion. The sacrament arises within the word, and within the genesis of the church. Word and faith are always first.³⁶

Where does this survey take us in our dialogue? The proclamation/response motif that emerges from the theological discussions in the mid-twentieth century has been carried forward since, and is embodied in various aspects of the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* convergence statement of the Faith and Order commission. As far as Disciples are concerned I hope that it has become clear that the Word of God proclaimed, made real and lived reaches its full expression in the sacraments of the Gospel. ‘We join ourselves to Christ in His redeeming acts and to the whole company of the redeemed, and we join ourselves in reality to the consummation of His redemptive work.’³⁷ One of the things, which I noticed most as a result of the union of Churches of Christ in Great Britain with the United Reformed Church in 1981, was that I had to alter my preaching style. It took me some years to work out why, but it was because the normal context of my preaching ceased to be a communion service. I had become accustomed, almost without realising it, to end my sermons with a reference to the way in which the sharing of the bread and wine encapsulated the heart of any good news which we had to preach as Christians. When that ‘natural ending’ was removed, I had to think of another way in which to bring the centrality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ back into my preaching. I also realised that this explained why so often sermons not in a context of Eucharistic worship seemed to be little more than pious or moral exhortation, which, of course, can so easily lead to the tyranny of the Law which was so vigorously condemned by St Paul. So for Disciples Calvin’s words in the *Institutes* have a special place:

Let it be a conclusion that our souls are fed by the flesh and blood of Christ as our bodily life is sustained by bread and wine. For the analogy of the sign would not hold good if our souls did not find their nourishment in Christ, which cannot be unless Christ is really joined to us and refreshes us by the eating of His flesh and the drinking of His blood.³⁸

Do we have the basis of a further agreement here? The *BEM* statement on ‘Eucharist’ says, ‘It is in virtue of the living word of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit that the bread and wine become the sacramental signs for Christ’s body and blood. They remain so for the purpose of communion.’³⁹ The second sentence of that paragraph has always seemed to me to be rather tame, by comparison with the first. The first sentence contains the nub of the affirmation

³⁶ J-M. R. Tillard, *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ* (St John’s, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2001), 130.

³⁷ Robinson, *Companion*, 27.

³⁸ J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 4, ch 17, quoted in Robinson, *Companion*, 46. In the *Library of Christian Classics* edition, the same section is translated as follows: ‘To summarize: our souls are fed by the flesh and blood of Christ in the same way that bread and wine keep and sustain physical life. For the analogy of the sign applies only if souls find their nourishment in Christ—which cannot happen unless Christ truly grows into one with us, and refreshes us by the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood.’ J.T. McNeill (ed), Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 2, Library of Christian Classics*, xxi (Philadelphia 1960), 1370.

³⁹ ‘Eucharist’ in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva 1982), 13, §15.

Disciples wish to make. We would also question whether the word ‘merely’ in the sentence in the Commentary on this paragraph—‘Some are content merely to affirm this presence without seeking to explain it’—is either necessary or helpful. We do not find evidence in the New Testament of attempts to explain it. Similarly, although we would agree with paragraph 12, ‘Since the *anamnesis* of Christ is the very content of the preached Word as it is of the Eucharistic meal, each reinforces the other. The celebration of the eucharist properly includes the proclamation of the Word’, the phraseology does not catch the sense that the fullness of the Word is to be found in the sacrament, rather than being separable from it. Phraseology such as that from Tillard, quoted earlier, would be better. Tillard also expressed the hope that each tradition would ‘renew its certitude at the very source from which it sprang’, and added: ‘Unity does not result from a collage of confessional groups. On the contrary it is the consequence of the reappearance of the same and indivisible apostolic source within the immense variety of communities which claim to belong to Jesus Christ.’⁴⁰ It was, I think, his hope for this dialogue that there was a similarity between Disciples and Roman Catholics that deserved exploration.

If, as a result of our exploration together this week, this proved to be the case, we might be in a position to say something like the following:

- a) God’s saving and reconciling purpose for humanity is revealed in the life and ministry, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is God’s very self in a human being;
- b) The good news about God, which Christians have been entrusted to proclaim to the world, is understood as we probe the mystery of those historical events;
- c) Jesus has given us the Gospel sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as the way of understanding the significance of his death and resurrection to new new life;
- d) The worship of the Church is most fully realised in the celebration of those sacraments, one for a particular person at a particular time and place, the other for all people at all times and in all places;
- e) Hence the living Word of God is most completely experienced and heard, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in sacramental worship, and God has entrusted this ministry to the Church as the servant of the living Word.

⁴⁰ Tillard, *Flesh of the Church*, 140.

Here, a dedicated priesthood,
we are met to worship thee,
all thy saints, on earth, in heaven,
humbly bend the adoring knee.

Here we see the mystery telling
of thy wondrous love for men;
here set forth in sacred symbol
love beyond our widest ken.

See thy Body bruised and broken,
see thy Blood for us outpoured;
thou the Priest and thou the Victim,
holy, holy, holy Lord!

Now thou standest at thine altar
feeding us with food divine;
herer thy flesh and blood thou givest,
making us most truly thine.

Lo! in adoration bending,
we receive what thou dost give;
join the angels' song unending,
feed by faith on thee, and live.

Praise to thee, eternal Saviour!
Praises from the earth ascend;
Praises from the saints in heaven,
alleluias without end.

W. Robinson (also Australia)

Non-C/C widely used

8

Bread of heaven! on Thee we feed,
For Thy flesh is meat indeed;
Ever may our souls be fed
With this true and living bread!
Day by day with strength supplied,
Through the life of Him who died.

Vine of heaven! Thy blood supplies
This blest cup of sacrifice;
'Tis Thy wounds our healing give;
To Thy cross we look and live;
Jesus, may we ever be
Rooted, grafted, built on Thee.

J. Conder

9

'Twas on that night when doomed to know
The eager rage of every foe,
That night in which He was betrayed,
The Saviour of the world took bread;

And, after thanks and glory given
To Him that rules in earth and heaven,
That symbol of His flesh He broke,
And thus to all His followers spoke:

'My broken body thus I give
For you, for all; take, eat, and live;
And oft the sacred rite renew
That brings My wondrous love to view.'

Then in His hands the cup He raised,
And God anew He thanked and praised,
While kindness in His bosom glowed,
And from His lips salvation flowed.

'My blood I thus pour forth,' He cries,
'To cleanse the soul in sin that lies;
In this the covenant is sealed,
And Heaven's eternal grace revealed.'

'With love to man this cup is fraught,
Let all partake the sacred draught;
Through latest ages let it pour
In memory of My dying hour.'

J. Morison (in Campbell's service)

10

To Him that loved the souls of men,
And washed us in His blood,
To royal honours raised our head,
And made us priests of God;
To Him let every tongue be praise,
And every heart be love!
All grateful honours paid on earth
And nobler songs above!

Behold, on flying clouds He comes!
His saints shall bless the day;
While they that pierced Him sadly mourn
In anguish and dismay.

'I am the First, and I the Last;
Time centres all in Me;
The almighty God, who was, and is,
And evermore shall be.'

I. Watts (as adapted in *Scottish Paraphrases*, 1781; in Campbell's service)

11

No Gospel like this feast
Spread for Thy Church by Thee,
Nor teacher nor evangelist
Preach the glad news so free:

All our redemption cost,
All our redemption won;
All it has won for us, the lost;
All it cost Thee, the Son.

Thine was the bitter price,
Ours is the free gift given;
Thine was the blood of sacrifice,
Ours is the wine of heaven.

For Thee, the burning thirst,
The shame, the mortal strife,
The broken heart, the pierced side,
To us the Bread of life.

Here we would rest midway
As on a sacred height;
That darkest and that brightest day
Meeting before our sight.

From that dark depth of woes
Thy love for us hath trod,
Up to the heights of blest repose
Thy love prepares with God.

Elizabeth R. Charles (also Australia)

12

Sing, my tongue, the Saviour's glory,
Of His cross the mystery sing;
Sound abroad the wondrous story,
Tell the triumphs of the King:
He, the world's Redeemer conquers,
Death, through death now vanquishing.

Word made flesh! His word life-giving

Gives His flesh our meat to be;
Bids us drink His blood, believing,
Through His death, we life shall see:
Blessed they who thus receiving
Are from sin and death set free.

Low in adoration bending
We our Lord and God revere;
Faith her aid to sight is lending,
Though unseen, the Lord is near:
Ancient types and shadows ending,
Christ our Paschal Lamb is here.

Thomas Aquinas (in UK 1908 book)

13

Jesus, Thou Joy of loving hearts!
Thou Fount of life! Thou Light of men!
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;
Thou savest those that on Thee call;
To them that seek Thee, Thou art good;
To them that find Thee, all in all.

On Thee we feast, Thou living Bread!
And here would feast upon Thee still;
Here drink of The, Thou Fountain-head,
Whose streams each thirsting soul can fill.

Our restless spirits yearn for Thee,
Where'er our changeful lot is cast;
Glad, when Thy gracious smile we see,
Blest, when our faith can hold Thee fast.

O Jesus, ever with us stay!
Make all our moments calm and bright;
Chase the dark night of sin away,
Shed o'er the world Thy holy light.

Bernard of Clairvaux, transl Ray Palmer