

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE EUCHARIST

Fourth Agreed Statement of the Disciples of Christ–Roman Catholic
International Commission for Dialogue
2003-2009



The Status of this Document

The Agreed Statement published here is the work of the Disciples of Christ–Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue. Commission members were appointed by the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council and the Holy See’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The authorities, who appointed the Commission, have now allowed the statement to be published so that it may be widely discussed. It is a joint statement of the Commission, not an authoritative declaration by the Roman Catholic Church or by the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, which will study the document in due course.

Abbreviations

Previous Agreed Statements of the International Commission for Dialogue between Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church:

- A&C *Apostolicity and Catholicity*, 1982
 CCIC *The Church as Communion in Christ*, 1992
 RHF *Receiving and Handing on the Faith*, 2002

Documents of the Second Vatican Council (references by paragraph number from the English translation in Norman P. Tanner, SJ (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ii, Sheed & Ward, London and Georgetown University Press, Washington DC 1990, unless otherwise indicated).

- SC *Sacrosanctum concilium*: Constitution on the sacred liturgy, 1963
 LG *Lumen gentium*: Dogmatic constitution on the church, 1964
 UR *Unitatis redintegratio*: Decree on ecumenism, 1964
 PO *Presbyterorum ordinis*: Decree on the ministry and life of priests, 1965

Documents of earlier Councils are also taken from Norman Tanner's edition and are referred to as 'Tanner' with volume and page number.

References to the Faith and Order Commission's Statement, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva 1982, are abbreviated, with paragraph numbers as appropriate, as follows:

- B The Statement on Baptism
 E The Statement on the Eucharist
 M The Statement on the Ministry
 [The whole document is referred to as BEM]

PL *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J-P Migne, published in Paris from 1844 to 1865. There is now an on-line database of the first edition plus indexes published by Chadwick-Healey, Cambridge, 1996-2008, which enables column references to be made to the original.

CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, English translation published by Geoffrey Chapman, London 1992 (references by paragraph number)

CDC *The Church for Disciples of Christ: seeking to be truly church today*, A Report and Resource by the Commission on Theology of the Council on Christian Unity, ed. Paul A Crow, Jr. & James O Duke, St Louis MO 1998 (references by page number).

Biblical references are from the NRSV, except where otherwise noted.

Introduction

1. This Agreed Statement completes the fourth phase of the international dialogue between Disciples of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church, the goal of which is the achievement of full, visible unity between our two communions. Although the ecumenical mood has changed since 1976, when plans for this dialogue were first made, neither Disciples nor Catholics would be satisfied with any lesser goal. The three earlier Agreed Statements considered ‘Apostolicity and Catholicity’ (*A&C*, 1977-82), ‘The Church as Communion in Christ’ (*CCIC*, 1983-92), and ‘Receiving and Handing on the Faith’ (*RHF*, 1993-2002). The theme chosen for the fourth phase was ‘The Presence of Christ in the Church, with special reference to the Eucharist’. The earlier Statements continued to inform our work during this phase.

2. We began our work by recalling areas of convergence and agreement – not least on the sacraments and ways in which faith is handed on – that have emerged in the three previous phases of this international dialogue. One shared affirmation is the significance of spiritual ecumenism, of setting all our work within the context of prayer for God’s guidance. The Agreed Statement following the dialogue’s first phase spoke of the ‘evangelical space’ found by those who ‘are set free as communities and as individuals from seeking to justify our divisions and...are moved to seek a shared life in a reconciled community’. When this happens ‘new possibilities for genuine exchange and sharing’ are discovered (*A&C* §19). To this end, we spent considerable time building relationships and presenting our ecclesiological self-understandings. We are not in full ecclesial communion, and therefore cannot share the Eucharist together. Our lack of full communion contradicts the will of Christ and impels us to listen to God’s Word and follow God’s leading towards overcoming our divisions.

3. Our meetings were held in Bari, Italy in 2004, Indianapolis, USA in 2005, Rome, Italy in 2006, St Louis, USA in 2007 and Vienna, Austria in 2008. Each meeting was set within a context of daily worship, both morning and evening, including Catholic and Disciples celebrations of the Eucharist. As well as the two main theological papers for each meeting, there was a Bible study and opportunity for theological reflection. On each occasion there were opportunities to meet with representatives from the local churches.

4. In this period of dialogue we have discovered significant agreement in faith in relation to common understandings on aspects of our theme, which are now presented in this Statement. The first section of the Statement reiterates the shared commitment of Disciples and Catholics to the unity willed by Christ for his Church. The second section

considers the presence of Christ in the world and the Church. We understand both the Word of God and the sacraments as means of the continuing presence of the Risen Christ. The third section specifically addresses the understanding of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. The fourth section discusses the priesthood of Christ and his ministers. The Conclusion summarises our arguments briefly and notes areas of further work for our Dialogue.

1 Oneness in Christ in the Church

1.1 A Shared Commitment to the Unity of the Church

5. Catholics and Disciples both confess the oneness of the Church and recognize it as the gift of God. For Disciples and Catholics, the visible unity of the Church is at the heart of the Gospel. In its second Agreed Statement, the Commission noted that 'Alexander Campbell was convinced that "the union of Christians is essential to the conversion of the world."... The Roman Catholic Church too proclaims that it has a specific mission for the unity of the world, and affirms that this unity is signified and given by the Eucharistic communion. It too teaches that the restoration of unity among all Christians is linked with the salvation of the world' (*CCIC*§8).¹ The goal of our dialogue is the visible unity of our two communions.

6. The basis for this goal is our unity in Christ. What is the nature of this union between Christ and the Church? Both Disciples and Catholics agree that the Church is communion in Christ. The Church is the covenant people of God, founded by and in Jesus Christ and sustained and empowered by the Holy Spirit Following the Apostle Paul, both Disciples and Catholics speak of the Church as the Body of Christ (*1 Cor* 12:27). The North American Disciples' Commission on Theology, speaking of the divinely constituted nature of the Church, said, "The church is that community called into being by the Gospel, which is God's covenant of love in Jesus Christ, and given its life through the power of God's Spirit in order to praise and serve the living God' (*CDC* 19). In the words of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, "The universal Church appears as "a people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" ... Christ, the one mediator, set up his holy church here on earth as a visible structure, a community of faith, hope and love; and he sustains it unceasingly and through it he pours out grace and truth on everyone' (*LG*, §§4, 8).

¹ A. Campbell, 'Foundation of Christian Union', *The Christian System* (4th ed., Cincinnati OH 1867), 107; UR §1.

7. Without such an understanding of the union of the Church with Christ, the Church would be reduced to a solely human organization and its mission undermined. At Pentecost the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit became the mission of the Church, which is sent to proclaim and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity. The members of the Church following the apostles were sent to bear witness to the truth of Christ, They are empowered by the Holy Spirit to extend and expand the sending of the Son by the Father and the sending of the same Spirit by the Risen Christ into the world of all places and all times. They are washed in the blood of the Lamb, made holy as the bride of Christ. In an earlier phase of our dialogue, the Commission agreed that ‘the Holy Spirit guides the Church, which because of this guidance will not finally fail in its task of proclaiming the Gospel’ (*RHF*, §2.4).

8. The Church lives from Christ, in Christ, and for Christ. At the same time, we recognize the importance of distinguishing between Jesus Christ and his Church. If we identify Christ with the Church without distinction, we run the risk of failing to recognize the sins of the members of the Church or else blaming these sins on Christ. While Christ is the sinless Incarnate Word of God, his saving mission to human subjects leaves them free and does not prevent them from rejecting his grace. The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* states that ‘While Christ, “holy, blameless, unstained” (*Heb.* 7:26) knew no sin (see *2 Cor.* 5:21), and came only to expiate the sins of the people (cf. *Heb.* 2:17), the Church, containing sinners in its own bosom, is at one and the same time holy and always in need of purification and it pursues unceasingly penance and renewal’ (*LG* §8).

1.2 One Faith, One Baptism, One Body

9. The first Agreed Statement of the Commission affirmed that Catholics and Disciples share the apostolic faith of the Church in one God, revealed in three persons. This faith has been faithfully proclaimed from age to age in different times and circumstances (*A&C*, §§36-37). In the third phase of the Dialogue members discovered that Disciples and Catholics shared more agreement about the first seven ecumenical councils than had previously been recognized (*RHF* §§3.12-13). That unity of faith is also expressed in the one baptism, which we share, as affirmed in *Apostolicity and Catholicity* (*A&C* §24).

10. If we share one faith and one baptism, in what sense can we speak of being part of One Body? The first Agreed Statement spoke of Catholics and Disciples as having ‘a communion in via’. ‘The unique unity of the One Church of God is the goal. We are

already on the way; we have taken the first step in faith through baptism which is also the call to that final unity' (*A&C* §57). This reflects the recognition, expressed in the *Decree on Ecumenism*, that 'those who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church' (*UR* §3);² it also corresponds to the less-formally-stated Disciples conviction that persons baptized in other churches (whether as infants or at a later age) are sisters and brothers in Christ, in no need of 'rebaptism' by immersion.

11. The fact remains that our communion at present is imperfect. We need to explore further the implications of the kind of communion with the Catholic Church, although it is imperfect, which is enjoyed by those who belong to separated communities. While there is an apparent lack of agreement on substantial questions of faith, we need to identify and explore these questions more precisely than we have done so far. Thus we have appreciated with new force two related questions, which we pose to each other. Catholics ask Disciples in what ways they understand themselves to be catholic and apostolic? Disciples ask Catholics what space there is for Disciples within the Catholic understanding of the catholicity and apostolicity of the Church. In *Apostolicity and Catholicity* the Commission spoke of 'a quality of evangelical life marked by the will to be faithful to Christ and open to one another ... This *metanoia* thus provides what might be called an "evangelical space" ... in which we find God's grace newly available to bind us together in praising, blessing, beseeching the God who makes us one' (*A&C* §19). Further reflection upon this may offer some clues to enable us to answer the questions posed above.

12. *Apostolicity and Catholicity* described our task as to give external expression to the communion on the way (*A&C* §57). Ecumenical dialogue should discover and publicly acknowledge the unity we already share, and then 'put this unity to work' through various kinds of encounter and joint action.³ With this in mind, we give thanks for the way Disciples and Catholics in numerous local settings have begun to pray for and with one another, to engage in common witness, to act together on behalf of persons marginalized by society, and to participate in each other's community life. These are important signs of hospitality, 'making room' for one another as those who are

² The phrase 'in quadam cum ecclesia catholica communione, etsi non perfectia' has been variously translated. The translation in the text is from *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §818; Tanner renders it 'in some kind of communion with the Catholic Church, even though this communion is imperfect', Tanner ii, 910; W.M. Abbott gives 'a certain, though imperfect, communion', *The Documents of Vatican II* (Geoffrey Chapman, New York NY 1966), 345; Austin Flannery gives 'some, though imperfect, communion', *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Leominster 1981), 455.

³ J. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (Crossroad, New York 1988), 139-40.

commonly incorporated into the body of Christ. We hope that our communities will be able to take advantage of the many signs of *koinonia* already officially permitted; and we recommend that information about such activities be widely disseminated in our congregations and parishes, and that they be encouraged to express our communion *in via* in ways appropriate to their local settings.

1.3 Summary

13. Disciples and Catholics therefore discover promising agreement in their understanding of the implications of their belief in the unity of the Church in Christ. This understanding of the Church as communion (explored particularly in the second Agreed Statement) obliges us to regard the Church's existence as part of the revealed will of God and not a matter of human construction. Equally it underlines the seriousness of our separation from anyone who shares the common apostolic faith in the triune God.

2 The Risen Christ and the Living Word: Word and Sacrament in the Church

14. Unity in Christ is more than identification with a group of people who have a continuous historical existence and look to a common founder. The significance of the resurrection of Christ is that he is dynamically present in both Church and world. The final promise of Christ – 'I am with you always' (*Mt. 28:20*) – has been a personal source of guidance for Christians through the ages; it has also been the basis of a wider belief in the presence of Christ in the world and of a specific belief in the presence of Christ in the Church. For example, we agreed that in the mission of the Church Christ is present in prayer, in the reading of the Bible, in the liturgy, in the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, in the preached Word, in the care of the poor and the sick, and in self-sacrificing love.

2.1 The Presence of the Risen Christ in the World

15. The world itself is God's creation and, although it has been marred by the sinfulness of humanity, God's purpose for it will not be finally frustrated. Catholics and Disciples believe that Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, was sent into the world by God to reveal God's redemptive will and that by his death and resurrection this redemption was achieved. No longer confined to a particular place and time, the risen Christ is

present in the world God created. In St Matthew's Gospel Jesus identifies himself with those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick strangers or in prison (Mt. 25:40). Christians through the ages have been inspired by the thought, not only that Christ sends them into the world with the promise of his continuing presence, but also that he is already there waiting to be recognised in the world. There is a long tradition in the Church that those who are not professed Christians may do God's will. In his ministry Christ emphasised that 'whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother' (Mk. 3:35). Many aspects of public life in the modern world reflect the attempt to embody Christian values, and Christians are able to join with non-Christians in urging political action on questions such as the relief of poverty, hunger and disease. Christians believe that Christ is mysteriously present in the world in a hidden way, and that he sends his Holy Spirit to be the agent in the righting of wrongs and the remedying of injustice, as well as in the healing of the nations. One day Christ will return in glory; we do not know the time but live waiting and praying.

2.2 The Presence of the Risen Christ in the Church

16. Both Disciples and Catholics also speak of the *gift* of Christ's presence, experienced in the Church. Christ promised that he would be present wherever two or three gather in his name (Mt. 18:20); he constantly urged his disciples to pray, just as he prayed himself (Mk. 6:46, Lk. 9:28, Jn. 14: 13-16, Jn. 17, Heb. 5:7). The apostles likewise urged their churches to pray (Eph. 6:18, 1 Thess. 5:13, 1 Pet. 4:7, 1 Jn. 3:21-22). When the churches gathered together they were urged to 'offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 2:5b) and to live lives of holiness.

17. Both Disciples and Catholics recognize those whose lives stand out as revealing the holiness willed by God – a response to the gift of Christ, which manifests itself in the fruits of the Spirit and compassionate living. The holiness of the Church is the gift of God. The Son of God has given himself for her to sanctify her and make a source of sanctification (Jn. 17:19, 1 Cor. 3:17, Eph. 5: 25b-27). The holiness of the Church is a perpetual resource for her members who recognise their need of conversion and sanctification. But we both also insist that spiritual life involves a constant struggle and a humility that resists any claims to our own 'achievement' of holiness. The focus is always on the work God has done and is doing in us. Beyond that, spiritual growth is always linked to concern for the other – an insight reinforced by the supreme example of God's self-giving love for the other seen in the Incarnation and the Cross. In thinking about these matters, we acknowledged a shared treasury of spiritual teachers and persons

whose writings and lived witness we look to for inspiration, persons in whom we ‘see’ Christ.

18. Because divisions among Christians contradict the holiness to which the Christian community is called, Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their bad behaviour at the Lord’s Table. Indeed he told them that the consequence of these divisions was that they were unable to discern the Lord’s body (*1 Cor.* 11:17-34), thereby illustrating the link between Christian living and the sacraments of the Church. The Pauline emphasis was not unique. In John’s Gospel the identification of Christ with the Word who ‘was in the beginning with God’ (*Jn.* 1:2), the ‘spring of water gushing up to eternal life’ (*Jn.* 4:14) and ‘the living bread that came down from heaven’ (*Jn.* 6:51) enables us to understand the ways in which Word and sacrament are integrally related in the life of the Church.

2.3 The Dynamism of God’s Word

19. In the Bible the Word of God is active and potent. The Old Testament presents the Word as performative: the Word brings about something. It is the biblical way of expressing God’s effective action: ‘by the word of the Lord the heavens were made’ (*Ps.* 33:6). At the same time, God’s Word calls for a response; it must be heard in faith. In the New Testament, the Word of God becomes flesh so that now in these last days God has spoken to us by the Son (*cf. Heb.* 1:2). The Word become flesh is the central mystery of the New Testament: God’s hidden purpose now revealed. The Word of God and mystery are two ways of speaking about one reality, Christ, who died and rose again, ‘the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints’ (*Col.* 1:25-26). ‘When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom’ (*1 Cor.* 2:1).

2.4 The Unity of Word and Sacrament

20. In the Pauline letters, the Greek term *mysterion* (‘mystery’) was sometimes translated into Latin as *sacramentum*.⁴ Its primary meaning is not a ritual action but God’s saving plan revealed in Christ. Both baptism and Eucharist were instituted by Christ as means for incorporating ‘those who were being saved’ (*Acts* 2:47) into the

⁴ In the first century of the history of Disciples the word ‘sacrament’ was rarely used; instead Holy Baptism and Holy Communion were referred to as ‘ordinances’, reflecting the belief (going back to John Calvin) that they were to be seen more as instituted by Christ than by the Church. In the twentieth century Disciples concluded that this was a distinction without a difference. Thus the British Churches of Christ scholar William Robinson published a guide for church members on baptism and communion in 1925 entitled *Holy Ordinances*, and a later one on *The Sacraments and Life* in 1949.

Christian community. In early Christian thought Word and sacrament were not understood as two different realities, but as two ways of referring to the same reality. When the word ‘sacrament’ began to be used to refer as well to ritual signs, the biblical sense was retained, so that these signs were understood to be participations in the great sacrament (mystery) of Christ’s saving work, made present in the Church, which is like a sacrament of Christ’s action: ‘What was visible in our Saviour has passed over into his mysteries (Pope Leo I).⁵ These signs are not contrasted with the word; they are, as Augustine explained, the ‘visible word’.⁶ This understanding deeply marked the Christian tradition from its first centuries.

21. Because of the biblical sense of God’s Word, the early Church understood that the words of Jesus spoken in a sacrament were, by divine power, efficacious. Medieval Catholic theologians continued this teaching. Disciples retained the biblical sense of the efficaciousness of the sacraments. Biblical texts were used to show that ‘persons are begotten by the Spirit of God, impregnated by the Word, and born of the water’.⁷ Belief in the power of baptism to remit sins was a basic belief of the early Disciples movement. The purpose of the sacraments is fully achieved only when they are received in faith. Underlying all sacramental belief is a conviction of the power and readiness of God through the Holy Spirit to respond to the prayers of those who ask in faith.

22. The reading of the Scriptures is another way in which the Word of God is heard in the ecclesial community. Celebrations of baptism and the Eucharist in both traditions normally include readings from the Old and New Testaments. In baptism Jesus’s command to baptize is repeated and obeyed and there is a prayer that by the use of water the one to be baptized will be cleansed from sin. In the Eucharist Jesus’s words of institution in relation to the bread and wine (either as recorded in the Gospels or by St Paul) will be invariably repeated.

23. Preaching in sacramental worship is understood as an extension of God’s efficacious word, words about the Word Incarnate. Christ is also present through the preached Word. Both Catholics and Disciples emphasize the power of preaching. Disciples and Catholics celebrate the Eucharist at least every Sunday, so that

⁵ ‘Quod itaque Redemptoris nostri conspicuum fuit, in sacramenta transivit’, Leo the Great, *Sermon 74.2*, PL 54, 398; cf *LG* §1.

⁶ ‘If you take away the word, what is the water except merely water? The Word is added to the element and the result is the sacrament, as a kind of visible word: ‘Detrahe verbum, et quid est aqua nunc aqua? Accedit verbum ad elementum, et fit Sacramentum, etiam ipsum tanquam visibile verbum’, Augustine, *Tractatus in Joannis Evangelium*, 80.3, (PL 35:1840); English translation in *Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vii, ed P. Schaff (1888, reprinted 1983, Grand Rapids MI), 344.

⁷ ‘Remission of Sins’, Proposition 10 in Campbell, *The Christian System*, 201.

proclamation of the Word on Sundays always occurs with the celebration of the sacrament. Our agreement about the power of God’s Word proclaimed clarifies the role of the ordained minister as the witness to the Word transmitted through the Church.

24. Because Christ is the living Word, the celebration of word and sacrament is an effective action, not simply a recollection of the past or a reading of written words. Both Disciples and Catholics believe that in the Church Christ himself acts in the sacraments. For Catholics the Eucharistic prayer at the centre of the Mass makes this clear. For Disciples the prayers at the Table and the words of institution highlight the centrality of Christ’s action. Christ’s action in the Eucharist is affirmed also in the hymns sung by Disciples before the prayers of thanksgiving for the bread and wine where Christ’s sacrifice is pleaded before God. Typically in these hymns the passion is recalled and also represented; the focus is on the present action of the Risen Christ, actively present and awaiting a welcome in faith.

2.5 Summary

25. We therefore come to a threefold understanding of the presence of Christ – in the world, in the Church and in the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, each based on the dynamic Word of God. All three are integrally linked. Indeed the sacramental approach to the whole of life is one way of affirming our underlying faith that we live in God’s world and that God is continually active in it. With this understanding we can turn to examine the presence of Christ in the Eucharist in particular.

3 The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

3.1 The Eucharist, Sacrament of Communion in Christ

26. Disciples and Catholics share the conviction that the Eucharist is at the centre of the Church’s life, where we are one in the Risen Christ and hear his Word together. The Second Vatican Council teaches that ‘through the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread there is represented and produced the unity of the faithful, who make up one body in Christ (see *1 Cor. 10:17*) (LG §3). The celebration of the Eucharist is ‘the chief means through which believers are expressing in their lives and demonstrating to others the mystery which is Christ, and the sort of entity the true Church really is’ (SC §2). For

Disciples, 'the affirmation that the church today, as in apostolic times, is called to gather at the Lord's Table on the first day of the week has been a prominent and enduring feature of Disciples church life. Indeed, it is a mark of our identity as a church'. Disciples experience the Lord's Supper as 'an act of inexhaustible spiritual richness ... that [they] share in common with Christians of all times and places'. 'The Lord's Supper means more than the church is ever quite able to say about it' (CDC 139).

27. Both Disciples and Catholics teach that the Church is communion in Christ and is characterized by visible unity, within which we receive the Eucharist, the sacrament of the Church's unity. *The Church as Communion in Christ* affirmed:

This visibility is realized especially in the celebration of the Eucharist. There, gathered together and after having confessed their faith, the baptized people receive the body and blood of Christ, the Son of God, who reconciled humanity to God in one body through the cross. There they enter into communion with the saints and members of the whole household of God. Moreover, what is celebrated at the Eucharist has to be actualized in a life of common prayer and faith, of faithfulness to the Gospel, of sharing the spiritual and even material goods of the community, and of commitment to the will of God that the saving work of Christ be extended as offer to all (CCIC §48).

28. Because the Church's visible unity is so central for both Catholics and Disciples, the divisions which keep us from sharing the Eucharist together are especially painful. But different ways of understanding the Church and its unity lead us to different practices in offering Eucharistic participation. The founders of the Disciples, notably Alexander Campbell and Barton Warren Stone, taught that the communion service demonstrated the oneness of all believers. For Catholics, sharing the Eucharist signifies full communion in Christ's body, the Church, which means sharing agreement on the content of faith, the sacraments and ministry of the Church, and structures of authority (see LG §14).

3.2 The Eucharist, Sacrament of the Real Presence of Christ

29. Disciples and Catholics regard the sacrament of the Eucharist as a privileged, unique place of Christ's presence, where his words are spoken in obedience to his command and are made powerful by the Holy Spirit, making effective for those gathered what Christ first promised to his followers at the Last Supper. Christ's dynamic word

brings his presence to those gathered at the Eucharist for their forgiveness, healing and transformation. Because Christ has entered the realm of the Spirit after his resurrection, he offers himself now to believers through the Spirit as the bread of heaven, his very self-given for the sake of the world so that ‘whoever eats me will live because of me’ (*Jn. 6:57*). Both Disciples and Catholics know the power of the celebration of the Eucharist, which remains for them the central and most important prayer of the Church. It is communion in the body and blood of Christ.

3.2.1 Some Historical Aspects of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

30. While both Disciples and Catholics teach a lively faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, they have inherited a set of historical controversies about the meaning of this teaching. Their understanding of these controversies shapes their understanding of each other and of each other’s teaching concerning Christ’s Eucharistic presence.

31. For the first millennium of the Church’s history the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Eucharist was affirmed without significant dissent. In the patristic period, Christian thinkers taught that the bread and wine were transformed into Christ’s body and blood. The prayer to the Holy Spirit that the bread and wine might become the body and blood of Christ shows how ancient and widespread was this belief. Patristic writers in the early centuries of the Church used a large number of analogies and concepts to explain this change in the elements of bread and wine, but following the lead of Irenaeus they related denial of the change to a denial of the Incarnation. By the fourth century, Eucharistic doctrine on the conversion (*conversio*) of the bread and wine was sufficiently developed that Hilary of Poitiers could speak of ‘the Word made flesh remaining in us “naturally.” He joined the nature of his eternity in the sacrament of his flesh which he allows us to share.’⁸ In the fifth century Augustine explained that the Eucharist contained the reality that it symbolized.⁹

⁸ ‘Si enim vere Verbum caro factum est, et vere nos Verbum carnem cibo dominico sumimus; quomodo non naturaliter manere in nobis existimandus est, qui et naturam carnis nostrae jam inseparabilem sibi homo natus assumpsit, et naturam carnis suae ad naturam aeternitatis sub sacramento nobis communicandae carnis admiscuit?’ Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 8, 13, *PL* 10.246.

⁹ ‘Si enim sacramenta quamdam similitudinem earum rerum quarum sacramenta sunt, non haberent, omnino sacramenta non essent. Ex hac autem similitudine plerumque etiam ipsarum rerum nomina accipiunt.’ ‘For if sacraments had not some points of real resemblance to the things of which they are sacraments, they would not be sacraments at all. In most cases, moreover they do in virtue of their likeness bear the names of the reality which they resemble’, Augustine, *Letter* 98.9, *PL* 33.364 (English translation in *Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, I (ed. P. Schaff, New York 1886), 410; cf. *Sermons* 227.1 and 272, *PL* 38.1099, 1257-68.

32. However, the patristic synthesis between the real and the symbolic disappeared towards the end of the first millennium and there followed a period of controversy in the Western Church about the mode of Christ's presence, which lasted for most of the second millennium of Christian history. Already in the ninth century, Paschase Radbert had developed a materialistic view of the change in the bread and wine, as though it were a physical or material change. Two centuries later, Berengar presented a 'symbolic' understanding of the Eucharist in which the gifts may be called the body and blood of Christ but in fact remain bread and wine. These positions stimulated controversies and popular misunderstanding in their day, but they also motivated theologians to seek clearer understandings of Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

33. To describe the conversion of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, theologians, synods and popes began to use the term 'transubstantiation' and the word entered official teaching for the first time in 1215 when the Fourth Lateran Council used it in defining the Eucharist.¹⁰ The meaning of this term 'transubstantiation' was brought to maturity by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Aquinas used transubstantiation both as a means to counter materialist views of the Eucharist, and to affirm the change of bread and wine inherited from the patristic period and manifested by the Eucharistic prayer to the Holy Spirit. Aquinas used Aristotle's philosophy, which was popular in the universities of his day and hence had an apologetic value. He argued that in the Eucharist the 'substance' – what it is – of the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, leaving only the 'accidents' – what it appears to be – remaining. Aquinas does not try to explain how this happens. He simply asserts that there is a change, not how it occurs. He emphasizes the uniqueness of this mysterious change: it is not a local or material change, but a supernatural change. Aquinas writes that the body of Christ begins to be present in the elements not in a local way, as though occupying a particular place, but 'by conversion of the substance of bread into itself (i.e. the body of Christ). Yet this change is not like natural changes, but is entirely supernatural, and effected by God's power alone...The whole substance of the bread is changed into the whole substance of Christ's body and the whole substance of the wine into the whole substance of Christ's blood.'¹¹ Because Christ is present in his humanity as well as his divinity in the Eucharist, Aquinas explains, it must involve his bodiliness though this is the transformed body of the risen Christ that Paul describes as 'a spiritual

¹⁰ Fourth Lateran Council, Constitution 1, Tanner i, 230.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, third part, qu 75, art 4 (ET by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Allen TX 1948), v, 2443–4.

body.’ Aquinas gives not a physical but a metaphysical account of what takes place at the conversion of the bread and wine.¹²

34. By the time of the Protestant Reformation, common understandings of the Eucharistic presence had again been replaced by a variety of viewpoints. Terms once understood in common now received different interpretations. Just as today ‘substance’ would have a materialist meaning – something we can touch and feel – so in the sixteenth century it was taken to mean ‘materially present’, which was just the opposite of what Aquinas had intended when he used the term ‘transubstantiation’ to oppose materialist misunderstandings. Martin Luther held to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist ‘under the bread and wine’, but repudiated the concept of transubstantiation. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* John Calvin condemned the use of the term ‘transubstantiation’ on the grounds of its relatively recent date, but he acknowledged that the Fathers (in particular Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose and John of Damascus) did use the term ‘*conversio*’. His particular objection was to William of Ockham, more than to Aquinas, and his primary emphasis was that ‘the truth of this mystery accordingly perishes for us unless the true bread represents the true body of Christ’.¹³

35. While the Reformers discussed Christ’s presence in the Eucharist in various ways, the Council of Trent (1545-63) defended the ‘true, real and substantial’ presence of Christ against attempts to understand it ‘as in a sign or figure’ or to combine Christ’s presence with a remaining presence of bread and wine. Trent began by recognizing that ‘though we can hardly express ... in words’ the mode of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, ‘we can grasp [it] with minds enlightened by faith’. It therefore used the term and concept of ‘transubstantiation’ in order to affirm that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, explaining, ‘the holy catholic church has suitably and properly called this change transubstantiation’.¹⁴ While Trent made clear that the term was used ‘most aptly’, its primary intention was to condemn terms or concepts that deny its meaning.

¹² Cf. Aidan Nichols, OP, ‘The consecration of the bread and wine destroys not the natural qualities of the bread and wine but these no longer manifest its ultimate reality. Its true substance, what is supremely important, lies elsewhere’, *Epiphany: A Theological Introduction to Catholicism* (Collegeville MN, 1996), 295.

¹³ J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, ch XVII, §14 (ed. J.T. McNeill, London 1960), ii, 1376. Although the first edition of the *Institutes* was published before the Council of Trent met, the final Latin edition appeared in 1559 after Session 13 of the Council (1551), canon 2 of which anathematized those who denied the change which the Catholic Church ‘most aptly calls transubstantiation’; by this time opposing positions were already becoming entrenched. But Calvin’s relevance lies more in the way in which he contextualises the Tridentine decrees than in any direct influence on the development of Disciples some 250 years later, since Disciples’ philosophical frame of reference was essentially taken from Bacon and Locke.

¹⁴ Council of Trent, Session 13 (1551), ch 1, canon 1 and ch 4, Tanner ii, 694, 697, 695.

36. Disciples of Christ came into existence in the nineteenth century, toward the end of this second millennium, which had been filled with controversies about Christ's real presence in the Eucharist. They separated from the Presbyterian Churches because Disciples did not believe that the requirement to accept the Secession Testimony as well as the Westminster Confession as a condition of the admission to communion was scriptural (cf. RHF §3.16). Furthermore it prevented response to Christ's invitation to his table. Hence Disciples tended to resist traditions about the Eucharist that insisted on precision or detail in explaining Christ's presence. Disciples have continued to resist attempts to explain the mystery of Christ's presence in the Eucharist too fully, not because they do not believe it, but because they have wished to avoid divisive controversies over a mystery where a variety of understandings has coexisted in the history of the Church.

37. The nineteenth century was a period when religious beliefs were defined as much in terms of denials as affirmations. For example, although Disciples always saw the Lord's Supper as being more than a recollection of the Last Supper, they criticized the use of the term 'transubstantiation' as involving an unnecessarily metaphysical explanation. Moreover, the earliest Disciples were reared in the philosophical atmosphere of Scottish common sense realism in which what Aquinas described as 'accidents' were understood to constitute the real, and what he described as 'substance' was seen as an unnecessary abstraction. In this different philosophical framework, then, transubstantiation was taken to mean almost the opposite of what Aquinas had intended. And the use of Aristotle's philosophical base by Aquinas – an effective apologetic tool in thirteenth-century Europe – no longer made sense within the different philosophical framework in nineteenth-century Britain and North America.

3.2.2. Contemporary Catholic and Disciples Teaching on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

38. The ecumenical era has offered the opportunity for greater mutual understanding of different approaches to the question of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist. Nevertheless, we also recognize that we are referring to a great mystery of our faith, a mystery not in the sense that it is unknown but that there is an inexhaustible depth in its meaning.

39. Our Bible studies helped us to discover the many ways that the presence of God is expressed in the Bible and to relate this to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In the divine name in Exodus 3:14 the dynamic and creative presence of God in the world

and in history is revealed, and this divine presence is also shown to be salvific in the theophanies of the Old Testament. The temple showed a kind of ‘dwelling’ for God in the midst of the people, which connoted a dynamic presence. This tradition is continued in the New Testament when it teaches that ‘the fullness of God dwells’ in Jesus Christ (*Col.* 1:19), and that the Risen Lord continues to dwell in the world in a continuous and new way after the resurrection. The body of the Incarnate Son, now transferred into the realm of the Spirit, still comes to us in the Eucharist and transmits divine life. In the Gospel of John, Jesus reveals himself as the bread of life, come down from heaven for the sake of the world.

40. Contemporary Catholic teaching broadened its focus when, in discussing the principles of liturgical renewal, it emphasized the many ways that Christ is present in the Church’s liturgical celebrations. Vatican II’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* teaches that Christ ‘is present through the sacrifice which is the mass, at once in the person of the minister – “the same one who then offered himself on a cross is now making his offering through the agency of priests” – and also, most full, under the Eucharistic elements. He is present through his power in the sacraments; thus, when anyone baptizes, Christ himself is baptizing. He is present through his word, in that he himself is speaking when scripture is read in church. Finally, he is present when the church is praying or singing hymns, he himself who promised, “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (*Mt.* 18:20)’ (*SC* §7).

41. The meaning of the term ‘transubstantiation’ continues to be normative for Catholic teaching today. In using this term, the Council of Trent intended to defend the mystery of Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist, which it did by opposing two extreme positions. On the one hand, Trent condemned positions in which Christ is present ‘as in a sign or figure’, or present along with the bread and wine, which remain. On the other hand, the Council of Trent taught the mystery of Christ’s presence by counteracting materialistic interpretations of it. This meaning intended by Trent is highlighted when Catholics teach that the bread and wine become the body and blood of the risen, glorified Lord.

42. In the nineteenth century, early Disciples did not use the language of ‘transubstantiation’ to describe their belief in Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist, and today they still find the conceptual framework from which it emerged unfamiliar and therefore would not readily use the term. Nevertheless later twentieth-century work on Aristotle’s understanding of the term ‘substance’ and its use in Aquinas and other scholars of that period has exposed the way in which this terminology has been

misunderstood in the past. Furthermore Disciples readily acknowledge that the ultimate significance of the bread and wine in the Eucharist is not to be explained by their physical characteristics alone. Thus they affirm the mystery of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, which makes receiving the bread and wine a true communion in his body and blood.

43. Disciples also have characteristic ways of describing the presence of Christ at the Eucharist. They affirm that Christ is the host at the Eucharistic feast, and that his presence is experienced in the communion of the faithful. They also affirm that by the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become for us, through faith, the Body and Blood of Christ. Disciples gladly make their own the words of the statement in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* to confess ‘Christ’s real, living and active presence in the Eucharist’ which is ‘unique’ and ‘does not depend on the faith of the individual.’ (E §13). In the celebration of the Eucharist, ‘the Spirit makes the crucified and risen Christ really present to us in the Eucharistic meal (E §14) so that it becomes a ‘foretaste’ of the ‘final renewal of creation’ (E §22). Disciples find that their characteristic ways of speaking of Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist have been enriched by the ecumenical dialogue and they welcome this expansion of their perspectives.

44. The presence of Christ in the Eucharist now awaits a welcome by the believer’s reception of communion: it should not be considered in isolation from this purpose. Catholics continue the practice of the early Church in reserving communion from the Eucharistic celebration for those absent from the celebration due to illness. This remains the primary purpose of reservation of the consecrated elements, but in the Western Church this reservation also led to the adoration of Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. Prayer in front of the reserved sacrament, processions and devotions surrounding the reserved sacrament, and communion taken to the sick continue to be lively aspects of Catholic life today. Catholic liturgical instructions make clear that even adoration of Christ in the reserved sacrament should be understood as an extension of the sacramental action of the Eucharistic celebration and that they have the purpose of sacramental and spiritual communion.¹⁵ Disciples welcome this clarification of a practice, which is unfamiliar to them. The anxiety felt by Disciples concerns any localization of the presence of Christ in the bread and wine, which is detached from the total Eucharistic celebration. For themselves Disciples find prayer before the reserved

¹⁵ *Eucharisticum mysterium (Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery)* §§5, 24-25, 49-50, 62 in Flannery, *Vatican Council II 1981*, 106, 116-7, 129-30, 134. Reservation of the sacrament was provided for by Canon 13 of the Council of Nicaea (Tanner, i, 12).

sacrament open to misunderstanding, although they respect the contemplative and communal traditions of prayer to which it has given rise.

3.2.3 Summary

45. Disciples and Catholics have used different language to describe the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and they have emphasized different moments of this mystery. Yet we both affirm the mystery of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, especially in the bread and wine; we both oppose reductionist understandings that see Christ's presence as simply materialist or figurative. We reached some real convergence on this topic through the elimination of mutual misunderstandings, though we also recognize many remaining differences.

3.3 The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Sacrifice of Christ

46. Both Disciples and Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the sacrament which makes real in a special way the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the entire life, ministry and passion that led to the cross. With Paul, we experience the communion cup as a 'sharing in the blood of Christ'. The Eucharistic prayer typically recalls not only the passion of Christ, but the whole story of creation and redemption, and it also looks forward to the consummation of the work of Christ in his coming again. In this way the Church fulfils the Pauline injunction 'to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (*1 Cor.* 11:26).

3.3.1 Some Historical Aspects of the Sacrificial Understanding of the Eucharist

47. In the New Testament, Christ's death on the cross is called an offering, made by Christ the high priest, who instead of offering sacrifices daily, instead 'once for all...offered himself' for sins (*Heb.* 7:27). In this 'single sacrifice for sins' (*Heb.* 10:12) Christ offered his body once for all (*Heb.* 10:10). The sacrificial understanding of Christ's death is prefigured in the Last Supper, where, according to Paul and the Gospel writers, Jesus linked the bread and the wine to his body, given for you', and his 'blood, shed for you' – the 'new covenant in his blood' (*Mt.* 22: 26-28, *Mk.* 14:22-25, *1 Cor.* 11:23-27). In the early Church theologians (e.g. Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus of Rome and many others) continued the tradition of sacrificial interpretations of the Eucharist.

48. In medieval Western thought the sacrificial interpretation of the Eucharist received less theological reflection than the understanding of the real presence of Christ. The patristic teaching concerning the sacrificial character of the Eucharist was developed to encompass the view that the mass was a satisfaction for sin, which could be offered daily on behalf of the living and the dead. Lay participation in the sacrifice was understood primarily in terms of spiritual identification with Christ in his passion, which was expressed devotionally in meditation, relating successive stages of the mass to stages of the passion. The propitiatory character of the sacrifice also encouraged the belief that particular masses could be directed to specific votive intentions: this led to the endowment of masses for the benefit of the souls of the donors and their family and friends.

49. Following Martin Luther, the Reformers of the sixteenth century rejected these theological interpretations and the practices that had accompanied them. Viewing the Mass as a sacrifice made it into a ‘work’ rejected by their theology of God’s grace, they argued. They emphasized that the Eucharist was not a repetition but a memorial of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, which had been made once-for-all and was sufficient to atone for the sins of all humanity. The Reformers differed among themselves about the meaning they gave to ‘memorial’.

50. To counteract the Reformers, the Council of Trent cited teaching from the early centuries of the Church and taught that the Mass is a sacrifice in a true and proper sense and not just ‘a bare commemoration’. Trent also said that the Mass is the same sacrifice as that of the cross, though offered in a different, unbloody manner. Though Christ offered himself once-for-all in a bloody way on the cross, Trent teaches, the same Christ is contained and immolated in a unbloody way in the Mass.¹⁶

51. Three centuries later, the Disciples of Christ received and made their own, without much debate, the Reformers’ rejection of sacrificial interpretations of the Eucharist. Disciples emphasized the character of the Eucharist as a meal where the sacrifice offered is the praise and thanksgiving of the believers.

¹⁶ Teaching and canons on the most holy sacrifice of the mass’, canon 3, ch 2, Council of Trent (Session 22), Tanner, ii, 735, 733.

3.3.2 Contemporary Catholic and Disciples Teaching on the Sacrificial Understanding of the Eucharist

52. Both Disciples and Catholics have benefited from the twentieth century recovery of the biblical understanding of memorial (*anamnesis*), whereby what is remembered is re-presented or re-enacted by the worshipping community. In our discussions, we linked the recovery of memorial (*anamnesis*) to the larger recovery of the dynamism of God's Word. For Catholics, the recovery of biblical language of memorial (*anamnesis*) helps to correct some theological misinterpretations of the teaching of the Council of Trent. While Trent taught that a new oblation of the Cross was not being made at every Eucharistic celebration, some theological interpretations of Trent gave the impression of a new oblation repeated daily during the Eucharistic celebration. It was not easy for some Catholic theologians to find a conceptual tool which allowed the radical once-for-all (*ephapax*) oblation to be held together with its perpetual presence in sacramental form. But the biblical concept of memorial provided this tool. For Disciples, the recovery of the biblical meaning of memorial helps to prevent misunderstanding this term as simply mental recall, even though the Reformers themselves avoided this misunderstanding: "These acts of God in history [in the *anamnesis*] were those which had meaning for eternity, and they were here set forth and actualized in the lives of the worshippers".¹⁷

53. Both Catholics and Disciples participated in drafting the statement of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, and we find it particularly helpful in its discussion of memorial (*anamnesis*). It says, "The Eucharist is the sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ, whoever lives to make intercession for us" (*E* §8) and its accompanying commentary: "It is in the light of the significance of the Eucharist as intercession that references to the Eucharist in Catholic theology as "propitiatory sacrifice" may be understood. The understanding is that there is only one expiation, that of the unique sacrifice of the cross, made actual in the Eucharist and presented before the Father in the intercession of Christ and of the Church for all humanity." The Eucharist is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered by the worshippers; and by being joined to Christ they are also drawn into the self-offering which constitutes Christ's sacrifice to the Father. The Eucharist hence re-presents to those sharing in it the sacrifice of the cross; and communion in the body and blood of Christ is both based upon and results in a call to discipleship.

¹⁷ W. Robinson, *A Companion to the Communion Service* (Oxford 1942), 35.

54. We have found the perspective of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* helpful to understand sacrificial interpretations of the Eucharist. But we also noted that in their response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (which was largely positive), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity did note that the notion of intercession does not seem sufficient for explaining the Catholic sense of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist. The response noted that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice is not repeated, but since the high priest is the crucified and risen Lord, this sacrifice can be said to be 'made eternal,' an idea not fully captured by the simple term 'intercession.' The response notes that Catholic faith 'links the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist to the sacrament of the body and blood [of Christ] more closely than is done in the text.'¹⁸

55. In our discussions we discovered more convergence than we had earlier recognized on the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. Both of our traditions teach that the sacrifice of Christ has occurred once for all and can never be repeated. Yet in the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church remembers by re-presenting the sacrifice of Christ in a sacramental way. As long ago as the Edinburgh Faith and Order Conference of 1937 the view of Disciples or Churches of Christ was described in this way: 'The Eucharist has been for them the great churchly service in which the Church as a royal priesthood offers worship, but not of a pattern of her own designing, nor one determined by her own preferences. Rather the priestly Church offers worship through her Great High Priest, who is here set forth in His Holy Redeeming Act as *sacrificium*.'¹⁹ More recently Disciples have described this remembering (*anamnesis*) as 'not merely a recollection of something long gone and hence remote from us, but a re-presentation which makes what is past a vivid and lively reality here and now. Jesus Christ himself with all he has accomplished for us and for all creation is present in this *anamnesis*' (CDC 144). These affirmations, which may suggest more convergence with the Roman Catholic Response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* than the text of *BEM* itself, have striking similarities to the teaching presented by the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which explains that 'in the sense of Sacred Scripture the memorial is not merely the recollection of the past events but the proclamation of the mighty works by God for men' (CCC §1363). So 'when the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present' (CCC §1364). In citing a text from the Council of Trent²⁰, the Catechism explains that the Eucharist is a sacrifice 'because it *re-presents* (makes present)

¹⁸ M. Thurian (ed.), *Churches Respond to BEM*, vi (Geneva 1988), 20-21.

¹⁹ R. Dunkerley (ed.), *The Ministry and the Sacraments* (London 1937), 264.

²⁰ Teaching and canons on the most holy sacrifice of the mass', ch. 1, Council of Trent (Session 22), Tanner, ii, 733.

the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its *memorial* and because it *applies* its fruit' (CCC §1366).

56. Disciples and Catholics agree that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the sacrifice of Christ. Although the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross cannot be repeated, Christians in the celebration of the Eucharist are drawn into the movement of Christ's self-offering. 'United with him and with the whole Church on earth and in heaven,' affirms the Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church, 'his people gathered at his table present their sacrifice of thanksgiving and renew the offering of themselves.'²¹ Adding nothing to what Jesus has already done, 'the whole people of God...in response to the sacrifice of Christ, offer up our own sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, a giving of ourselves to God who brings good news to sinners (CDC 145). In the Eucharist the Church unites itself to Christ's intercession with the Father for all people and for the whole of creation. 'The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value,' the *Catechism* explains (CCC §1368).

3.3.3 Summary

57. Disciples and Catholics both understand the Eucharist as the sacrament which makes present the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. We have been surprised by the amount of convergence that we discovered, even though we recognize that we have different emphases. Now we will examine a distinct but related topic: the different ways that sacrificial language has been applied to the presiders at the Eucharist when they have been described in priestly language.

4 The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers

4.1 Some Historical Aspects of the Priestly Understanding of the Ordained Ministry

58. Just as sacrificial interpretations began to be applied to the Eucharist in the early centuries of the Church, there also developed a sacerdotal or priestly interpretation of the one presiding at the Eucharist. Such usage does not occur in the New Testament,

²¹ Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church §15. (The majority of Churches of Christ in Great Britain became part of this Church in 1981.)

which calls the Church ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood’ (1 Pet. 2:9), but does not use any one word to describe those presiding over the communal Eucharist. But as the parallels between the Last Supper and the Eucharist were developed, using the language of Hebrews 10:10 and the Old Testament, in liturgical and theological imagery during the patristic period, the presider at the Eucharist was seen to stand in a sacramental relation to the sacrificial self-giving of Christ the High Priest and came to be called a ‘priest’.

59. By the medieval period in the Western Church, a priestly interpretation dominated the theology and practice of the ordained ministry. The Council of Trent continued this emphasis by making the priestly category central in its doctrinal teaching about ordination. God had always provided for priests, it taught. At the Last Supper, Christ had made the apostles priests and entrusted them with the sacrifice of the Eucharist.²²

60. The Council of Trent emphasized these elements especially to counter those points which the Reformers had denied, in particular the sacrificial interpretation of the Eucharist, the priestly understanding of the ordained ministry, and the sacramental character of ordination. While the Reformers emphasized the importance of the ordained ministry for the Church, they underlined the tasks of preaching, teaching, and pastoral care entrusted to the ordained minister. In addition, the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist reformers in Europe felt themselves forced to choose between continuity in episcopal office and continuity in teaching. In this situation they discontinued or deemphasized the office of the bishop and taught that apostolic succession came primarily through continuity in teaching. They also ceased to refer to the ordained presbyters as ‘priests’ and spoke of the ‘priesthood of the faithful’. Disciples of Christ inherited this Reformation legacy. Although among Disciples an ordained minister or elder is the normal presider at the sacraments of both Eucharist and Baptism, they have not been in the habit of using the term ‘priest’, which has a specific application to the Eucharist, to describe the one who also baptizes and preaches (CCIC §45).

61. The Second Vatican Council repeatedly addressed the question of ordained ministry and its relationship to the whole Church. On the one hand, the Council spoke of the ‘common priesthood’ of all of the faithful, who ‘by virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist’ as well as exercising their priesthood through reception of the sacraments, prayers and thanksgiving, and lives of holiness, self-denial,

²² ‘Canons on the most holy sacrifice of the mass’, Canon 2, Council of Trent (Session 22), Tanner, ii, 735.

and charity. On the other hand, the ministerial priesthood of the ordained is described as different from the common priesthood ‘in essence and not simply in degree’ because it ‘forms and governs the priestly people’ and ‘brings about the Eucharistic sacrifice’ (*LG* §10). It exists to foster and nourish the common priesthood of all of the baptized.

62. Furthermore, the Council, following ancient tradition, affirmed the episcopate rather than the presbyterate as the fundamental category for understanding ordained ministry. Rather than seeing the episcopate as conferring simply additional jurisdiction and authority, the Council emphasized the sacramentality of the episcopal ministry and the collegiality of the bishops acting together as successors of the apostles. While the bishop’s ministry continues to be understood as a participation in Christ’s priesthood, it also confers the offices of teaching and governing (*LG* §21). Finally, the work of preaching is given the eminent place among the functions of the bishop (*LG* §25). Presbyters²³ also, as fellow-workers with the bishops, have ‘as their first charge to announce the gospel of God to all’ (*PO* §4).

4.2 Contemporary Catholic and Disciples Teaching Concerning the Priestly Understanding of the Ordained Ministry

63. On some issues related to ordained ministry, our two traditions are in agreement. Both Disciples and Catholics agree, for example, that the measure and norm of all priesthood is Christ’s unique priesthood. Christ serves as the mediator between God and human beings, sanctifying us through offering himself as a full, perfect, once-for-all sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. ‘Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself’ (*Heb.* 7:27). Through his death and resurrection, constituting his unique and abiding high priestly role, he established a new relationship between God and humankind (*Jn.* 17:21).

64. In addition, Disciples and Catholics agree that Christ has made of the baptized a priestly people, bound to Christ and hence to each other as his body. Because they are a priestly people, the baptized are to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving (*Heb.* 13:15, *Ps.* 116:17), to present their bodies ‘as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God ... your spiritual worship’ (*Rom.* 12:1).

²³ The Latin ‘presbyteri’ is uniformly translated as ‘priests’ in *PO*, whereas the Latin in the phrase ‘ministerial priest’ in *LG* §10 is ‘sacerdos ministerialis’.

65. Disciples and Catholics also agree that the ordained ministry is to be seen in the context of the apostolicity of the Church. In an earlier phase of dialogue, the Commission has discussed and agreed on the relationship between the Eucharist and maintaining continuity with the apostolic community. *The Church as Communion in Christ* stated, ‘Both Disciples and Catholic share an intention to live and teach in such a way that, when the Lord comes again, the Church may be found witnessing to the faith of the apostles’ (CCIC §27). It was also agreed that the Holy Spirit works to link the past with the present and to maintain the Church in the memory of the apostolic faith, making it present and enabling succeeding generations to appropriate the event remembered. ‘In the Eucharist especially, the Spirit makes Christ present to the members of the community’ (CCIC §28).

66. In addition, the Commission agreed that the Holy Spirit ‘gives a variety of gifts or *charisms* which enable the Church as a whole to receive and hand on the Apostolic Tradition. At the heart of these are the gifts appropriate to worship, particularly in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper’ (CCIC §41). But within the multiplicity of gifts given to the Church, ‘there is a particular charisma given to the ordained ministry to maintain the community in the memory of the Apostolic Tradition. Both Disciples and Roman Catholics affirm that the Christian ministry exists to actualize, transmit, and interpret with fidelity the Apostolic Tradition which has its origin in the first generation’ (CCIC §45).

67. At the same time, while agreeing about the relationship between the ordained ministry and continuity with the apostolic tradition, Disciples and Catholics understand and articulate this relationship differently. Disciples came from Reformation traditions which rejected episcopacy as they knew it in the sixteenth century, although ‘Disciples have always recognized that the work of the ministry, shared in the local congregation by ordained ministers and ordained elders, is essential to the being of the Church and is a sign of continuity with the Apostolic Tradition’ (CCIC §45). The Commission noted that Catholics believe that the bishop, in collaboration with ‘presbyters, deacons, and the whole community in the local church, and in communion with the whole college of bishops throughout the world united with the Bishop of Rome as its head, keeps alive the apostolic faith in the local church so that it may remain faithful to the Gospel’ (CCIC §45). Hence, the Commission has agreed that, despite different ways of structuring the ordained ministry, for both communions the ordained ministers have a unique role in maintaining the whole community in the apostolic tradition. Both traditions affirm that ‘the whole Church shares in the priesthood and ministry of Christ’ and both ‘also affirm that ordained ministers have the specific charisma of re-presenting Christ to the Church

and that their ministries are expressions of the ministry of Christ to the whole Church' (CCIC §45). This already represents a significant agreement on the apostolic nature of our ordained ministries and on the issue of apostolic succession, although with different understandings and expressions contained within it.

68. On the issue of the representation of Christ by the ordained, Disciples and Catholics both agree and disagree. While they agree that ordained ministers represent Christ, the head of the Church, they disagree first about the nature of this representation of Christ and secondly about the relationship between the ordained ministry and the priesthood of the faithful.

69. First, Disciples and Catholics disagree about the representation of Christ by the ordained. For Catholics, the priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood are two connected but distinct participations in the priesthood and person of Christ, differing 'in kind and not only degree' (LG §10). On the one hand, all of the faithful are given a participation in the priesthood of Christ through baptism. Christ continues his priesthood through the baptized who consecrate the world to God through their spiritual sacrifices. 'There is no member who does not have a part in the mission of the whole Body' (PO §2). The participation of the baptized in Christ's priesthood finds its consummation in the Eucharist. On the other hand, by the intention and command of the Lord, this sacramental life requires the action of apostolic ministers who act in his person and speak in his name. The ministerial priesthood is given in a sacrament distinct from baptism whereby the ordained 'are so configured to Christ the Priest that they can act in the person of Christ the Head' (PO §2). Catholics believe that the ordained ministers exercise this function in a special way at the Eucharist. 'There, acting in the person of Christ and proclaiming His mystery, they join the offering of the faithful to the sacrifice of their Head' (LG §28). In presiding at the Eucharist, the ordained act in the name of all the baptized and for their sake. 'Through the ministry of priests, the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is made perfect in union with the sacrifice of Christ, the sole Mediator. Through the hands of the priest and in the name of the whole Church, the Lord's sacrifice is offered in the Eucharist in an unbloody and sacramental manner until He Himself returns' (PO §2). Hence those ordained to the ministerial priesthood share in the person and work of Christ, the great high Priest, for the purpose of enabling the priesthood of the baptized.

70. Disciples have not developed such a detailed understanding of the relationship between the ordained ministry and the priesthood of Christ. They understand ordination to be, not a sacrament distinct from baptism, but sacramental in a wider

sense. The foundation of the ordained ministry is Jesus Christ, the great high Priest, who is head of the Church ‘which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all’ (*Eph.* 1:22-23). The whole community, commonly referred to by the phrase ‘the priesthood of all believers’, shares in the continuing ministry of Christ as members of his body. Hence in declaring the living Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the ordained call the Church to its own identity in Christ.²⁴ But Disciples believe that the ordained have a distinctive role in the life and ministry of the Church, revealed especially at the celebration of the Eucharist. An ordained minister, as representative of Christ presiding at the Lord’s Table, serves in Christ’s place as host at the Table. The ordained serve in the priestly role by leading the offering of sacrifices of praise and worship. By the action of the Holy Spirit, acting through the Eucharistic prayer and the faith of the community, the bread and wine become for our sake the body and blood of Christ.

71. Secondly, because they understand the relationship of the ordained to Christ’s priesthood somewhat differently, Disciples and Catholics differ in the way they see and articulate the relationship of the ordained to the whole Church. On the one hand, they agree that ‘not all the members have the same function’ (*Rom.* 12:4). On the other hand, Catholics describe the participation in Christ’s priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood as differing in kind and not only in degree, a conception foreign to the Disciples tradition which rather speaks of the ordained calling the whole community to its identity in Christ, or representing Christ to the community. While Catholics emphasize the difference between lay and ordained, they also teach that the two are interrelated. ‘The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood, though they differ in essence and not only in degree, are nevertheless interrelated,’ Vatican II taught. ‘Each in its own particular way shares in the one priesthood of Christ’ (*LG* §10). Catholics note that the ordained ministry exists for the sake of the Church and not apart from the Church. In explaining this difference, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that ‘the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians’ (*CCC* §1547). Disciples find such clarifications helpful. But they also wish to emphasize the value of the gifts given to all of the baptized, and they fear any description of the ordained ministry that seems to undermine those gifts.

²⁴ Compare the statement of *The COCU Consensus* (ch 7, §31), which Disciples in the USA have officially affirmed: ‘Ordination marks them as persons who represent to the Church its own identity and mission in Jesus Christ’; J.A. Burgess & J. Gros, FSC, *Growing Consensus: Church Dialogues in the United States, 1962-1991* (New York/Mahwah, NJ, 1995), 56.

4.3 Summary

72. Disciples and Catholics agree the priesthood of Christ is the criterion for all priesthood in the Church. We also agree that the whole people of God is a priestly people 'called by God for his own' (*1 Pet. 2: 9*). Where we disagree is on the relationship between the priesthood of the faithful and that of the ordained ministry. In an earlier phase, it was recognized that Disciples carry out the role of *episcopo* (oversight) differently from Catholics, but that for both the ordained ministry has a unique role in keeping alive the memory of what Christ has done and thus maintaining the Church in continuity with the apostolic faith. In this phase, we discovered further agreement about the ordained ministry, but some remaining disagreement. While both Disciples and Catholics agree that the ordained represent Christ the high priest in their ministry, we disagree about the nature of this representation of Christ and whether they have a priesthood distinct in kind from the priesthood of the faithful. These disagreements will need further exploration in a future phase of our dialogue together.

5 Conclusion

73. Because Disciples and Catholics share a commitment to the unity of the Church, we have carefully listened to each other and talked together to discern a way forward in our dialogue. We began with our common conviction that God is present throughout the world and in the Church, speaking a Word that is dynamic and effective. In Christ, the Word of God became flesh, and through his death and resurrection he moved into a new dimension that enables him to be present to all time and space.

74. We sought in particular to relate the presence of the Risen Christ and God's dynamic Word to our understanding of the Eucharist on points where we have disagreed. The active character of God's Word helped us to understand the power of the words of the *anamnesis* in the Eucharist, calling to mind all that God has done for us in the work of redemption and proclaiming this in a way that makes these past events effective in the present. This also illuminated the efficacy of the words of the prayer to the Holy Spirit that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ²⁵. Because Christ is risen from the dead, he can offer himself to believers for their nourishment in a unique way in

²⁵ 'Fiat' in the Roman liturgy, or in Eucharistic prayers I and II 'become for us'; compare 'be for us' at the corresponding points in the Orders for Holy Communion in Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland (1964 and 1967), and successive Service Books of the United Reformed Church.

the Eucharist, a sign and foretaste of the new creation that will be completed when he comes again in glory. Our common confession on the efficacy of God's Word and the power of Christ's resurrection helped us to reach more convergence on the Eucharist than has previously been possible for Catholics and Disciples.

75. We therefore agree on the integral link between the presence of Christ in the world, in the Church, and in the Word and sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Furthermore we agree that the sacramental approach to life affirms our underlying faith that we live in God's world and that God is continually active in it.

76. Through this dialogue we have come to understand both why different views had been taken in the past on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and also that our perceptions of each other's beliefs had been based on misunderstandings. Both Catholics and Disciples seek to defend the essential mystery of the way in which the bread and wine in the Eucharist become the body and blood of Christ. To combat materialist understandings of this change (*conversio*), as well as others, Catholics developed the Aristotelian category of 'substance' to refer to the underlying reality of things. The concept of transubstantiation was therefore essentially a defence against such materialist understandings. However, transubstantiation was itself in turn misunderstood in materialist terms by the Protestant Reformers; and early Disciples thinkers, cradled in Scottish common sense realism, rejected it as unnecessary or unhelpful metaphysical speculation. Both Catholics and Disciples agree that a materialist account of what happens at the Lord's Table is to be rejected, and both affirm the ultimate impossibility of fathoming this sacramental mystery.

77. Catholics and Disciples agree that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. The Eucharist is the new covenant in Christ's blood, sealed by his death on the cross for our redemption. In the Eucharist the Church unites itself to Christ's self-offering to the Father for all people and for the whole of creation.

78. Both Catholics and Disciples affirm the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist, and both therefore see it as a priestly celebration. However, Catholics identify the priestly action specifically with the presiding minister, while Disciples understand the whole priestly people of God to be those who celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice. Nevertheless Disciples normally expect the presiding minister to be an ordained minister or elder, and anyone who might preside can only do so after having been identified and called by the congregation for that representative office. There is further work to be done here in clarifying these points, which we have barely begun to address.

79. Nevertheless this is the first time in more than thirty years of our Dialogue when we have engaged in a detailed discussion of the Eucharist. This Statement is not an exhaustive account of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Rather it is a promising beginning – a ‘communion in via’. We have identified several areas where further work needs to be done:

- a) it is necessary to explore more deeply our discussion of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist (§45) and on the sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist (§57), in order to examine how far our differences remain Church-dividing;
- b) it is also necessary to examine the ecclesial implications of this topic, especially the relationship between ordination and priesthood on the one hand, on which our discussion has only just begun (§§69-70) and the relationship between the ordained ministry and the representation of Christ on the other (§§40, 61, 69, 74). We have discussed the latter before, but the Eucharistic context gives it a new priority.
- c) in the background there remains the question of apostolic succession in relation to ordained ministry (§65-67), which again we have touched on before.

As a result we may be able to identify more precisely the substantial matters of faith on which agreement still needs to be reached for the attainment of full communion (§11).

80. Once again we have discovered that by careful mutual explanation and listening to each other misunderstandings have been overcome. The extent of agreement is significant and offers hope to Disciples and Catholics for our greater unity. We present it as a contribution to the one ecumenical movement.

30 June 2009

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