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The Reformation and the Eucharist

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My aim in this essay will be to examine the Reformed understanding of the eucharist and to set this understanding against the modern concept of the sacrament. This will enable us to see how the Reformers in no way presented a total picture but were men of their times conditioned by the various disputes in which they were engaged.

1 John Calvin

Besides the *Institutes*, one of the most important sources for Calvin's teaching on the eucharist is his *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord*. This was written in 1540 and published a year later, after an active ministry in Strasbourg under the influence of Martin Bucer. Bucer's influence is clearly seen in the *Short Treatise* in that Calvin, like Bucer, sees one of the prime objectives of the eucharist as its effecting a union of the believer with the risen Lord, a spiritual communion. He then goes on to delineate the other objectives:

For seeing we are so foolish, that we cannot receive him with true confidence of heart, when he is presented by simple teaching and preaching, the Father, of his mercy, not at all disdaining to condescend in this matter to our infirmity, has desired to attach to his Word a visible sign, by which he represents the substance of his promises, to confirm and fortify us, and to deliver us from all doubt and uncertainty.¹

The eucharist is a visible sign of the salvation wrought for us once for all in Christ Jesus, a sign which gives us the assurance that the salvation is truly complete and truly for us. A further objective of the sacrament is to make us recognize God's goodness to us so that we are led to praise him. Finally, it exhorts us 'to all sanctity and innocence, seeing that we are members of Jesus Christ, and particularly to unity and brotherly charity . . .'²

Calvin then continues to outline the 'benefits' of the supper; these do not in fact seem very distinct from the objectives he has already outlined. First, it gives us assurance:

Our heavenly Father . . . gives us the Supper as a mirror in which we contemplate our Lord Jesus Christ crucified to abolish our faults and offences, and raised to deliver us from corruption and death, and restoring to us a heavenly immortality. Here, then, is the peculiar consolation we receive from the Supper, that it directs and conducts us to the cross of Jesus Christ and to his resurrection, in order to assure us that, whatever iniquity there may be in us, the Lord does not cease to regard and accept us as righteous.³

Thus, assurance is given us by means of a sacrament in which we

commune with the risen Lord. Calvin describes this communion by saying that we 'really receive in the Supper the body and blood of Jesus Christ, since the Lord there represents to us the communion of both.'⁴ The word 'represents' here is perhaps a little misleading, for a few lines later Calvin goes on to say that 'Jesus Christ gives us in the Supper the real substance of his body and his blood, so that we may possess him fully . . .'⁵ This apparent contradiction or confusion in terminology is a common feature of Calvin's eucharistic writings: in trying to explain his own teaching against that of Zwingli and Luther (as he was in the *Short Treatise*) he is often led to use words in a rather clumsy or imprecise fashion.⁶ Perhaps there were not enough words to enable him to express himself sufficiently clearly, especially when the earlier Reformers had already made their own distinctive use of them! Returning to the benefits of the eucharist, however, his second point is that it forces us to give thanks for the blessings of salvation, and incites us, thirdly, to 'holy living'.

Insofar as the communion aspect was concerned, Calvin was keen to affirm throughout his *Short Treatise* that in partaking of the eucharist the Christian partook of the body and blood of Christ. He ends the work with the following comment:

We are truly made partakers of the real substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. How this is done, some may deduce better and explain more clearly than others . . . we must hold that it is accomplished by the secret and miraculous virtue of God, and that the Spirit of God is the bond of participation, for which reason it is called spiritual.⁷

For Calvin, then, the bread and wine were not mere signs, bare signs, as they had been for Zwingli; for Calvin there was a 'real' presence at the eucharist.⁸ But Calvin was always careful to circumscribe the 'real' presence. He wrote, for example, to Bullinger in 1548:

We eat the body and drink the blood of Christ. By so speaking we neither make the sign the thing, nor confound both in one, nor enclose the body of Christ in the bread, nor, on the other hand, imagine it to be infinite, nor dream of a carnal transfusion of Christ into us, nor lay down any other fiction of that sort.⁹

Calvin's stress on communion with Christ led him to be challenged as to whether the eucharistic communion was of a unique kind—that is, whether communion with the risen Christ could be achieved outside of the eucharist. On this point Calvin becomes, on my reading, very unclear. In his *Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, for instance, he says that the believer obtains a spiritual communion 'through the gospel also',¹⁰ but then goes on to say that 'though both in Baptism and in the gospel Christ is exhibited to us, yet we do not receive him wholly but only in part.'¹¹ This appears to be a blatant self-contradiction. In 1561, however, he seems to have adopted a more precise stance; this is exhibited in his *Clear Explanation of Sound Doctrine Concerning the True Partaking of the Flesh and Blood of Christ in the Holy Supper*, a work composed to answer Heshus. Here Calvin states

his position as follows:

God gives us no more by visible signs than by his Word, but gives it in a different manner, because our weakness stands in need of a variety of helps . . . what is offered to us by the gospel outside the Supper is sealed to us by the Supper, and hence communion with Christ is no less truly conferred upon us by the gospel than by the Supper.¹²

The eucharist, then, offers us nothing aside from what we have already received in the gospel; it is the *mode* of reception that is different. To make his case, Calvin points out that John the Baptist possessed Christ as Saviour and yet he never partook of the supper.¹³

The *Institutes* say little that has not already been said with regard to the function and benefits of the eucharist. Most of the relevant sections are taken up in discussing the mode of Christ's presence in the sacrament. This shows that Calvin is stressing the communion aspect of the eucharist, viewing its nature as spiritual food for the believer in which Christ is communicated to him. Once again Calvin seems to present his thought in a manner which is not always clear. For example, at one point he appears to put forward an almost Zwinglian position, for Zwingli and his followers regarded the bread and wine as being purely symbols of the body and blood of Christ—for them there was no real presence. Calvin comes very close to this position when he says that 'the signs are bread and wine, which represent for us the invisible food that we receive from the flesh and blood of Christ.'¹⁴ By using the words 'signs' and 'represents' he comes very close to the Zwinglian position. Again, a few pages later, he says that the body and blood of Christ 'are represented under bread and wine.'¹⁵ The very use of the word 'represent' seems to suggest that Calvin is denying any sort of real presence, especially since the word 'represent' and its cognates generally imply that someone or something is absent.

This is far from Calvin's real thought however: he wishes to preserve a real presence, but without going 'as far' as to admit any form of transubstantiation.

For unless a man means to call God a deceiver, he would never dare assert that an empty symbol is set forth by him . . . And the godly ought by all means to keep this rule: whenever they see symbols appointed by the Lord, to think and be persuaded that the truth of the thing signified is surely present there . . . If it is true that a visible sign is given us to seal the gift of a thing invisible, when we have received the symbol of the body, let us no less surely trust that the body is also given to us.¹⁶

Calvin then, wishes to assert that there is a true partaking of the body and blood of Christ, but wants to deny that this is in any way mechanical or automatic, or that the bread and wine actually become in themselves the physical body and blood of Christ. Possibly the 'highest' statement of Calvin occurs when he discusses transubstantiation. In denying this 'fictitious' doctrine with its attendant 'absurdities', he does actually allow that for the believer the bread becomes what it was not. 'If there is a conversion (these men say), one thing

must be made from another. If they mean that it is made something which it was not before, I agree.¹⁷ Calvin is prepared to agree that whilst the bread does not in itself become anything apart from bread, and whilst the wine does not in itself become anything apart from wine, they do become for the believer the body and blood of Christ in a spiritual and mysterious sense. They can be said to become what they were not, but not in any mechanical or automatic sense—only in a spiritual and mysterious sense. The eucharist for Calvin is primarily a mystery—it can never be fully comprehended. All we can assert on earth is that in partaking of the bread and wine we partake also of the body and blood of Christ. This aspect of mystery must be fully acknowledged when trying to understand Calvin's thought—it is possibly one of the keys to understanding his self-contradictions. He realizes himself that he can never completely describe what happens in the eucharist because it remains above all else a mystery. Our thought forms and our words can only grope to describe it. Calvin himself admits that 'this mystery of Christ's secret union with the devout is by nature incomprehensible.'¹⁸

Pure union with Christ, however, is not the central aim of the eucharist according to Calvin's teaching in the *Institutes*:

Rather, it is to seal and confirm that promise by which he testifies that his flesh is food indeed and his blood is drink, which feed us unto eternal life . . . And to do this the Sacrament sends us to the cross of Christ, where that promise was indeed performed and in all respects fulfilled.¹⁹

If the nature of the sacrament is union with Christ, its aim is to 'seal and confirm' our redemption; this aim is achieved by the sacrament's standing as a memorial for what Christ did for us upon the cross and in his resurrection. To partake of the sacrament, therefore, is to be reminded and assured of our redemption in Christ. It is the eucharist which seals and confirms this fact.

In total then, Calvin's eucharistic teaching may be summarized as follows: 1) the nature of the eucharist enables the believer to experience a spiritual but nevertheless real communion with the risen Christ; 2) its function is to signify and to seal for us the redeeming work of Christ so that we can be assured of our salvation. In addition the eucharist also achieves the following ends: 3) it leads us to praise God for his goodness and grace to us, and 4) exhorts us to Christian living. It is the first two factors, 1) and 2), that are of chief importance for Calvin.

2 Robert Bruce

The second figure from the Reformation period that I wish to look at is Robert Bruce. Bruce was one of the successors of John Knox in the ministry at St Giles's, Edinburgh. As a student of St Andrews, Bruce had come into contact with the Reformed teachings of George Buchanan, Andrew Melville and John Knox himself—who spent the last

year of his life preaching in St Andrews. Like Calvin, Bruce was steeped in the learning of the early church fathers, being particularly influenced by Augustine and Irenaeus. His concern, however, in the series of sermons preached in St Giles's in 1589, was more pastoral than academic; he was concerned to educate his congregation with regard to the eucharist rather than to write an academic treatise on the sacrament.²⁰ His writing, therefore, does not contain the academic power of Calvin's *Institutes*, but presents us instead with a more popular view of the sacrament. We are likely to see in Bruce a distilled rather than weighty account of the eucharist, but an account that was likely to have been palatable to, and, more importantly, accepted and (to a greater or lesser extent) understood by the sixteenth-century churchman.

Bruce sees four purposes for which the eucharist was instituted. First, it was instituted

chiefly to represent our spiritual nutriment, the full and perfect nutriment of our souls. As he who has bread and wine lacks nothing for the full nourishment of his body, so he who partakes of the Body and Blood of Christ, lacks nothing for the full and perfect nourishment of the soul.²¹

Secondly, the eucharist was instituted 'that we might bear witness to the world.'²² The bread and wine were to be a way of 'testifying' the Christian religion. Bruce seems to understand by this that the sacrament is a way of 'witnessing' the Christian faith to the world rather than a means of actually *proclaiming* it. The text of Corinthians 11:26 seems to demand more of the eucharistic action than pure *witness*; it demands that the eucharist be in itself a means of *proclaiming* the gospel.²³ Thirdly, the Lord's Supper serves as 'our special comfort and consolation, to serve as a sovereign medicine for all our spiritual diseases, when we find ourselves either ready to fall . . . or after we are fallen.'²⁴ In time of temptation the sacrament serves as a reminder that Christ has died and risen for us, that he has once and for all released us, and that we are therefore forgiven. The sacrament acts as a means of assurance. Finally, the sacrament was instituted to incite us to praise and thank God for his benefits.

Like Calvin, Bruce was keen to stress the communion aspect of the eucharist. In so doing he makes use of the distinction between a man's body and his soul, teaching that when the Christian eats the bread and wine he is feeding his soul at the same time with the body and blood of Christ. It is because the physical and the spiritual communion take place at the same time that the elements are called signs.

I call them signs because they have the Body and Blood of Christ conjoined with them. Indeed, so truly is the Body of Christ conjoined . . . that as soon as you receive the bread in your mouth (if you are a faithful man or woman) you receive the Body of Christ in your soul, and that by faith.²⁵

For Bruce, therefore, just as for Calvin, there is what we might call a 'real presence': the bread and wine are not mere symbols—they actually 'exhibit and *deliver* the thing that they signify.'²⁶ The man of faith partakes of the body and blood of the risen Christ in a spiritual communion.

Like Calvin, too, Bruce believed that what was received at the eucharist was also received in the Word—the eucharist gives us nothing extra. Indeed, Bruce asks, what more could the believer want or receive?

He could never presume to pierce the clouds, to ascend so high, to ask for the Son of God in His flesh to be the food of his soul. If you have the Son of God, you have Him who is the heir of all things, who is King of Heaven and earth, and in Him you have all things. What more, then, can you want? . . . Therefore I say, we get no other thing in the Sacrament than we get in the Word.²⁷

But although we only receive in the eucharist what we have already received in the Word, the sacrament is not useless or superfluous, for 'you get that same thing better'. Whereas Calvin stated that what was received in the Word and sacrament was the same but that its mode of reception was different, Bruce adopts a conception which seems in fact to make the sacrament offer something more, although he denies this. He states: 'God has more room in your soul, through your receiving of the Sacrament than He could otherwise have by your hearing of the Word only . . . We get a better grip of Christ now . . .'²⁸ Bruce seems to believe that not only is the mode of reception different but that the actual amount of what is received is increased.²⁹ In so saying, Bruce appears, perhaps, to attach more value to the sacrament than Calvin, although both see it as essential.

In sum then, we may see in the Reformed teaching on the eucharist major and minor elements. The major elements are twofold, and centre around the idea of the eucharist being a 'sign' and a 'symbol': 1) the elements are 'signs' and 'symbols' of a spiritual communion with the risen Christ in which the Christian partakes of his body and blood, and 2) they are 'signs' and 'symbols' that we have been once and for all redeemed in the death and resurrection of our Lord—as such the sacrament offers us assurance. The minor elements in the eucharist are 1) its ability to make us praise our Redeemer, 2) its ability to incite us to holy living, and 3) its function as testifying our faith both to ourselves and to the outside world.

3 The temporal dimensions of the eucharist

The eucharist may be said to have a number of dimensions: temporal dimensions (the sacrament's relation to the past, the present and the future) and personal dimensions (towards God, towards the church and towards the world). I will begin by discussing the sacrament's temporal dimensions.

In 1 Corinthians 11, St Paul passes on the traditions concerning the

last supper. After breaking the bread, he quotes Jesus as saying, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' (1 Corinthians 11:24) At the end of the meal, Jesus passes round the cup of wine with the words, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' (v 25) Jesus commands us to celebrate the eucharist 'in remembrance' of him. But how exactly is this 'remembrance' to be understood?

Gregg has pointed out in his study of the *anamnesis* rubric that although Jesus knew Greek and normally spoke Palestinian Aramaic, the language in which he instituted the eucharist was probably Rabbinic Hebrew. The arguments in favour of this conclusion are that the language of Judea in the first century was still Hebrew, and that Hebrew was the medium of Rabbinic teaching and of the Jewish liturgy. Seeing that the eucharist was instituted in the context of a passover meal in Judea, it is therefore highly probable that the language used was Hebrew. The Hebrew for the Greek word *anamnesis* is undoubtedly *zkr* (remember). Gregg has postulated, after an examination of the alternatives, that the precise equivalent nominal form from the root *zkr* is *zikkaron*.³⁰ This form 'designates "something" which directs the attention of those who perceive it to a prior reality from which the *zikkaron* itself derives.'³¹ In Hebrew writing contemporary with the New Testament, the word *zikkaron* is predominantly used of a cultic act (the observing of festivals, sounding of trumpets, etc.), and it would thus seem that the eucharist is to be interpreted as a cultic act which directs our attention to a prior reality, namely the death of Christ and his redemption for us.

But how are we to understand the movement between the past and the present in this act of remembrance? How is the gap between the past and the present to be crossed? The *anamnesis* is not to be construed as a mere mental act of remembering, although it must include that. Gregg, in his study, concludes that the *anamnesis* must be understood in the light of other biblical acts of remembrance, and quotes B. S. Childs' interpretation of such events: 'The biblical events can never be static, lifeless beads which can be strung on a chronological chain . . . We conclude that Old Testament actualization [remembrance] cannot be correctly identified with a return to a former historical event . . .' Instead, biblical *anamnesis* should, according to Childs, be interpreted as 'a real event', which 'occurs . . . as the moment of redemptive time from the past initiates a genuine encounter in the present.'³² The eucharistic remembrance, then, according to Gregg, is similarly not just a memorial, nor is it just a mental act of remembering on the part of the believer; instead it must be seen also as a God-given event in which Christ's redemptive action in the past itself initiates and enables an encounter in the present. Such an understanding of the *anamnesis* rubric is one which delivers the eucharist from being a past, lifeless and flat event to

being a dynamic and vital one.

The first temporal dimension (the eucharist looking to the past) is therefore closely related to the second (the sacrament's relation to the present), for in looking to the past it thereby initiates a personal encounter with God at the present time, an encounter which is based on his past redemptive act in the historical world. It is this present encounter with God in a personal communion that the Reformed tradition stressed most strongly. We have seen how important personal communion with the risen Lord was for both Calvin and Bruce. This encounter, like the *anamnesis*, is essentially something dynamic; I rather think that the Reformers might have used the word 'dynamic' in place of 'mysterious' on occasions, for it is this dynamism of the sacrament that constitutes part of its essential mystery. Dynamism means that there is no room for transubstantiation—which is a static concept—but that there is a 'real presence' in the eucharist in the form of a present personal encounter.³³ H. E. W. Turner sums up the matter as follows:

To speak of a Real Presence given in action and for encounter seems more in line with the dynamic character of the sacrament . . . it relieves Eucharistic theology of the dead weight of a cumbersome and unconvincing metaphysics. Christ who is really present uses material means for his self-giving, but this is to be understood in terms of a Real Coming—a dynamic act, and not a Presence of the type which involves any change in the elements themselves other than one of use, significance, or even value.³⁴

As well as its relationship to the past and to the present, the eucharist also has a relationship to the future. Christians await with eager expectation the coming kingdom of God, and yet we are told that the kingdom has come already with the advent of Christ the King. Jesus then, inaugurated the kingdom in his own person, but it is a kingdom which nevertheless remains to be consummated at the end of time. Christians, through a relationship with their Lord, are made partakers of this kingdom. The eucharist symbolizes this dynamic tension: it is a sacrament which we have here and now on this earth in the present time, and yet it is also a sign of the final heavenly banquet. The idea of a heavenly banquet occurs a number of times in the Gospels and is particularly associated with the last supper. Jesus tells his disciples at the supper that he will not eat again until he himself participates in that heavenly banquet.³⁵ On earth, then, the eucharist is to signify and prefigure this heavenly meal.³⁶

The eschatological element of the sacrament is one which is 'played down' today; played down because many churchmen have a totally inadequate picture of the kingdom. Dix traces the demise of the eschatological element to the fourth century, when the Christian faith became the faith of the empire. With the public acceptance of Christianity as the state religion, the early Christians began to feel 'at home' on earth, with the inevitable result that interest in the consum-

mation of the kingdom waned.³⁷ What is urgently needed is for the sacrament to retrieve its eschatological element—the Reformers did little to help this retrieval.³⁸ The whole eschatological understanding of the eucharist is totally foreign to the modern world, and yet it was of the essence of its primitive meaning.

4 The personal dimensions of the eucharist

The institution narrative that we have already look at in 1 Corinthians 11 tells us that Jesus ‘gave thanks’ over the bread and later over the wine. This latter thanksgiving over the wine at the end of the meal would have been the Jewish ‘blessing’ or *berakah*. It is this *berakah* which has become the central eucharistic prayer. The word *berakah* means literally a blessing or thanksgiving (for the Jew the two were synonymous), and can be translated into Greek as *eucharistia*. The eucharist, then, was originally seen in terms of an act of thanksgiving and praise to God for redemption in Christ, and this constitutes our first personal dimension of the eucharist—Godward. The early liturgies are full of praise, as a brief glance through the appropriate texts will show. Cyril of Jerusalem, for example, describes the thanksgiving in the eucharist as follows:

After this, we make mention of heaven and earth and sea; of sun and moon and stars; of all creation, rational and irrational, visible and invisible; of angels, archangels, virtues, dominions, principalities, powers, thrones; of the Cherubim with many faces; saying with full effect the words of David, ‘Magnify the Lord with me.’ We make mention also of the Seraphim, whom Isaiah saw in the Holy Spirit standing in a circle round the throne of God . . . That is why we say this hymn of praise which has been handed down to us from the Seraphim, that we may share with the heavenly armies in their hymnody.³⁹

For Cyril, the eucharist was an act of thanksgiving and praise in which Christians joined with the heavenly host to hymn the God who had redeemed them.

Unfortunately, during the medieval period this mood of joyful praise and thanksgiving in the eucharist disappeared. The medieval Christian became uncertain of his salvation, and his church placed excessive demands on him if he wanted to ensure that he was in a state of grace. Nicholas Lash characterizes the mood of the medieval eucharist as ‘one of timorous petition, of fear and uncertainty, almost as if God had not, in Christ, spoken his definitive, irrevocable word of forgiveness.’⁴⁰ Uncertain of forgiveness, uncertain as to whether he was in a state of grace, the medieval Christian had little cause for joy, and this is reflected in the liturgy of the mass. Petitions beginning with the word ‘may’ are abundant in the Roman rite: ‘May [the eucharistic cup] ascend in the sight of your divine majesty for our salvation’; ‘May our sacrifice be performed in your sight today as so to please you’; and so on.⁴¹

The Reformers wanted to assure man once again of his salvation.

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Calvin criticized the Roman Catholic Church for its burdensome demands on men who wanted to ensure that they were in a state of grace: 'Doctors of sophistry have brought poor consciences into perilous perplexity, or rather into an awful hell, by demanding I know not what kind of examination, which they cannot possibly get through.'⁴² In their eucharistic liturgies, therefore, the Reformers stressed that the sacrament was a 'sign' and a 'seal' that redemption in Christ had been fully accomplished, and that this redemption was now offered to the believer. Trust was to be placed not in self-examination and human effort, but in Christ's redeeming action. The efficacy of Christ's redemption was 'signed' and 'sealed' in the eucharist. Thus in Bucer's *Strasbourg Rite* of 1539 we read:

And since, for our sake, he has not only offered his body and blood upon the cross to you for our sin, but also wishes to give them to us for food and drink unto eternal life, grant that we may accept his goodness and gift . . . So, in sure confidence we call upon you now and always, God and Father.⁴³

A similar confidence is evident in Calvin's *Form of Church Prayers*, 1542:

Let us have no doubt at all that he claims us for his children, and that the Lord Jesus Christ addresses his words to us, to invite us to his table, and to present us with this holy sacrament . . . And although we may feel within ourselves such frailty and misery from not having perfect faith . . . let us understand that the sacrament is a medicine for the spiritually poor and sick.⁴⁴

The Reformers thus returned to the eucharist a confidence which might have restored the element of praise and thanksgiving to the sacrament. Unfortunately, however, this was not always the case: the desire to bring assurance often led to a didactic liturgy, and the Reformation's continuance of a pre-Reformation individualism often stunted any elements of joyous thanksgiving that might have developed. The loss of beauty and ceremonial in the liturgy had a similar effect, since Reformed worship now encouraged an attitude of humility before God rather than a rejoicing in him.

The second personal dimension is the corporate nature of the eucharist: the sacrament is for the church, the body of Christ. The eucharist was not to be celebrated by individuals in the privacy of their own homes: it was to be celebrated by the local body of Christ together. The eucharist is essentially a corporate act of worship. Thus in many of the early eucharistic liturgies, reference is made to the unity of the body of Christ: 'Make us worthy to partake of your holy things . . . that we may become one body and one spirit' ('The Anaphora of Basil of Caesarea'⁴⁵); 'As this bread was scattered over the mountains, and was gathered together and became one, so gather your holy Church out of every nation and every country and every city and village and house, and make us one living catholic Church' (Serapion: *The Euchologion*⁴⁶); 'Unite with one another all of us who

partake of the one bread and the cup into the fellowship of the one Holy Spirit' ('The Liturgy of St Basil'⁴⁷). The corporate nature of the eucharist is symbolized by the 'kiss of peace', a kiss that was only to be exchanged between the faithful and not by catechumens; furthermore, it was to be the whole body of Christ that received the sacrament, and those who were absent through infirmity or illness were brought the bread and wine by the deacons.

Unfortunately, during the Middle Ages the corporate nature of the eucharist was forgotten. The priest was seen as the eucharistic celebrant whilst the faithful acted as mere spectators, a role that was emphasized by the Latin language which estranged the laity from the rite. The popularity of the low mass assisted this development; the service was said by the priest in a low voice, and answered by a server who was solely a convenience to enable the priest to perform the rite on his own. The laity could, and did, attend low mass, but as spectators rather than as active participants. The quiet nature of the low mass afforded the devout an excellent opportunity for using mentally the vernacular prayers which they substituted for the Latin text of the liturgy as their personal worship. Dix sums up the medieval development in the following words: 'The old corporate worship of the eucharist is declining into a mere focus for the subjective devotion of each separate worshipper in the isolation of his own mind.'⁴⁸

The Reformers were keen to re-establish the concept of corporate worship by the whole body of Christ, but their stress on the 'communion' aspect of the eucharist limited their re-establishment of the sacrament as an essentially corporate act. Stressing, as they did, the communion of the individual Christian with the risen Christ in the sacrament, its corporate nature received little emphasis. McDonnell's study of Calvin acknowledges the importance of this inward communion in the Reformer's thinking:

Calvin's great ecclesiological concern was to build a theology of the church which is marked by a pervading inwardness and interiority, an interiority which finds its roots in Christology and Pneumatology, and finds its simplest expression in the union with Christ. This was Calvin's answer to the divinization of ecclesiasticism and sacramentalism.⁴⁹

McDonnell denies that the eucharist was, in Calvin's thought, a multitude of private acts performed together. Calvin's overriding concern for an individual and personal communion with Christ in the sacrament, however, must lead us to reject McDonnell's defence of Calvin and admit instead, with Dix, that in Calvin (and in other Reformers too) the real eucharistic action remains individual rather than corporate.⁵⁰

The final personal dimension of the eucharist is towards the world. St Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:26 that the eucharist 'proclaims' the Lord's death; the word he uses is the Greek verb *katangelo*, a verb which is used elsewhere to denote the preaching of the Christian gospel.⁵¹ The eucharist, then, is itself a preaching of the gospel. Just

as the gospel can be proclaimed by word of mouth, so too it can be proclaimed by the Christian community celebrating the eucharist. This should not surprise us: if the eucharist is a celebration by the people of God of their redemption in Christ; if it looks back to the redemption achieved in Christ; if it is a joyous act of worship by the body of Christ; then it must also proclaim the gospel and must reveal the risen Christ. We noted earlier that the central eucharistic prayer is derived from the Jewish *berakah* or prayer of thanksgiving; this Jewish prayer has a threefold structure. The second section of the prayer declares the reason for praising God, recalling the mighty deeds which God had performed for his people in the past. For the Jew to proclaim God's works was to proclaim the gospel. And so the Christian eucharist, like the Jewish *berakah*, must also be kerygmatic. Lash's conclusion regarding the origin of the thanksgiving prayer in the *berakah* is that 'it firmly situates the eucharistic prayer within the category of "gospel", of effective proclamation of the saving words of God to his people.'⁵² The sacrament is an acted sermon; it makes known Christ's redemption. In addition, if all worship is in the first instance an act of God himself, then to see Christians caught up in this eternal activity of the Trinity must have an evangelistic aspect.⁵³

To say, as Calvin did, that to proclaim Christ's death in the eucharist is merely to 'confess' our faith is not enough. 'For the command to us to "declare the Lord's death till he come" in judgement means nothing else than that we should by the confession of our mouth declare what our faith recognizes in the Sacrament: that the death of Christ is our life.'⁵⁴ The verb *katangelo* demands more of the sacrament than this: it demands that the eucharist be not only a means of confessing or witnessing to our faith, but actually a means of declaring it. To celebrate the eucharist is to proclaim the gospel.

5 The Reformers and the eucharist

The Reformed tradition has stressed two elements in the eucharist: the personal communion between the believer and his Lord, and the assurance given him in that the sacrament acts as a 'sign' and a 'seal' of the redemption won for him in Christ. In affirming these two elements the Reformers were correct, but they failed to present a complete picture of the eucharist. With regard to the sacrament's temporal dimensions, they had some concept of its relation to the past; they thought that the eucharist must drive us to the cross of Christ and that it acted as a 'sign' and 'seal' of our redemption. Of the *anamnesis*'s more dynamic aspect, however, they had little conception. As to the eschatological dimension of the eucharist, it must be said that although the Godward aspect of praise and thanksgiving received some attention from the Reformers, it remained undevel-

ped, whilst its corporate nature remained uncovered. As to its relationship to the world, the Reformers failed to give it a powerful enough position as a means of proclaiming the gospel.

In making these criticisms, however, it must be remembered that the Reformers were men of their times concerned with the disputes in which they were engaged. Calvin's writings, as McDonnell has pointed out, were largely determined by polemics, and we should not therefore expect to find a complete eucharistic doctrine expounded in them.⁵⁵ And, of course, no one man (or set of men) can be expected to deliver the church completely from all the errors into which it had fallen during the medieval period. Few modern churchmen have anything like the doctrinal standing and depth that Calvin and the other Reformers had.

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NOTES

- 1 'Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord', in J. K. S. Reid (trans.), *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (SCM Press: London 1954) p 144.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 *ibid.*, p 145.
- 4 *ibid.*, p 148.
- 5 *ibid.*
- 6 J. R. Meyer, 'Mysterium Fidei and the Later Calvin', in *SJT*, XXV, 1972, p 392, 406f.
- 7 Reid, *op. cit.*, p 166.
- 8 J. N. Tylanda corroborates this in his 'Calvin and Christ's Presence in the Supper—True or Real?', *SJT*, XXVII, 1974, pp 65-75. Tylanda points out, however, that Calvin may have been reluctant to use the word 'real' for fear that the concept of a 'real presence' denoted something existent and objective in the external order of things, i.e. without faith on behalf of the communicant.
- 9 Quoted in Meyer, *op. cit.*, p 402.
- 10 'Catechism of the Church of Geneva', in Reid, *op. cit.*, p 136.
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 'Clear Explanation of Sound Doctrine Concerning the True Partaking of the Flesh and Blood of Christ in the Holy Supper', in Reid, *op. cit.*, p 281.
- 13 *ibid.*, p 291.
- 14 J. Calvin, *Institutes* IV, ch. 17, 1.
- 15 *ibid.*, IV, ch. 17, 3.
- 16 *ibid.*, IV, ch. 17, 10.
- 17 *ibid.*, IV, ch. 17, 14.
- 18 *ibid.*, IV, ch. 17, 1.
- 19 *ibid.*, IV, ch. 17, 4.
- 20 The sermons have been published as R. Bruce, *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper* (J. Clarke: London 1958, trans. and ed. by T. F. Torrance).
- 21 *ibid.*, p 71.
- 22 *ibid.*, p 72.
- 23 Calvin seems to exegete 1 Cor. 11:26 in the same way as Bruce; cf *Institutes*, IV, 17, 37: 'to declare the Lord's death, that is, with a single voice to confess openly before men that for us the whole assurance of life and salvation rests upon the

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- Lord's death.' Calvin does not see the eucharist as being in itself kerygmatic, as I believe the text demands.
- 24 Bruce, op. cit., p 72.
- 25 *ibid.*, p 44.
- 26 *ibid.*, my italics.
- 27 *ibid.*, p 84.
- 28 *ibid.*, p 85.
- 29 D. Gregg, *Anamnesis in the Eucharist* (Grove Books : Bramcote 1976) p 10. In my discussion on this past temporal dimension of the sacrament I shall be leaning heavily on this work.
- 30 *ibid.*, pp 17-22.
- 31 *ibid.*, p 20.
- 32 B. S. Childs, quoted and used by Gregg, *ibid.*, p 25.
- 33 An attempt to release the concept of 'transubstantiation' from its static meaning is made by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission's *Statement on the Eucharist* (1971): 'The word *transubstantiation* is commonly used in the Roman Catholic Church to indicate that God acting in the eucharist effects a change in the inner reality of the elements. This term should be seen as affirming the *fact* of Christ's presence and of the mysterious and radical change which takes place. In contemporary Roman Catholic theology it is not understood as explaining *how* the change takes place.' (footnote, para. 6)
- 34 H. E. W. Turner, in R. R. Williams (ed.) *Word and Sacrament* (SPCK : London 1968) p 18.
- 35 Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:16.
- 36 D. A. Aune has claimed that the NT pictures the eucharist as a festal gathering, not only of Christians on earth but also of angelic beings and restored men before God (cf 'The Presence of God in the Community: The Eucharist in its Early Christian Context', *SJT*, XXIX, 1976, pp 457-9). In my opinion Aune has gone beyond the NT evidence. G. Dix goes 'further' than Aune and gives the eucharist a mystical interpretation: 'It [the eucharist] transported those who took part in it beyond the alien and hostile world of time into the Kingdom of God and the World to come.' (*The Shape of the Liturgy*, Dacre/A. & C. Black: London 1945, p 305) Such a 'mystical' interpretation is due to Dix's failure to see the kingdom of God as inaugurated by Christ and thus present on earth now, albeit in an unconsummated form. He sees instead its futuristic aspect only.
- 37 *ibid.*
- 38 It must be retrieved correctly, however. The kingdom of God must be presented as something inaugurated in Christ and to be consummated by him at the end of time; it must be presented as something real and not as some utopian hope that cannot or will not be realized (cf J. Llopis, 'The Message of Liberation in the Liturgy', *Concilium*, II, 1974, p 69).
- 39 Cyril of Jerusalem, 'Lectures', in R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming (eds.), *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collins : London 1975) pp 52-3.
- 40 N. Lash, *His Presence in the World* (Sheed and Ward : London 1968) p 99.
- 41 'The Mass of the Roman Rite', in Jasper and Cuming, op. cit., p 105.
- 42 Calvin, 'Short Treatise on the Holy Supper', in Reid, op. cit., p 150.
- 43 M. Bucer, 'The Strasbourg Rite', in Jasper and Cuming, op. cit., p 137.
- 44 Calvin, 'Form of Church Prayers', *ibid.*, p 141.
- 45 'The Anaphora of Basil of Caesarea', *ibid.*, p 31.
- 46 Serapion, 'Euchologion', *ibid.*, p 35.
- 47 'The Liturgy of St Basil', *ibid.*, p 87.
- 48 Dix, op. cit., p 599.
- 49 K. McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church, and the Eucharist* (Princeton Univ. Press : Princeton 1967) p 181.
- 50 Dix, op. cit., p 633.
- 51 cf. Acts 13:5; Phil. 1:17, 18; Col. 1:28, etc.

- 52 Lash, op. cit., pp 81-2.
- 53 I would commend M. Perry, *The Paradox of Worship* (SPCK : London 1977) ch. 1 for a fuller discussion of this topic.
- 54 Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, 17, 37.
- 55 McDonnell, op. cit., p 280f.