

“HIS SOUL-REFRESHING PRESENCE”:
THE LORD’S SUPPER IN BAPTIST THOUGHT & EXPERIENCE
IN THE “LONG” EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO ANNE
DUTTON & JOHN SUTCLIFF

At the time of the Reformation there was a great division in the ranks of the Reformers over an issue of spirituality. It concerned one of the means of grace, namely the Lord’s Supper. While all of the Reformers clearly rejected the Roman Catholic dogma of transubstantiation and the superstitions that had arisen with it, they were deeply divided over the answer to the question, “How is Christ present at the Table?”

In the view of Martin Luther (1483-1546), Christ’s body and blood are present “in, with and under” the bread and the wine. Contrary to the Roman dogma of transubstantiation, the bread remains bread and the wine remains wine. Yet, in some way, they also actually contain Christ’s body after the prayer of consecration.

The Swiss Reformer Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531), on the other hand, regarded the bread and the wine as mainly signs of what God has accomplished through the death of Christ and the Supper therefore as chiefly a memorial. In recent discussions of Zwingli’s perspective on the Lord’s Supper it is often maintained that Zwingli was not really a Zwinglian, that is, he saw more in the Lord’s Supper than simply a memorial.¹ Be this as it may, a tradition did take its start from those aspects of his thought that stressed primarily the memorial nature of the Lord’s Supper.

Then, there was the view of John Calvin (1509-1564), in some ways offering a mediating position.² In Calvin’s perspective on the nature of the Lord’s Supper, the bread and wine are signs and guarantees of a present reality. To the one who eats the bread and drinks the wine with

¹ See Derek R. Moore-Crispin, “ ‘The Real Absence’: Ulrich Zwingli’s View of the Lord’s Supper” in *Union and Communion, 1529-1979* (London: The Westminster Conference, 1979), pp.22-34.

² Cf. William Henry Brackney, *The Baptists* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp.62-3.

faith there is conveyed what they symbolize, namely Christ. The channel, as it were, through which Christ is conveyed to the believer is none other than the Holy Spirit. The Spirit acts as a kind of link or bridge between believers and the ascended Christ. Christ is received by believers in the Supper, “not because Christ inheres the elements, but because the Holy Spirit binds believers” to him. But without faith, only the bare elements are received.³

Calvin’s position was followed by not only by Calvinists on the European continent, but also by the English and American Puritans and such eighteenth-century Evangelicals as Jonathan Edwards and Charles Wesley. But in the last two hundred years, it has been largely replaced with the Zwinglian view. This lecture is a plea to consider afresh the view of Calvin. I want to pursue this by looking at the witness of English Particular Baptists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their witness is especially important since Baptists have in the last two hundred years been a driving force in disseminating the Zwinglian perspective on the Table. We want to understand how these Baptists viewed the Table as means of grace and then make some suggestions as to why this view was largely lost in the beginning of the eighteenth century.

“*This Soul-reviving Cordial*”⁴

Among the key texts that have to be examined for an accurate understanding of seventeenth-century Particular Baptist doctrine in general is *The Second London Confession of Faith*. Well described as “the most influential and important of all Baptist Confessions”,⁵ this statement of faith was first issued in 1677 and then later re-issued by the Particular Baptist denomination in 1689 as a declaration of their doctrinal position. Incorporating large portions of the Presbyterian

³ Victor A. Shepherd, *The Nature and Function of Faith in the Theology of John Calvin* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983), p.220. Other helpful studies on Calvin’s theology of the Lord’s Supper include B.A. Gerrish, “The Lord’s Supper in the Reformed Confessions”, *Theology Today* 13 (1966-1967), pp.224-43; John D. Nicholls, “‘Union with Christ’: John Calvin on the Lord’s Supper” in *Union and Communion*, pp.35-54; John Yates, “Role of the Holy Spirit in the Lord’s Supper”, *Churchman* 105 (1991), pp.355-56; B.A. Gerrish *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

⁴ Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia: A Key to open Scripture Metaphors* (Repr. London: William Otridge, 1778), p.621. For a recent edition of this work, see Benjamin Keach, *Preaching from the Types and Metaphors of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1972).

⁵ W.J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), p.219.

Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) and the Congregationalist *Savoy Declaration* (1658), the *Second London Confession* was clearly drawn up in such a way as to indicate that there were extensive areas of doctrinal agreement between the Particular Baptists and these other Calvinistic bodies. The chapter in the *Confession* that deals with the Lord's Supper, chapter 30, is an especially good example of the way in which the Particular Baptists sought to demonstrate their fundamental solidarity with other communities in the Reformed tradition.

Following the *Westminster Confession* and the *Savoy Declaration*, the *Baptist Confession* denounces as unbiblical the Roman Church's doctrine of the mass, its practice of private messes, its refusal to allow any but a priest to partake of the cup, and its dogma of transubstantiation.⁶ Having noted such errors regarding the Lord's Table, a right understanding of this ordinance is then inculcated.

Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible Elements in this Ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally, and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified & all the benefits of his death: the Body and Blood of Christ, being then not corporally, or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of Believers, in that Ordinance, as the Elements themselves are to their outward senses.⁷

Close comparison of this statement with the parallel statements in the *Westminster Confession* and the *Savoy Declaration* reveals one main area of difference. The two earlier confessions use the term "sacrament" to describe the Lord's Supper, whereas in the *Second London Confession* this has been altered to "ordinance."⁸ Neither term is actually used in the New Testament, but the term "ordinance" appears to have been adopted to stress the divine institution of the Lord's Supper.⁹

⁶ *Second London Confession* 30.2-6 (McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions*, 270-72).

⁷ *Second London Confession* 30.7 (McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions*, p.272).

⁸ It should be noted that both the *Westminster Confession* and the *Savoy Declaration* do use the term "ordinance" in later paragraphs to describe the Lord's Supper.

⁹ W. Morgan Patterson, "The Lord's Supper in Baptist History", *Review and Expositor* 66, No. 1 (Winter, 1969), 26. Cf., however, Erroll Hulse's discussion of these two terms in "The Implications of Baptism" in his *et al*, *Local Church Practice* (Haywards Heath, Sussex: Carey Publications, 1978), pp.46-7.

This difference between the three confessions, however, is minimal compared to what they have in common. All three affirm that as believers partake of the bread and the wine, Christ is “spiritually present” to them and nourishing them. In other words, all three documents essentially maintain the perspective of John Calvin.¹⁰

The first paragraph of chapter 30 of the *Second London Confession* also has a detailed discussion of the importance of the Lord’s Supper for the Christian life. There it is stated that the “Supper of the Lord Jesus, was instituted by him, the same night wherein he was betrayed, to be observed in his Churches unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance, and shewing forth the sacrifice in his death, confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits therof, their spiritual nourishment, and growth in him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other.”¹¹ In this enumeration of the reasons for the Lord’s Table, the *Second London Confession* follows closely both the *Westminster Confession* and the *Savoy Declaration*. Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper for five reasons according to this paragraph.

- The Supper serves as a vivid reminder of and witness to the sacrificial death of Christ.
- Then, participation in the Lord’s Supper enables believers to more firmly grasp all that Christ has done for them through his death on the cross.
- In this way the Lord’s Supper is a means of spiritual nourishment and growth.
- Fourth, the Lord’s Supper serves as a time when believers can re-commit themselves to Christ.

¹⁰ Those who drafted these confessions would have understood the phrase “spiritually present” to mean “present by means of the Holy Spirit.” See E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp.131-2. For some remarks on the biblical basis of this perspective as it is found in the *Second London Confession*, see David S. Dockery, “The Lord’s Supper in the New Testament and in Baptist Worship”, *Search* 19, No. 1 (Fall 1988), 44-5.

¹¹McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions*, p.270.

- Finally, the Lord's Supper affirms the indissoluble union that exists, on the one hand, between Christ and believers, and, on the other, between individual believers.

One cannot come away from reading these paragraphs on the Lord's Supper without the conviction that those who issued this *Confession* were deeply conscious of the vital importance of the Lord's Supper for the Christian life. It should also be noted that, in this hearty appreciation of the Lord's Supper, these early Particular Baptists stood squarely in the mainstream of Puritan thought. The Puritans generally regarded the Supper as a vehicle that the Spirit employed as an efficacious means of grace for the believer, and thus they opposed the Zwinglian perspective on the Lord's Supper.¹² For the Puritans and for the seventeenth-century Particular Baptists the Lord's Supper was indeed, in the words of the leading Particular Baptist theologian of the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), a "Soul-reviving Cordial."¹³

"Sweet repast"¹⁴

A random sampling of eighteenth-century Particular Baptist reflections on the Lord's Supper reveals strong evidence that the perspective on the nature of the Lord's Supper that we have already noted in the seventeenth century continued to prevail for much of the following century.

Consider, for instance, the diary of Isaac Staveley, a young clerk and a member of Eagle Street Baptist Church, London during the latter years of the pastorate of Andrew Gifford (1700-1784). Written daily from 24 February 1771 to 22 September of that year, the diary opens a window

¹² For the Puritan view of the Lord's Table, see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947), pp.90-101; New, *Anglican and Puritan*, 59-76; Holifield, *Covenant Sealed*, 109-138; Hywel W. Roberts, "'The Cup of Blessing': Puritan and Separatist Sacramental Discourses" in *Union and Communion*, pp.55-71.

¹³ *Tropologia*, p.621.

¹⁴ Benjamin Beddome, *Hymns adapted to Public Worship, or Family Devotion* (London, 1818), Hymn no. 669. For a good overview of the high regard in which the Lord's Supper was viewed by late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Dissenters, see Margaret Spufford, "The importance of the Lord's Supper to dissenters" in her ed., *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.86-102. See also Karen Smith, "The Covenant Life of Some Eighteenth-Century Calvinistic Baptists in Hampshire and Wiltshire" in William H. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes with John H.Y. Briggs (eds.), *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B.R. White* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999), pp.178-82.

upon “the interests, way of life, thoughts and activities which we may suppose to have applied to a considerable number of Baptists during the later part of the eighteenth century.”¹⁵ The centre of Staveley’s life was the Baptist fellowship to which he belonged and his chief delight the sermons of Gifford and visiting ministers, of which he wrote extensive summaries in his diary. Participation in the Lord’s Supper was also an important event for Staveley. After the evening sermon on 3 March, the young clerk recorded that he and his fellow Baptists “came around the table of our dear dying Lord to feast on the sacrifice of his offered body, show his death afresh, to claim and recognise our interest therein, to feast on the sacrifice of his offered body as happy members of the same family of faith and love.”¹⁶

Staveley probably was not aware of the fact that the phrase “to feast on the sacrifice of his offered body”, which he uses twice in this short extract, had its roots in the soil of Calvin’s theology of the Lord’s Supper. In his *magnum opus*, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the Genevan Reformer had written that the Lord’s Supper confirms “for us the fact that the Lord’s body was once for all so sacrificed for us that we may now feed upon it, and by feeding feel in ourselves the working of that unique sacrifice.”¹⁷ Such language, both that of Staveley and of Calvin, is foreign to a mindset that regards the Lord’s Table merely as a memorial.

Eighteenth-century Baptist hymnology is also a good guide to Particular Baptist eucharistic piety. Some of the richest texts that display this piety can be found in *Hymns In Commemoration Of the Sufferings Of Our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, Compos’d For the Celebration of his Holy Supper* by Joseph Stennett I (1663-1713), the pastor of a Calvinistic Seventh-Day Baptist Church that met in Pinners’ Hall, London.¹⁸ Stennett can describe the Church’s celebration at the

¹⁵ L.G. Champion, “Baptist Church Life in London, 1771”, *The Baptist Quarterly* 18 (1959-1960), 300.

¹⁶ Champion, “Baptist Church Life”, pp.301-2.

¹⁷ *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.17.1, trans. Ford Lewis Battles in John T. McNeill (ed.), *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1361. I am indebted for this reference to Walker, *Baptists at the Table*, p.9.

¹⁸ On Stennett, see Bryan W. Ball, *The Seventh-day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp.120-5; B.A. Ramsbottom, “The Stennetts” in Michael A.G. Haykin (ed.), *British Particular Baptists, 1638-1910* (Springfield, Missouri: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), I, 136-38.

Table as a “perpetual memorial” of Christ’s death, a death that is to be commemorated.¹⁹ And the bread and wine he calls “proper Symbols” and “Figures.”²⁰ Yet, Stennett can also say of these symbols:

Thy Flesh is Meat indeed,
 Thy Blood the richest wine;
 How blest are they who often feed
 On this Repast of thine!²¹

And he can urge his fellow believers:

Sing *Hallelujah* to our King,
 Who nobly entertains
 His Friends with Bread of Life, and Wine
 That flow’d from all his Veins.

His Body pierc’d with numerous Wounds,
 Did as a Victim bleed;
 That we might drink his sacred Blood,
 And on his Flesh might feed.²²

Stennett does make it clear that the feeding involved at the Table is one of faith,²³ but this is realistic language utterly foreign to the later Zwinglian perspective.

¹⁹ *Hymns In Commemoration Of the Sufferings Of Our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, Compos’d For the Celebration of his Holy Supper* (London: N. Cliff and D. Jackson, 1713), pp.iii, 4.

²⁰ *Hymns In Commemoration*, pp.29, 20.

²¹ *Hymns In Commemoration*, p.35.

²² *Hymns In Commemoration*, p.23.

²³ Thus, in one of his hymns he can state (*Hymns In Commemoration*, p.19):

“Here may our Faith still on Thee feed
 The only Food Divine;
 To Faith thy Flesh is Meat indeed,
 Thy Blood the Noblest wine.”

Two hymns of Benjamin Beddome (1717-1795), pastor of the Baptist cause in Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire, for over fifty years, can also be cited as evidence for what is clearly the most prevalent belief about the nature of the Lord's Supper among eighteenth-century Baptists. Beddome was a prolific hymn-writer and many of his hymns were still in use at the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁴ Although Beddome wrote only a few hymns that specifically dealt with the subject of the Lord's Supper, they are fairly explicit as to his view of its nature. In one he prays,

Oh for a glimmering sight
 Of my expiring Lord!
 Sure pledge of what yon worlds of light
 Will to the saints afford.

. . . May I behold him in the wine,
 And see him in the bread.²⁵

In another, the invitation is given:

Come then, my soul, partake,
 The banquet is divine:
 His body is the choicest food,
 His blood the richest wine.

Ye hungry starving poor
 Join in the sweet repast;
 View Jesus in these symbols given,
 And his salvation taste.²⁶

²⁴ On Beddome and his ministry, see Thomas Brooks, *Pictures of the Past: The History of the Baptist Church, Bourton-on-the-Water* (London: Judd & Glass, 1861), pp.21-66; William Boswell Lowther, "Benjamin Beddome", *The Dictionary of National Biography* (1885-1886 ed.; repr. London: Oxford University Press, 1963-1964), II, 97-8; W. R. Stevenson and John Julian, "Beddome, Benjamin" in John Julian, ed., *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (London: John Murray, 1908), pp.121-4; Michael A.G. Haykin, "Benjamin Beddome (1717-1795)" in his (ed.), *British Particular Baptists*, I, 167-182. One recent hymnal, *Grace Hymns*, contains five of his hymns: *Grace Hymns* (London: Grace Publications Trust, 1975), Hymn nos. 288, 351, 470, 496, 514.

²⁵ *Hymns adapted to Public Worship, or Family Devotion* (London, 1818), Hymn no. 672.

²⁶ *Hymns*, Hymn no. 669.

Beddome did not hold to a Roman Catholic or Lutheran view of the “real presence.” The bread and the wine, he asserted, are “symbols.” Nevertheless, he did expect the Lord’s Supper to be a place where the “sweet repast” of salvation is savoured and Christ himself seen. The “realism” of the language in the first of these two stanzas especially bespeaks the conviction that Christ is present in the ordinance.

“His Soul-refreshing presence”²⁷

Finally, another Calvinistic perspective on the Supper is found in *Thoughts on the Lord’s Supper, Relating to the Nature, Subjects, and right Partaking of this Solemn Ordinance* (1748) by Anne Dutton (1692-1765). Over the past three years, a five-volume edition of her writings has begun to appear. Volumes I-IV have already appeared.

Dutton was born in Northampton to godly Congregationalist parents. In her late teens she began attending an open-membership Baptist church in the town, pastored at the time by John Moore (d.1726). There, in her words, she found “fat, green pastures,” for “Mr. Moore was a great doctrinal preacher.” As she went on to explain: “the special advantage I received under his

²⁷ Anne Dutton, *Thoughts on the Lord’s Supper, Relating to the Nature, Subjects, and right Partaking of this Solemn Ordinance* (London, 1748), p.33. Though most of Anne’s works survive now in only a few copies, they are well worth the effort finding and reading. This writer can testify to the rich time he spent one October morning last year on a train trip from Bedford to Gatwick Airport reading some of Anne’s letters. I had been given a copy of Anne’s *Selections from Letters on Spiritual Subjects* (compiled and published in 1884) by Mr. Nigel Pibworth of Biggleswade, and despite the press of the commuters that morning, I was gripped by the spirituality of her prose. Hopefully this brief introduction to her life will prompt a renewed appreciation of her legacy and spirituality. I would like to thank Mr. Pibworth for the gift of a number of other sources that also helped immensely in the writing of this lecture.

ministry, was the establishment of my judgement in the doctrines of the gospel.”²⁸ It was in this congregation that she was baptized as a believer.

When she was twenty-two she married a Mr. Cattell (there appears to be no record of his first name), and moved with her husband to London. While there she worshipped with Cripplegate Particular Baptist Church that met at premises on Wood Street, where the pastor was John Skepp (d.1721). Skepp published but one book and that posthumously, *Divine Energy: or The Efficacious Operations of the Spirit of God upon the Soul of Man* (1722), which is largely believed to be a Hyper-Calvinistic work. It is sometimes argued that Anne Dutton’s exposure to Hyper-Calvinism at a young age shaped her thinking for the rest of her life. If so, it is curious to find her rejoicing in the ministry of preachers like George Whitefield (1714-1770) in later years.

Skepp interestingly enough was an impressive preacher. The overall trend in the church during his ministry was one of growth. There were 179 members when he came as pastor in 1714. When he died in 1721, church membership had grown to 212. And Anne delighted in his “Quickness of Thought, Aptness of expression, suitable Affection, and a most agreeable Delivery.”

About 1720, though, Anne’s life underwent a deep trial as her husband of but five or six years died. Returning to her family in Northampton, she was not long single. Her second marriage in the early 1720s was to Benjamin Dutton (1691-1747), a clothier who had studied for vocational ministry in various places, among them Glasgow University. Ministry took the couple to such towns as Whittlesey and Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, before leading them finally in 1731 to Great Gransden, Huntingdonshire.

Under Dutton’s preaching the church flourished so that on any given Sunday the congregation numbered anywhere between 250 and 350, of whom roughly 50 were members. This growth led to the building of a new meeting-house, which can still be seen in the village. Benjamin perished at

²⁸ Cited H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists* (London: The Kingsgate Press, 1946), p.52.

sea, however, in 1747. He had gone to America to help raise funds to pay off the debt incurred in the building of the meeting-house and the ship on which he was returning foundered not far from the British coast. Widowed now for the second time, Anne was to live another eighteen years. During that time “the fame of her primitive piety,” to use the way that Baptist historian Joseph Ivimey (1773-1834) referred to her New Testament-like spirituality, became known in Evangelical circles on both sides of the Atlantic. She had been writing for a number of years before Benjamin’s demise. After his death a steady stream of tracts and treatises, collections of selected correspondence, and poems poured from her pen. Among her numerous correspondents were Howel Harris (1714-1773), Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791), William Seward (1711-1740), George Whitefield, and Philip Doddridge (1702-1751).

Harris was convinced that the Lord had entrusted her “with a Talent of writing for him.” When Seward, an early Methodist preacher who was killed by a mob in Wales, read a letter she had written to him in May, 1739, he found it “full of such comforts and direct answers to what I had been writing that it filled my eyes with tears of joy.” And Whitefield, who helped promote and publish Anne’s writings, said after meeting her that “her conversation is as weighty as her letters.”

She was not slow to critique theological positions she felt erroneous. For instance, she was a critic of John Wesley and his brand of Evangelical Arminianism, though her criticism was never abusive. In addition to a number of letters to Wesley, she wrote a booklet entitled *Letters to the Reverend Mr. John Wesley against Perfection as Not Attainable in this Life* (1743).

She died in 1765. There is a powerful account of her final days from Robert Robinson (1735-1790), in a letter that he wrote to a friend in 1766 and which has just come to light.

You have (no doubt) heard of Dear M^{rs} Dutton’s departure.—I saw her a few weeks before she died. She apprehended her death near then. She could not get into the meeting[-house] at the sermon... O how ravishingly she talked. She was up, and sat by the fire. Her countenance—I won’t say serene and composed, but blithe[,] gay, full of a

Serenity, or rather full of *Immortality*—My mind was full of that Scripture which I thought I then saw exemplified in Mrs. Dutton. Psal. 92.12 etc. *The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree*, which it seems grows fastest under burdens. ...*They shall still bring forth fruit in old age*.—A woman of seventy four laden with the fruits of the spirit. *Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness temperance*. Gal. 5.22... Not shriveled, wrinkled, nor spotted with doubts, fears, deadness, &c., but like fine ripe fruits, at once charming the eye, refreshing the smell, & gratifying the tast[e]. The sight answered the end mentioned by the Psalmist. ...I had heard, that precious in the sight of the Lord was the *Death* of his saints, and now I saw he [i.e. God] was true to his word, for he was present by his Spirit in the sickness and death of Mrs. Dutton. Her Illness was a sore throat, and one of her Expressions was, ‘My dear Sir, I am rejoiced to think that there is but a hair’s breadth betwixt me and my father’s house. ‘Tis but for God to stop my breath and I am with him. And so shall I be ever with the Lord.’ She then talked for half an hour on the six last verses of the fourth chapter of the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, which also she chose for her funeral sermon, and which was preached Last Thursday...at her interment by Mr. Keymer, pastor of the church at Gransden, of which church she was a member.²⁹

One of her best pieces is a devotional study of the Lord’s Table, *Thoughts on the Lord’s Supper, Relating to the Nature, Subjects, and right Partaking of this Solemn Ordinance*, which was published anonymously in 1748. It clearly reveals Particular Baptist piety at its best—Christocentric. “Not a Dram of new Covenant-Favour”, she writes, “was to flow to the Heirs of Promise, but thro’ the Death of Jesus”. This Christ-centredness and cross-centredness permeates the entire treatise. To give but one further example: “O what a wondrous Draught,” she declares near the beginning of the book, “what a Life-giving Draught, in his own most precious Blood, doth God our Saviour, the Lord our Lover, give to dying Sinners, to his beloved Ones in this glorious Ordinance.”

Dutton devotes the first section of her sixty-page treatise on the Lord’s Supper to outlining its nature. In this section Dutton argues that the Supper is, among other things, a “communication.” “As our Lord is spiritually present in his own ordinance,” she writes, “so he therein and thereby doth actually communicate, or give himself, his body broken, and his blood shed, with all the

²⁹ Letter to John Robinson, November 30, 1766 [Timothy Whelan, “Six Letters of Robert Robinson from Dr Williams’s Library”, *The Baptist Quarterly*, 39, No.7 (July 202), 355-356].

benefits of his death, to the worthy receivers.”³⁰ Here Dutton is affirming that Christ is indeed present at the celebration of his supper and makes it a means of grace for those who partake of it with faith. Here biblical proof is found in 1 Corinthians 10:16. She has rightly interpreted this text. Note Paul’s argument in the context.

As she states later on in this treatise: in the Lord’s Supper “the King is pleas’d to sit with us, at his Table.”³¹ In fact, so highly does she prize this means of grace that she can state, with what other Particular Baptists of her era might describe as some exaggeration, that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper “admits” believers “into the nearest Approach to his glorious Self, that we can make in an Ordinance-Way on the Earth, on this Side the Presence of his Glory in Heaven.”³² For Anne, and one suspects many of her fellow Baptist Dissenters, the Lord’s Supper was a “Royal Banquet which infinite Love hath prepared”. Her language may sound extravagant to some, but it reveals, I believe, something of the spiritual intensity that was available to Dissenting congregations in the mid-eighteenth century. In fact, one of the few negative effects of the Evangelical Revival may well be the way in which this spirituality was diluted in the press to make churches primarily centres for evangelism.

³⁰*Thoughts on the Lord’s Supper*, pp.3-4.

³¹*Thoughts on the Lord’s Supper*, p.21.

³²*Thoughts on the Lord’s Supper*, p.25.

A “*memorial of the absent Saviour*”³³

The view that the Lord’s Supper is primarily or merely a memorial only began to become widespread in Particular Baptist circles during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Abraham Booth (1734-1806), the influential London Baptist leader, stated in 1778 that the Lord’s Supper was designed to be “a memorial of God’s love to us and of Immanuel’s death for us.”³⁴ Twenty or so years later, the Yorkshire Baptist leader John Fawcett (1740-1817), declared in the minor spiritual classic, *Christ Precious to those that Believe* (1799), that the

Lord’s Table...is wisely and graciously designed to revive in our minds the remembrance of him who gave his life a ransom for our souls. This institution is happily contrived to represent, in a lively and striking manner, the love, the sufferings, and the death of our blessed Redeemer, together with the benefits which we derive from them. When we unite in this solemnity, all the springs of pious affection should be let loose, while we contemplate the dying agonies of the Prince of Peace. We should feel the sweet meltings of godly sorrow, and the warmest exertions of gratitude, love and joy.³⁵

A most striking acceptance of the Zwinglian perspective on the Lord’s Supper is found in a tract written by John Sutcliff (1752-1814), the pastor of the Baptist church in Olney, Buckinghamshire, a close friend of William Carey (1761-1834) and one of the founders of the Baptist Missionary Society. Sutcliff also played a central part in bringing revival to the Particular Baptists, far too many of whose churches were largely stagnant and somewhat moribund in the mid to late eighteenth century.³⁶

Entitled *The Ordinance of the Lord’s Supper considered* and written in 1803 as a circular letter for the Baptist churches belonging to the Northamptonshire Association, this text abounds in memorialist language and the Calvinist tradition hardly makes a showing. Sutcliff took for his guiding verse throughout this letter the statement of Christ in Luke 22:19: “This do in

³³ John Sutcliff, *On obedience to Positive Institutions* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1808), p.6.

³⁴ Cited Payne, *Fellowship of Believers*, p.65.

³⁵ *Christ Precious to Those that Believe* (4th ed.; repr. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers), pp.230-1.

³⁶ For a study of Sutcliff’s life and ministry, see Haykin, *One heart and one soul: John Sutcliff of Olney*.

remembrance of me". Seen through the lens of this text, the Lord's Supper "is a standing memorial of Christ. When you see the table spread and are about to partake of the bread and wine, think you hear Christ saying, 'Remember me.' Remember who he is... Again: Remember what he has done... Once more: Remember where he is, and what he is doing."³⁷

The fact that Christ instructed us to remember him, Sutcliff continued, clearly "implies his absence." Moreover, if a friend, who has gone away, left us with a small present prior to his departure and asked us to "keep it as a memorial of his friendship," then, even if the present has "little intrinsic worth, we set a high value on it, for his sake." Gazing upon this present aids in the "recollection of our absent friend." So it is with the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It is designed "to draw our attention to, and assist our meditations upon an unseen Jesus."³⁸

Towards the end of *The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper considered* Sutcliff also emphasized that remembrance of what Christ has done for the believer should lead him or her to a renewed commitment to the Saviour.

To him who gave his life a ransom, it becomes you to devote your lives. Bought with a price, remember you are not your own. Resolve therefore in the strength of divine grace, to glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. Each time you approach this sacred ordinance consecrate yourselves anew to the service, honour and glory of the blessed Jesus.³⁹

The Lord's Table is thus a place of re-consecration.

Finally, Sutcliff stresses that participation in the Supper is a matter of obedience to the command of Christ; it is an open avowal of one's "subjection to him as a Sovereign." As such he warned his readers: "Never treat the positive institutions of the Redeemer as matters of indifference."⁴⁰

³⁷ *The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper considered* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association; Dunstable, 1803), pp.2, 3.

³⁸ *Ordinance of the Lord's Supper*, pp.3-4.

³⁹ *Ordinance of the Lord's Supper*, p.7.

⁴⁰ *Ordinance of the Lord's Supper*, p.9.

But, as Michael Walker has cogently shown with respect to the memorialist position in the later decades of the nineteenth century, such a position was generally accompanied by some degree of ambivalence with regard to the importance of the Table for the believer's Christian experience. Thus, although Sutcliff sought to guard against indifference about the Supper, his perspective on the nature of the Table would, in time, help to foster such an attitude.

Sutcliff's tract on the Supper marks a definite setting aside of the Calvinistic view of the Table in favour of the leaner memorialist perspective. And it presaged what would come to be the majority view among British Baptists in the nineteenth century.⁴¹

Why the change?

Michael Walker has argued that nineteenth-century British Baptists became enamoured of the memorialist position from the 1830s onwards in reaction to a revival of English Roman Catholicism and the emergence of Tractarianism in the Church of England, a movement that was open to Roman Catholic theology and piety.⁴² When Sutcliff wrote his letter on the Lord's Table, however, neither of these events was even on the horizon. Why then did he embrace the memorialist position?

Ernest Payne has suggested that eighteenth-century rationalism with its "suspicion of the mysterious and inexplicable" may have been a major factor in the advance of memorialist views among the Particular Baptists.⁴³ It is indeed fascinating to observe that Joseph Priestly (1733-

⁴¹ It is interesting to note that the two earliest articles on the Lord's Supper in the denominational paper of the Calvinistic Baptists, *The Baptist Magazine*, which began in 1809, are from a fully memorialist point of view. See T. W., "On The Lord's Supper", *The Baptist Magazine* 2 (1810), 504-506; T[homas] G[riffin], "On The Lord's Supper", *The Baptist Magazine*, 3 (1811), 361-68.

⁴² Michael Walker, *Baptists at the Table. The Theology of the Lord's Supper amongst English Baptists in the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot, Oxfordshire: Baptist Historical Society, 1992), pp.84-120.

⁴³ Ernest Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers. Baptist Thought and Practice Yesterday and Today* (2nd ed.; London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1952), pp.64-5. For a similar argument, see also Susan J. White, "Christian

1804), one of the leading opponents of the mystery of the Trinity in this era, can speak of the Lord's Supper in terms identical to those of Sutcliff. The Supper, he maintained, was instituted by Christ "in commemoration of his death". It is intended to serve as "a memorial" of Christ's death and as a means whereby Christians make a public declaration of their allegiance.⁴⁴

Shaping Sutcliff's view of the Supper, however, was a major shift in British Baptist ecclesiology that was underway during the final decades of the eighteenth century.⁴⁵ This shift involved nothing less than the transformation of the Particular Baptist denomination in the British Isles from an inward-looking, insular body primarily concerned with the preservation of its ecclesial experience and heritage into a body of churches that was outward-looking with hands outstretched to evangelical believers in other denominations and vitally concerned about the advance of Christ's kingdom throughout the earth. Earlier Particular Baptist authors like Benjamin Keach had sought to orient their ecclesiology by means of those marks traditionally identified by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology as vital for a genuine church of Christ. From the vantage-point of this theological tradition, a true church can be said to exist where God's Word is faithfully preached, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are administered, and biblical discipline is exercised. Thus, Benjamin Keach, in what is the earliest Particular Baptist book primarily devoted to issues of ecclesial polity, *The Glory of a True Church and its Discipline display'd* (1697), maintained that a church of Christ is composed of "Converted Persons," it is a community where "the Word of God and Sacraments are duly administered, according to Christ's Institution", and it has "regular and orderly Discipline."⁴⁶

While Sutcliff did not disagree with this way of reflecting on the identity of the church, it was the proclamation of the Word of God, in particular evangelistic preaching, which dominated his

Worship since the Reformation" in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, eds., *The Making of Jewish and Christian Worship* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), pp.194-5.

⁴⁴ *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1772-1774) [*The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, ed. J. T. Rutt (New York: Klaus Reprint Co., 1972), II, 336-37].

⁴⁵ On this shift, see Michael A.G. Haykin, "The Baptist Identity: A View From the Eighteenth Century", *The Evangelical Quarterly* 67 (1995), 137-52. The material in this paragraph and the next one is taken from this article. For permission to use this material, I am grateful to the editor of this journal, I. Howard Marshall.

⁴⁶ *The Glory of a True Church, And its Discipline display'd* (London, 1697), pp.6, iii.

conception of the church's nature. For it was such preaching of the Word that enabled the kingdom of God to move forward and to occupy the realms of darkness and convert them into strongholds of light. This perspective is clearly seen in the reasons that Sutcliff delineates for the existence of local churches. In an address that Sutcliff gave in 1802 at the ordination of Thomas Morgan (1776-1857) to the pastoral oversight of Cannon Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, he specifically mentioned three: "the honor of Christ, the advancement of his cause, and their [i.e. the members of the church] own profit."⁴⁷ By "the advancement of [Christ's] cause" Sutcliff has in mind uninhibited evangelism at home and abroad. Again, in *Qualifications for Church Fellowship*, a circular letter that Sutcliff drew up in 1800 for the Northamptonshire Association, he maintained that local churches have been designed for two principal reasons: the upbuilding of believers and "the promotion of the cause of Christ at large."⁴⁸ A statement of one of Sutcliff's closest friends, Andrew Fuller (1754-1815), encapsulates well the Olney Baptist's thinking in this regard: "The *true* churches of Jesus Christ travail in birth for the salvation of men. They are the armies of the Lamb, the grand object of whose existence is to extend the Redeemer's kingdom."⁴⁹

Such an evangelistic force tended to downplay the importance of the Lord's Supper, an ordinance that was expressly designed for believers and, in the minds of increasing numbers of Baptists in the nineteenth century, an aspect of the Christian life that played little part in the evangelization of the lost. In the words of W.R. Ward: "to the devotees of the Missionary Church, bent on the business of conversion, ordinances which did not convert (as by the end of the eighteenth century they did not) were a matter of diminishing interest."⁵⁰ The memorialist

⁴⁷ "Introductory Discourse" in his, John Ryland, and Andrew Fuller, *The Difficulties of the Christian ministry, and the Means of surmounting them; with the Obedience of Churches to their Pastors explained and enforced* (Birmingham, 1802), p.3.

⁴⁸ *Qualifications for Church fellowship* (Clipstone, 1800), p.3.

⁴⁹ *The Promise of the Spirit, the Grand Encouragement in Promoting the Gospel* (1810) [*The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Andrew Gunton Fuller and revised Joseph Belcher (1845 ed.; repr. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), III, 359, italics added].

⁵⁰ "The Evangelical Revival in Eighteenth-Century Britain" in Sheridan Gilley and W.J. Shiels, eds., *A History of Religion in Britain, Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1994), p.271. Nevertheless, it is fascinating to note that while this change in viewpoint about the nature of the Lord's Supper was taking place among the Particular Baptists, many of their evangelical counterparts in the Church of

view of the nature of the Lord's Supper was well suited to the growing ambivalence regarding its importance.

Sutcliff had been privileged to have played a central role in the transformation referred to above, in which the Particular Baptists moved from being a largely static denomination preoccupied with the preservation of its ecclesial heritage to one that was passionately involved in the missionary advance of Christ's kingdom throughout the earth. It was a movement in which much was gained, but also something lost. For Sutcliff's own theology of the Lord's Supper was indeed a poor alternative to the rich perspective of his seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baptist forebears, who had come to the Table believing that there Christ would meet them and give them something deeply satisfying and precious.

England still held to a robust eucharistic spirituality. See Christopher J. Cocksworth, *Evangelical Eucharistic Thought in the Church of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.72-8.