

THE FAITH WE AFFIRM

Basic Beliefs of Disciples of Christ

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RONALD E. OSBORN



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Editor's Foreword

Members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), in this last quarter of the twentieth century, have manifested a renewed interest in exploring the basic beliefs which shape our witness to the Christian faith. As we broaden our ecumenical involvements and reflect on the history through which God has led us, we also seek to enlarge our vision of the mission to which God calls the church in our time.

It is in response to repeated requests for a study guide to assist us in our quest that this book is offered. Its primary purpose is to engage Disciples in thinking responsibly about the faith we affirm in the light of our heritage and in the context of our contemporary situation.

The faith we affirm as Disciples is succinctly set forth in the first paragraph of the Preamble to *The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. Phrases from this affirmation which appears on pages 8 and 9 are used as chapter headings, and statements from it serve to introduce each chapter. This study is offered as a replacement for an earlier course, *Doctrine and Thought of the Disciples of Christ*, by Howard E. Short, which is no longer in print.

The author of *The Faith We Affirm*, Ronald E. Osborn, is a distinguished teacher and writer whose personal faith is deeply rooted in this tradition. He was the first moderator of the church in 1968 and is a frequent lecturer at ministers' institutes and church assemblies. This volume represents a lifetime of reflection on the Disciples witness. His major interest is in motivating us to seek a more mature faith with understanding.

This book is designed both for individual reading and for use with

study groups of youth and adults, especially participants in church membership classes. By devoting a session to each chapter, a group may complete the study in six sessions. However, each chapter provides sufficient content for two or more sessions, furnishing a resource for as much as an entire quarter's study.

While no session plans are developed here, questions at the end of each chapter may provide topics which participants will want to explore in their group sessions.

For more information about our heritage and how our church operates, the following resources will be useful. *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* by William E. Tucker and Lester G. McAllister (Bethany Press, 1975) offers a comprehensive history of the Disciples. For a description of how the church is organized and functions see *We Call Ourselves Disciples* by Kenneth L. Teegarden (Bethany Press, 1975). The document outlining how our life together is ordered, *The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, is printed in our church's *Year Book and Directory* for 1979. Separate copies of *The Design* (73A1708, 25¢) also are available from Christian Board of Publication.

The affirmation of faith, which this study invites us to explore, is used today by many congregations in their common worship of God. (It is No. 490 in the *Hymnbook for Christian Worship*.) A careful reading of this book should enable worshipers to have a better understanding of the faith which is being affirmed.

Herschell H. Richmond

An Affirmation of Faith

AS MEMBERS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,

We confess that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of the living God,
and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.

In Christ's name and by his grace
we accept our mission of witness
and service to all people.

We rejoice in God,
maker of heaven and earth,
and in the covenant of love
which binds us to God and one another.

Through baptism into Christ
we enter into newness of life
and are made one with the whole people of God.



In the communion of the Holy Spirit
we are joined together in discipleship
and in obedience to Christ.

At the table of the Lord
we celebrate with thanksgiving
the saving acts and presence of Christ.

Within the universal church
we receive the gift of ministry
and the light of scripture.

In the bonds of Christian faith
we yield ourselves to God
that we may serve the One
whose kingdom has no end.

Blessing, glory and honor
be to God forever. Amen.

—From the Preamble of the
Design for the Christian Church
(*Disciples of Christ*).



We confess that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of the living God . . .
Within the universal church
we receive . . . the light of scripture.



1

THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE

The Bible as Interpreted by Disciples

BECAUSE the sublime language of the Bible proclaims religious faith, many persons—both inside and outside the church—apparently do not know what to make of it. Faith to them has to do with feeling, with miracle, with mystery. They conclude therefore that a testimony of religious belief must necessarily be irrational, or beyond understanding. Some who are outside the church imagine that faith cannot stand up under critical examination.

Some persons who are inside the church hold a strikingly similar view. Any attempt to submit the Bible or a creed to analysis by contemporary thought, they fear, is irreverent. Some even suppose that if they could explain their convictions in rational terms, they would no longer “truly believe.” They identify religion with mystery.



Disciples of Christ, however, link understanding with faith. The word *disciple*, used so frequently in the New Testament, means both *learner* and *follower*, one who accompanied a traveling teacher. It refers to a person whose faith imparts insight, understanding, and guidance for living. Consequently, this faith evokes dedication: a disciple of Jesus is an adherent. But commitment is not separated from comprehension. Rather, each intensifies the other. (Discipleship will be explored in more detail in chapter 5.)

Faith, Scripture, and Understanding

Here we are focusing on a cast of mind which holds faith and understanding together. It is this link which enables the disciple to think responsibly about Christian beliefs from the Scriptures. To receive “the light of scripture” requires us to have respect for our minds.

Because the Bible addresses our entire being, it speaks not only to our hearts, but also to our minds to evoke understanding. It has inspired a long tradition of respect for human intelligence in the service of God. The prophet Isaiah offered this counsel: “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD” (Isa. 1:18). In stating the commandment which takes priority, Jesus stated that persons are to “love the Lord your God . . . with all your mind” (Mark 12:30).

Christians today are heirs of a noble tradition of intellectual activity. St. Augustine, in the fourth century, described the action of theology as “faith seeking understanding.” The early leaders of the Disciples of Christ contended for a faith characterized as sane, scriptural, and practical. They were motivated by a faith which, to them, “made sense.”

Disciples who want to understand the faith will undertake to enlarge both their knowledge and comprehension. The house of faith will be illuminated by understanding, as the light of scripture streams in. It will have great clerestory windows to flood all its space with brightness and warmth from above.

It was in just such a manner that Alexander Campbell wanted the Bible to illuminate the life of the church and the minds of the people. For this reason he published a fresh translation of the New Testament by a group of British scholars. Commonly known by its binder’s title, *The Living Oracles*, this translation pioneered the principle of rendering the Scriptures in modern speech so that readers may more readily understand.

Moreover, Campbell insisted, with stubborn conviction, on the use of the term “disciple” to designate a follower of Christ. Other early leaders, such as Barton W. Stone and Walter Scott, deemed the name “Christian” more fitting. Because of Campbell’s persistence, we have been so compelled to call ourselves Disciples that we stagger awkwardly under our official name, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Thus we sometimes refer to ourselves as “The People of the Parentheses.”

The intent of Campbell’s choice of the name for a people committed to Christ was to emphasize that we are all *learners*. The faith of Christ’s adherents is a matter of growing understanding and of thinking about the Bible.

An archbishop from Yugoslavia, who did not know English, once visited Christian Theological Seminary. He knew our name in German, *die Junger Christi*, and his translator had him addressing us as “Jesus’s Pupils.” We smile. But that is precisely the point of the name *disciple*; we are learners.

Many people do not seem to know about the biblical kinship between faith and wisdom. They have not heard about loving God with all the mind. There is much ignorance of the Bible and the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Even to some persons inside the churches, the biblical vocabulary sounds like an alien tongue.

Confused as to what the Bible teaches, what the church professes, or what they themselves believe, some people turn to the brightly colored tents of the hucksters. They put their faith in all kinds of religion, psychology, or pure hokum. On television and in huge tabernacles, some evangelists hawk an anti-intellectual notion of the gospel which offers certainty at the price of a throttled mind. “It’s in the Book!” they shout. Or, “The Bible says!” That ends it.

Today, a simplistic, distorted version of Christianity has rushed in to fill an intellectual vacuum. Recently, in a meeting of Disciples from across the land, we heard reports of a proof-texting kind of biblicism everywhere, even in our own congregations. We seem to have raised up a generation which no longer thinks with the Disciples mind.

The Mind of Disciples

What do we mean by the Disciples mind? It is a way of approaching the Scriptures with a reverent intelligence. This style of professing Christian faith has accepted the reproach of advocating a “head religion” hurled by those who profess a “heart religion.”

Emphasizing faith with understanding, the Disciples mind puts the highest premium on rationality and faithfulness in action. This faith is biblically based, but it is understood in the light of scripture.

While the Disciples mind is *biblical*, it is more than that. It is *reasonable*: it thinks the Bible through with common sense. It is *empirical*: it reads the Bible in light of the knowledge that comes through the sciences. It is *pragmatic*: it tests in action the teachings of scripture and all religious notions.

Reasonable, empirical, pragmatic—these three characteristics are more fully described by the late W. B. Blakemore in *The Reformation of Tradition*, edited by Ronald E. Osborn (Bethany Press, 1963). To this list, we would add *ecumenical*: the Disciples mind seeks biblical understanding in light of the common mind of the whole church.

We will now consider each of the elements in this five-part process, beginning with the Bible.

A Biblical Mind

Thomas Campbell, in the *Declaration and Address*, declared: “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.” What is the meaning of this slogan?

- The Bible conveys a knowledge of God. It makes known to us the Awesome but Friendly Presence who dwelt with our primordial ancestors at the early dawn of the human race. In it we hear the Voice of Promise who called Abraham and Sarah to a unique mission. Here we behold the Divine Emancipator who, by the hand of Moses, led a people out of slavery and claimed them in holy covenant. Here we listen to the One Altogether Holy who spoke to Israel through priest and prophet, poet and sage, holy women and holy men of many generations.

Moreover, in the Bible we meet the Forgiving Parent who, in heaven’s supreme act of self-revelation, made divinity known to us in a human life, in Jesus of Nazareth. Here we encounter the Redemptive Power whose holy Spirit enabled Jesus’ followers to proclaim the good news of the risen Christ and to establish a church committed to the gospel. Across the centuries, the Bible has spoken this great story.

The church, from its earliest days, has called the Bible the Word of God. Through its writings God speaks to us. Not that God gives us orders through these ancient texts, but that the same God who confronted the people of long ago now confronts us as we ponder their story. To understand God and the shape of the Christian life, we go to the Bible for light.

- Christians therefore need to know the Bible. To deal with the issues of faith and life today, we must have enough familiarity with scripture to draw on its resources. Some of our early Disciples ancestors were nicknamed “walking Bibles.” Walter Scott maintained that anyone considered for the office of deacon in the church should be expected to know the New Testament by heart. It was said of J. W. McGarvey, president of one of our seminaries, that if all the Bibles in the world were destroyed, he could reproduce the text from memory. This is probably an exaggeration, but at least he could recite great portions of it.

A mind described as biblical loves the scriptures. Learning to know them is one way of serving God.

- As we come to know the Bible, we discover in it striking developments across vast periods of time. Alexander Campbell, in his “Sermon of the Law,” noted that the law given through Moses was binding on Israel, but that Christians belong to a new dispensation. The church, therefore, is not under the Mosaic law. Rather Christians base their lives on the witness of the apostles to Jesus Christ. It is their teachings and practices which direct the church. Those who claim to take the Bible seriously must use it with discrimination.

- Alexander Campbell spoke proudly of his position as “true Bibleism.” By this he meant that the church should pattern its life and teaching after the essentials of Christianity as set forth in the New Testament. Any requirements the church might make on its members which are not clearly set forth in the New Testament should be eliminated.

Campbell also insisted on using “Bible words” to talk about “Bible things.” He disliked the language of traditional theology which he regarded as too technical and abstract, in sharp contrast to the vivid speech of Jesus and the plain words of the apostles. He refused to use such terms as trinity and sacrament. He felt that any Christian who comes to the Bible with an honest mind can understand it without the interpretation of a priest, bishop, or theologian.

- The biblical commitment of the Disciples mind tended to shape the practices in the congregations. They called themselves by biblical names: Disciples, Christians, Christian Church, Church of Christ. They undertook to restore the faith and order of the apostolic church. They insisted on believer’s baptism which they viewed as normative in the earliest church. They practiced immersion as the baptismal form, convinced that it was clearly taught in the New Testament. For the

same reason they observed the Lord's supper every Lord's Day.

- Across the generations, many Disciples have demanded a proof-text for everything that was done or taught. They called this a "thus saith the Lord." As a result, they fell into a new legalism, making the words of the Bible into a creed. Most Disciples, however, have avoided this trap. We seek the light of scripture with a mind that is reasonable, empirical, and pragmatic.

A Reasonable Mind

Disciples have taken pride in advocating a common sense religion. We seek an approach which is sane as well as biblical, rational as well as practical. Here is an understanding of the faith which our pioneer leaders felt could be readily explained to ordinary folk, and which they could embrace with their intelligence as well as their hearts. Sometimes we have made our little systems too tight, too simple. But the genius of the Disciples mentality has held that we do not love God as we ought unless we examine the claims of religion with rational minds.

This commitment to reason, however, does not eliminate all mystery from life. Daily we confront realities beyond our powers of comprehension, such as beauty, evil, death, and God. Faith bows in reverence and humility before wonders too deep to fathom. Yet Disciples do not make a virtue of not understanding. A doctrine is not made sacred simply because it may be incomprehensible. Disciples insist that the gospel is intended by God to be understood, and that when we read the Scriptures reasonably they can be understood.

We Disciples, as we often remind ourselves, came into being in the wake of the Enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century. This fact noticeably affected the temper of our thought. The Reformation, from which most Protestant churches originated, marked the climax of the Middle Ages. The Enlightenment ushered in the modern era. Our Disciples founders lived with the great minds of the Age of Reason. They were acquainted with John Locke, the Scottish common sense philosophers, and American intellectuals such as Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin.

The early Disciples championed the faith in debate with skeptics, agnostics, and infidels. Alexander Campbell took on the celebrated Robert Owen to defend the cause of revealed religion. He also debated with religious leaders such as the Roman Catholic Bishop

Purcell with whom he contested the claims of hierarchical authority. From such intellectual contests the Disciples developed a polemic approach to doctrinal preaching and a skeptical cast of mind. They regarded ignorance and superstition as evils from which the gospel grants deliverance.

From this reasonable point of view a religious claim is not necessarily good simply because its proponents are sincere or feel good about it. It must stand scrutiny for truth and for ethical responsibility. It is not enough for preachers to teach people to have faith. They need to teach believers to raise questions about the faith they affirm. It is crucial that we Disciples continue to emphasize this aspect of our heritage.

In the classic formulations of the Disciples position, faith has two aspects. Basically, it means a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord, and a continuing life as a disciple of Jesus. But faith also has a substantive side. It is a body of beliefs. These beliefs, however, are not to be professed simply out of emotion, nor to be accepted merely on the assertion of some authority. Faith is expressed by confessing Christian belief out of intellectual conviction. It is arrived at on the basis of evidence presented in the scriptures.

A belief that the Bible, when it is rightly read, makes sense and ought to make sense has been a major emphasis of the Disciples. They have imputed integrity to the mind of God. Occasionally we may encounter persons who exalt divine authority above divine wisdom. Some have even said, with great unction: "If the Bible commanded me to run my head into a stone wall, I would do it!" Disciples, however, maintain that God as revealed in Jesus Christ is never arbitrary or capricious. They point to the Great Commandment which bids us to love God with our minds.

Nevertheless, Disciples sometimes forget this cardinal principle. Some used to urge that, because scripture says an elder or deacon must be "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2, 12, KJV), only married persons may stand for these offices. One British brother insisted that if an elder's wife died, he must resign at once because he would no longer be eligible. Most Disciples, reading this passage with common sense, see it simply as a prohibition of polygamy. In many of our congregations today, this passage is understood also to mean that an elder may be "the wife of one husband."

One of Alexander Campbell's major contributions to our Disciples heritage was the set of rules for a reasonable interpretation of the Bible which he popularized. These were not his own invention, but he did make available to congregations principles with which responsi-

ble biblical scholars had been working since the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation. These rules were published in *The Christian System* (chap. 2).

Campbell suggested that the reader, on opening any book of the Bible, should consider the historical circumstances of its writing, such as author, date, place, and occasion. Also we should observe who is speaking, to whom it is addressed, and the message it is intended to convey. In regard to interpretation, the same rules should be applied to its language as would be applied to the language of any other book.

In discerning the message of a biblical writing, Campbell suggested that the meaning of any word should always be decided on the basis of common usage. For words which have more than one meaning, the precise meaning should be decided by the context or use in parallel passages. The interpretation of figurative language, symbols, and parables in the Scriptures follows the same pattern used in interpreting these literary devices in secular writings.

The final rule stated by Campbell is that the reader seek to come within “the understanding distance” of the scriptures. He was convinced that the Bible was intended for our edification, and, with diligent seeking, we should be able to understand it.

In order to produce informed and thinking Christians, capable of reading the Bible with understanding and applying its precepts to their lives, the Disciples pioneers founded colleges across the land. These were liberal arts schools for teaching students to think and become responsible persons in society rather than seminaries for training a professional clergy. Here students were prepared to pursue careers as educators, doctors, lawyers, editors, and entrepreneurs while they also were being equipped intellectually to serve as elders, deacons, and teachers in the church.

The Disciples mind is both biblical and reasonable. We are convinced that God intends the Bible to make sense.

An Empirical Mind

The Disciples mind is also empirical. It reads the Bible reasonably in the light of modern secular knowledge. All of the empirical studies—from astronomy, physics, chemistry, geology, biology, psychology, on through geography, archaeology, anthropology, sociology, and history—are pertinent to a Christian’s thinking. We cannot read the Bible as though we had never heard of Copernicus or Darwin, Marx or Freud, Albert Einstein or Margaret Mead. Hearing the Scriptures today necessarily involves a dialogue between two

worlds, the world of the Bible and the contemporary world.

The Disciples founders cut their intellectual teeth on the writings of John Locke, the empirical philosopher who maintained that all verifiable knowledge comes to us through the senses. Alexander Campbell accepted this principle, even for religion. The gospel, he insisted, consists of facts to be believed, a series of historical events accessible to observation. He may have oversimplified or over-rationalized, but his empirical commitment is clear.

Many religious people, in the mid-nineteenth century, became agitated when geologists spoke of certain features of the earth being shaped by processes that required millions of years. Ministers often promoted debates on “Geology or Genesis?” A young Disciples preacher, James A. Garfield, who later was elected President of the United States, defended the scientific point of view. Another Disciples minister, Alexander Procter, gained national attention in the news media for espousing evolution in his preaching.

Disciples also carried empiricism into the realm of faith. Many people ask: How do you know you are saved? Disciples insist that religious assurance is not a matter of feeling. Rather they contend that God has promised salvation to all who confess Jesus Christ and are baptized in faith and repentance. The highest form of spiritual experience offered by Christian faith is positive and objective, rather than mystical and charismatic. It centers in a public act, a corporate act, a visible action—the breaking of bread by the congregation gathered about the Lord’s table.

Some views advanced by our Disciples founders, however, are no longer adequate for us. These rested on assumptions long since proved false. What is important for us is the honesty of their minds, their reasonable and pragmatic temper, rather than their conclusions, which we must correct in the light of new data.

They considered the New Testament, for example, as the divinely given constitution for the church. Thus they assumed that it must reflect a uniformity of faith and practice. They supposed that what they read about the church in Antioch applied equally to the churches in Jerusalem or Rome, or that congregations at the end of the first century operated in the same way as did the disciples immediately following Pentecost. They missed the many splended diversity of New Testament life.

More careful empirical study now makes clear the striking variety in early Christian theology and practice. Congregations did not do everything alike in Judea, in Samaria, and in the uttermost parts of the earth. As the decades rolled by, they worked out new ways of

doing things. To speak responsibly of a New Testament church, we need to recognize the diversity in the various Christian communities. The oneness of the church derives from the one Lord, not from uniformity of practice.

Like our Disciples pioneers, we need to continue to study the Bible empirically. We are not being unfaithful to the scriptures by reading them honestly in the light of facts established since they were written. To look at the Bible without trying to forget what we now know is a part of our heritage of common sense.

A Pragmatic Mind

Another aspect of the Disciples mind is the conviction that we learn from experience. It is pragmatic. This means that we put our beliefs to a practical test in our own lives, in our congregations, and in the larger life of the church. On the basis of this experience, we revise our previous understanding of what the Bible seeks to tell us.

Jesus warned his disciples to beware of false teachers, insisting, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:20). This same pragmatic principle is illustrated in Jesus' statement that if it is our will to do God's will, we "shall know whether the teaching is from God" (John 7:17). Alexander Campbell has been quoted as saying, "Nothing can be Christian doctrine that cannot be translated into life."

Disciples have taken as much pride in calling their faith practical as in calling it reasonable. Their pragmatic approach to biblical teaching began to show itself very early.

They started out trying to order the life of their churches in strict accordance with the New Testament. But they soon discovered that the Bible is silent on many matters. It doesn't tell us how many elders a congregation should have. It does not say how often we should elect members to the official board or how many should be on the board. (In fact, it does not even mention an "official board.") Neither does it tell us how to arrange an order of worship, or how long the sermon should be ("sermon" is not a scriptural term either).

Soon Disciples began to speak about the "law of expediency." This meant that congregations have to use common sense and reflect on the lessons of experience. When the scriptures point to something we ought to do, but do not tell us how to do it, congregations need to decide on a course of action which seems most expedient.

Resorting to the law of expediency, congregations developed organizational patterns: committees, specific offices, the church school, organizations for women, for youth, for men. In our general life we used it to justify missionary societies and various agencies and institutions to carry out the work of the churches. More recently, pragmatic thinking guided the shaping of our shared life together in *The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*. By mutual consent our people, in 1968, adopted this organizational structure in order to be both more responsible and effective in our witness to the gospel in the world today.

An Ecumenical Mind

In describing the particular cast of mind of the Disciples of Christ we do not want to seem boastful or partisan. Disciples resist any tendency toward a sectarian emphasis. Our intention is to read the biblical message in the light of the common judgment of the whole Christian community and for the sake of the whole church.

We Disciples did not decide which books belong in the Bible. The ancient catholic church decided that. In their judgment at that point we concur. So we must give heed, insofar as we are able, to the judgment of the best minds in all the churches across the centuries in regard to the meaning of scripture.

Disciples have insisted on the right of every Christian to read the Bible for oneself. Over against this right, however, we have balanced the admonition: "No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20). We need to listen to the "common mind" of the church before we make up our own individual minds.

Alexander Campbell was unwilling to base his practice on what he regarded as unscriptural practice in other churches. Nevertheless, he gave careful attention to the work of other religious leaders in their study of the Bible. It is this stance which is reflected in our Affirmation of Faith: "Within the universal church we receive . . . the light of scripture."

The Bible is an ecumenical book. To read it rightly, we must read it ecumenically. When we read it rightly, it will make us ecumenical. Disciples have sought for themselves, and for all Christians everywhere, an ecumenical mind.

Dialogue with Scripture

The fivefold mode of thinking which has characterized Disciples involves us in a dynamic dialogue with the Scriptures. The Bible is a vast library of testimonies to the reality of God. Many people across the centuries have been inspired to tell the story of Israel's encounters with Yahweh, and of God's supreme revelation in the person of Jesus whom we call the Christ. Many others have undertaken to offer directions for living based on their understanding of God's will in their particular situations.

Each of the accounts—in narrative, law, psalm, proverb, gospel, epistle—comes from a particular time and addresses a particular circumstance. Not all of them rise to the same level of understanding, nor do all of them agree. Yet they all testify to the living God. For this reason the community of faith—first Jewish, then Christian—has acknowledged them as part of the canon of sacred scripture. It sets the standard for the faith we profess.

In our interpretation of the Bible today we will not always come to the same conclusions as earlier generations of Disciples. The intense biblical scholarship of almost two centuries since Barton W. Stone and the Campbells began their work has given us a clearer understanding of many parts of scripture that was not available to them. However, we are being faithful to the Disciples mind when we take the Bible seriously, read it in the light of contemporary knowledge, and reflect on its message for our present situation.

Biblical, reasonable, empirical, pragmatic, ecumenical—by persisting in the use of these principles, we can carry on an enriching dialogue with the Bible. Thus, “we receive the light of scripture.”

For Reflection and Discussion

What do you understand to be the nature of the Bible? In what sense do you personally regard it as God's *word* for Christian living?

What is your understanding of how God communicates with us through the scriptures? In what ways do you seek the light of scripture on specific issues which call for a decision?

What do you understand to be the meaning of faith? What is the relationship between faith and a personal commitment of our lives to God?

What authority does the Bible have for Christian living? What would be your response if someone should ask you, "How do we decide which parts of the Bible are authoritative for us today?"

What suggestions could you offer someone who wants to find out what the Bible says about a specific problem?

Can you think of any particular problems for which the scriptures offer no precise answers? If so, how would you decide what is the right thing to do in such situations?

What is your understanding of how persons are to "love the Lord your God . . . with all your mind" (Mark 12:30)? How does loving God with our minds influence the way we think and what we do as Christians?

In this chapter, the author describes the Disciples mind as being biblical, reasonable, empirical, pragmatic, and ecumenical. To what extent do you regard these five principles as a valid approach for interpreting the scriptures?

Reflect on the affirmation that "within the universal church we receive . . . the light of scripture." To what extent do you listen to the "common mind" of the church for guidance in formulating your own interpretation of the scriptures?

How important is it for a disciple of Jesus to know the Bible and study it regularly? What, precisely, does it mean to *know* the Bible?

What new insights have you received from this chapter in regard to how Disciples of Christ have interpreted the Bible? To what extent has this discussion been helpful to you for seeking the light of scripture for your own understanding of the Christian life?

We confess that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of the living God,
and proclaim him Lord and Savior
of the world. . . .

Through baptism into Christ
we enter into newness of life
and are made one with the whole
people of God.

