

## ARTICLE: DOING THE CHALICE

### PURPOSE:

1. To write directly to those who now - or who will - administer the Wine/Chalice at a Communion\* service of some sort.
  2. To outline the invisible side of 'Communion\*' and its relevance to your ministry.
  3. To deal very thoroughly with virtually all aspects of its practical side, so that you can quickly feel at home with it.
  4. To provide additional short related notes from Scripture and history.  
[\* for use of terms - see below, Part I section 2.]
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### OUTLINE:

#### **PART I -Introduction**

1. Why this Article ?
2. Two Preliminary Notes
- 3 Drinkers or Communicants ?
4. Your Ministry - Visible & Invisible
5. The Choice of Minister and Title

#### **PART II - The Essence & Scope of Communion**

1. 'Communion' - The Word's Meanings
2. The Requirements of Communion
3. The Results of Communion

#### **PART III - Your Invisible Ministry**

1. Preparation
2. Prayer
3. Presentation

#### **PART IV - Practical Aspects of Serving**

1. General Care
2. Accidents Can Happen
3. A Need for Vigilance
4. The Chalice
5. Purificator/'Holy Hank'
6. Rotating ?
7. Drinking/Sipping ?
8. Supplementary Consecrations
9. Holding or Controlling ?
10. Hygiene
11. Ministering in Pairs
12. My Own Choice of Style

**PART V - Your Spoken Ministry**

1. The Words
2. Their Meaning

**PART VI - General Aspects of Your Serving**

1. Problems of Standing
2. Kneeling
3. Wheelchairs
4. Non-Communicant Adults
5. Non-Communicant Children
6. Informal Eucharists
7. Make His Way Straight

**PART VII - Some related Topics in Scripture & History**

1. Jews, Cups and Jesus
2. The Last Supper
3. The Eucharist
4. The Earliest Errors
5. The End of the Meal
6. Regal Chalices
7. The Two Chalices
8. 'Out of Reverence' so Out of Sight
9. Elevated Beliefs
10. The Question of Development
11. Reform
12. The Problem of Definitions
13. Some Fruits of Reform

## PART I - INTRODUCTION

### 1. Why this Article?

Detailed advice is never given to those who administer the Chalice.

'Don't drop it!' goes without saying - so no one dares say it! What else is there to say?

I have written this for you who 'Do the Chalice' because of the widespread assumption that all you do is give someone a drink. That's certainly all that a camera would see, because it cannot see the invisible realities of Christian 'Communion'.

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### 2. Two Preliminary Notes

#### a) USE of 'HE'

Instead of *he/she's* and *his/hers* I have opted instead for simply *he+* and *his+* as it makes easier reading for you. My plus sign (+) shows that the word means *more* than it might suggest, i.e. it includes *she* and *her*.

(The option of making everyone plural - *they* and *their* - to get gender-inclusive English clashed with my aim to address *you* personally and write about the individual communicant in front of you.)

#### b) WRITTEN for ALL

I have by-passed all denominational distinctions so that this article can help *all* Christians with this ministry. I have tried not to assume or promote any particular sacramental doctrine. I have tended to avoid definitions - especially narrow ones - because they can cause unnecessary division. (See Part VII, section 12: The Problem of Definitions.)

#### (i) The Service's Name

Since I view the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, the Mass, the Holy Communion and the Breaking of Bread as *essentially* the same, I had, for convenience, to choose one title to indicate all or any of them.

I opted for **Eucharist+** since it is simply the New Testament word for *giving-thanks* and is used of Jesus at the Last Supper [I Corinthians 11:24, Mark 14:23, etc]. As above, the plus symbol (+) shows that the word means *more* than it might suggest, and is inclusive, therefore, of *all* such services.

#### (ii) The Leader's Title

For the local Christian leader/priest/celebrant/minister/presbyter/superintendent/etc., I have opted for the Biblical term '**Minister+**'. It is not exclusive to 'Protestant' streams of Christianity, nor is it a divisive title. While a minister might not call himself+ a priest, any priest must gladly acknowledge, like St. Paul, that he+ is a *minister of Jesus Christ* [Romans 15:16]. In addition he+ will probably know that the NT word for *minister* is basically the same as its word for *liturgy*! As before, the plus symbol (+) shows that it means *more* than it suggests, i.e. *all* leaders of such services.

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### 3. Drinkers or Communicants ?

Our choice of language should expose the common error that equates 'Doing the Chalice' merely with offering a drink. We do not call those who drink the Wine the 'drinkers' but the 'communicants'. This description points beyond the visible to the invisible realities of Christian Communion, which this article reveals.

#### 4. Your Ministry - Visible & Invisible

Your ministry cannot but be involved with both the visible *and the invisible*. Although you will be concerned with the *physical* event of people drinking from the Chalice (which I deal with thoroughly in Parts IV-VI), you will be enriched by having some general understanding of what is likely to be happening *spiritually* around your ministry.

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#### 5. The Choice of Minister and Title

##### a) CHOICE

The choice of local Christian leaders of someone to administer the Chalice needs to be a person who is not simply competent on the physical side of Communion, but aware of its invisible realities.

##### b) TITLE

What should you be called? Since you 'administer the Chalice' you could be called an 'Administrator'. That cannot be used, however, because of its associations with detachment, status and power - which are the very opposite of your calling and ministry.

Your best title is undoubtedly - **Server**.

Although some other assistants in Christian worship are called Servers there is no reason not to extend its use. (If your particular role needs to be differentiated then **Server of the Wine** would do that nicely.)

I shall use **Server** because:

- We naturally speak of **servicing** both food and drink.
- Christ came among us *as one who serves* (literally 'as a deacon' - Luke 22:27).
- The title **Server**, therefore, relates your ministry closely to Christ himself.

## PART II - THE ESSENCE & SCOPE OF COMMUNION

### 1. 'Communion' - The Word's Meanings

#### a) RANGE OF MEANINGS

The word 'Communion' can be used for a world-wide fellowship of Christians; a name for the Eucharist+; a description of partaking of the Bread and Wine, and the name given the Bread and Wine when taken to the sick.

As a Server you will be most interested in the King James's translation of I Corinthians 10:16 -

*...the cup of blessing which we bless  
is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?*

*Communion* is an interesting and unusual word.

- *Com* means to join, but
- *Union* also indicates a joining.

It thus repeats the same meaning for emphasis - *together/together* ! You can't get much more together than that!

#### b) GOD TO US

'Communion' indicates that most incredible joining imaginable, the comings together of -

- God to us
- and
- us to God.

The reality and result of that double-togetherness is vividly expressed in the widely-used words -

*...that we may evermore dwell in him  
and he in us.*

It is right and helpful that the word 'Communion' is used not just of partaking of the Bread and Wine, but of the Eucharist+ itself. All true Christian worship offers us the reality of 'communion' with the Risen Christ, since he promised to be wherever *two or three are gathered in* [his] *name* (Matthew 18:20).

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Author's Note: *Before* consecration I write - bread and wine  
*After* consecration I write - Bread and Wine.

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## 2. The Requirements of Communion

#### a) GOD'S INVITATION

A much-loved concept of the Risen Christ is of him standing, knocking, and waiting at the door of our being to be welcomed in by us. It is based on Revelation 3:20 which runs -

*Be earnest, therefore,  
and repent.  
Listen!  
I am standing at the door knocking;  
if you hear my voice  
and open the door,  
I will come in to you*

*and eat with you,  
and you with me.*

The Eucharist+ (of whatever name), by its ministry of both Word and Sacrament, works through a similar sequence to the Scripture above.

It starts with the Ministry of the Word, which encourages our *earnestness* and *repentance*. It then inevitably moves on to God's response, with his offer of personal forgiveness to those who repent.

### **b) GOD'S REQUIREMENTS**

Note the order of our responses implied by the text of Revelation 3:20

<b>Repenting</b>	to God
<b>Hearing</b>	from God
<b>Opening</b>	for God
<b>Table-fellowship</b>	with God

- We must *repent* before we can *hear*.
- We must *open* before we may *eat* together.

The greater the emphasis, teaching and expectancy placed on the Bread and Wine, the more likely that the three preliminary necessities to *repent*, to *hear*, and to *open* will be underplayed. But note -

- A willingly opened *mouth* does not guarantee a willingly opened *heart*.  
(The Christian church would be transformed if that were so!)
- The opening of both mouth and heart require an act of the *will*.
- God does *not over-ride* our free-will because it is his precious gift to us.
- Christ stands at the door until such time as we *open* to him.
- Christ's fullest entry into the depths of our lives is dependent upon *us*.

***IF you hear my voice - and open the door - I will come in...***

Note the importance of '*if*' in the process - it is not automatic.

At the time of a holy Communion two things are always happening -

- God is offering himself,
- We are responding (positively or negatively) to God.

In your ministry of serving, you will be helped by being a little aware of the invisible realities, encounters and blessings going on around you as God and individuals join one another.

### **c) SEEING THE INVISIBLE!**

What a daft heading! We cannot see the invisible, of course! (This is a major problem to all followers of an invisible God!)

However,

- While we cannot see the invisible, we can (often later) see its results.
- Christianity has had a 2,000-year history of God's dealing with Jesus's followers.
- That provides a huge database of experience from which we can see the patterns and characteristics of God's person and purposes unfolding in history. These confirm and underline his revelation of himself through Christ in Scripture.
- Basic human needs remain much the same in every age and in every land.

- God, being God, is unchanging in his character, so remains faithful to us.
- Experience shows that Jesus Christ '*meets us at our point of need.*'

In Section 3 (below) I list some typical examples of how God is likely to be working among those you serve. My list (however unfamiliar to you) is not fanciful but rooted in Christian history past and present. It should increase your faith in God's love, and help you to minister to each person with fresh wonder, a more active hope and a truer expectancy.

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### 3. The Results of Communion

Before looking at God's responses, here's a reminder of some of the needs he faces.

#### a) SOME POINTS OF NEED

H. Twell's lovely healing hymn reminds us of some of your communicants' needs -

*You do not change, dear Lord, so we  
oppressed with various ills draw near,  
although your form we cannot see,  
we know, and feel, that you are here.*

*Dear Saviour Christ, our fears dispel  
for some are sick and some are sad,  
and some have never loved you well  
and some have lost the love they had.*

*And some have found the world in vain,  
afraid, they know not what to do,  
and some have friends that give them pain,  
yet have not found a friend in you.*

*And none, O Lord, have perfect rest  
for none are wholly free from sin,  
and those who aim to love you best  
are conscious most of wrong within...*

[Revised 2003 © John Richards/Help for Christians.]

#### b) GOD'S RESPONSES

Here, then, is a selection of the *sort of things* that can begin to happen when needy folk open their lives to God. At a Eucharist+ and during its Communion such processes tend to get under way, go more deeply, or be given increased momentum. There should certainly be change.

- Some will be burdened by their past and unable to deal with it. They may begin to meet in the living God - a love, an understanding, an offer of forgiveness, and the power to live a new life.  
*Forgive us our sins...*
- Some will be deeply fearful of what lies ahead, but whose trust in God will be kindled afresh by a new encounter with him.  
*Give us this day...*

- Some young people will be suffering the pain and split-up of their parents. God will come to them as an utterly reliable and loving parent-figure in whom they can trust, and who will offer support, strength and purpose. ***Our Father...***
- Some will attend who acknowledge God but have never knowingly met him or felt the need to. They experience 'communion' only with friends. Your role may be to supply that non-fussy quietness that will enable them to ***hear his voice*** for the first time, ***and open the door*** and experience the real Presence of Jesus as Lord.
- Some will come who are captive to forces beyond their understanding and control. In the Eucharist+ of worship, word and sacrament, their freedom may get underway as they enjoy Christ's protection of those he loves. ***Deliver us from evil.***
- Some will come most deeply scarred, but will relate to the Lord Jesus because of his Cross and their sharing in his Body broken and his Blood outpoured. Through Christ's sharing *their* passion they may be put on the road to share in his Resurrection.  
***Serve him in newness of life***
- Some will come under great stress - e.g. young people doing exams. God will not offer them success, but guidance, peace, and an inner strength to achieve a fair result that reflects their gifts and efforts.
- Some will come doubting their worth but will begin to be lifted to a new status, experiencing that it was for *them* that Christ's Body was broken and Blood outpoured.  
***...which was shed for you***
- Some will come broken-hearted, and find in encountering Christ for the first time - or afresh - one whose ministry included the ***'binding up'*** of such wounds.
- Some, like Zacchaeus, will need to ***come down*** from a false and unreliable status to a humble reality of their true worth. Worship is 'worth-ship', where we experience God's worth to us and our worth to him - a transforming truth never more real than when partaking of the Christ's Bread and Wine.
- Some will have needs that involve others more than themselves - the sick spouse, the aborted baby, the cruel husband, the secret affair, the handicapped child, the pagan loved one, the broken marriage, the aged parent and so on. Communicants bring these in their hearts to God, and he will begin to touch them as Jesus transformed the lives of those distant from him - e.g. the Centurion's servant [Matthew 8:5-13, see also Mark 7:25-30, John 4:46-54].  
God, of course, is aware of the burden carried by the loving bystander who comes to him, and will, as Jesus did, ease his+ anxiety by encouragement and hope.

***Go, be it done as you believed it would. (NIV)***

Such a list could go on endlessly. Some readers, unfamiliar with these realities, may feel that I've become detached from ordinary church life! What is the truth of the matter?

### c) SACRAMENTS

Christians vary slightly in what they term a 'Sacrament', but they often affirm that other things can be 'sacramental' in character. How Christians decide is usually based on the sacrament being -

- *An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace...*

This definition has, without change, served Christians since Augustine first used it in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The compilers of the influential Book of Common Prayer used it a thousand years later, and it has stood the test of time.



If my teaching seems extreme, rest assured that it is 'extreme centre'. I accept fully Augustine's definition of a sacrament. I write to make it real in experience, not just in theological theory. I do not accept anyone's assumption that a sacrament should be redefined as -

- *An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.*

My long list (above) showing how God changes lives is not fanciful, but a sober record of what can happen when such *inward and spiritual grace* is given, received and nurtured.

In modern terms, sacraments are *not* - repeat *not* - WYSIWYG ('What You See Is What You Get!')

- In a sacrament or sacramental act what you see  
can be the merest fraction of what you get!

- whether it is the water you see at Baptism, the Bread or Wine you see at the Eucharist+, the hands you see in Confirmation or Ordination, or the oil you see anointing the sovereign or the sick.

How sad it is when Servers like yourself, who are privileged to enable the '*outward and visible sign*' of drinking, are unaware of the '*inward and spiritual grace*' at work in and around their ministry.

#### **d) PRESENCE - POWER OR PARALYSIS?**

The witness of Scripture is proof enough that we cannot think of God in other than *active* terms. He is usually described as *doing* something - often rescuing.

- In the Old Testament, the Jews describe God as the one who *brought them out of the land of Egypt* [Leviticus 19:36].
- In the New Testament, Christians describe him as the one who *raised Christ Jesus from the dead* [Colossians 2:12].

Christian worship - in which God is invited to be present - cannot be *normal* if God is not active within it. *The Lord is here! His Spirit is with us!* God cannot come to us paralysed - even if we wish to greet him that way! It is we who tend to be bound like Lazarus, and need to be brought forth - not he!

There are then these two truths -

- **God meets us at our point of need**
- and
- **'Communion' is about meeting.**

These truths are probably acceptable, in theory, to virtually every Christian.

God *has to respond* to the needs of those he loves - as, to a lesser degree, do you and I find ourselves unable to do otherwise.

How can so many Christians keep quite apart God's Presence and his action?

It is simple logic on my part - not some extreme fringe enthusiasm - that leads me to claim that if God is King he must rule, if Saviour he must save, if Healer he must heal, if Light he must enlighten, if Deliverer he must deliver, if Shield he must protect, if Redeemer he must redeem, if Comforter he must strengthen, if Father he must care!

*...ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me his praise should sing?* (H.F.Lyte)

- Any doctrine that stresses the reality of God's Presence must include the inevitability and reality of God's *action*!

You cannot have one without the other. God's Presence simply *cannot* leave things unchanged! He comes as water to a wilting flower, as yeast to bread, as air to a balloon, as light to darkness and as spring to winter. Where God is - there is **transformation**.

To hold any other view denies God's revelation of himself in Scripture, and is illogical. Some Christians hold assumptions that, if true, would have God thinking like this:

*I know Sharon longs to meet me afresh; I will meet with her on Sunday at the Eucharist+. It is a pity about her broken heart; I'll not be able to bind that up until the fifth Sunday of the month when they have an evening healing service! Though, come to think of it, her Vicar cancelled it last time because of the very bad weather, and because he couldn't get an organist, and because the heating system had packed up!' So she may have to wait some months for that!*

If God is present he comes in power - not paralysis! His Presence is not static - like the presence of a corpse in a sepulchre, or useless like a ghost. His Presence is active. Christ comes to make his communions with each of us in his risen power.

- Lord, King, Saviour, Judge, Healer, Comforter, Shepherd, and so on. We use such titles not as historical honours bestowed on a past religious leader, but because they are the present activities of our risen Lord among us.

#### e) GRACE UNRECOGNISED

There are many reasons why God's working is not recognised.

##### (i) Unconnected

When folk do not expect God to work and change us, they fail to notice when he does, or even to make the connection.

- It is probably *not* a co-incidence when, after a Eucharist+, a person is able at last to write that letter of apology after ten years.
- It is probably *not* a coincidence that, following the forgiveness and new life of a Eucharist+ Communion with God, a person's tension-headache is lessened.
- It is probably *not* a co-incidence that, following a Eucharist+, a young person finds it easier to buckle down to their studies.
- It is probably *not* a coincidence that, following Communion, a person finds a gradual release from a compulsion for which he+ felt he+ would never be free.

Such invisible connections cannot be proven, but Scripture, Christian experience and reason all suggest that in the majority of cases they occurred because of a fresh imparting of God's *inward and spiritual grace* - received, and used. Such things are happening all the time. Christians tend not to notice, so they cannot discern the link.

Some folk will hesitate to make such links as I have done for fear of being thought unreasonable. They need not fear. For quite clearly it is those who expect a living encounter with God himself to change *nothing*, that are the unreasonable ones!

(ii) Christian Spectrum

Another factor that might make my list of God's workings seem extreme is the vast range of difference between Christian groups and churches. Those that naturally operate spiritually, and which run on prayer as a car runs on petrol, will expect God to work and will not be disappointed. But, sadly, not all churches and fellowships are like that. In the 1970's David Edwards could write that the church was the last place you would expect to encounter the supernatural - but times have changed, and a mighty thaw has happened since then. Some ice-bound spots remain but they are no longer the norm.

(iii) Static Security

Another factor in the apparent discrepancy between my list and the average Christian experience is that human nature simply does not welcome change, but feels secure when things are static. Just as there are sufferers who prefer the security of their illness to the demands of health, so there are entire Christian groupings that want only the comfort of the Presence of God. They do not want - or cannot face - the ever-changing, and sometimes hair-raising, adventure in obedient growth that marks true Christian discipleship. They affirm God's Presence (which in a secular society is good and important) but they don't want God to be active.

One can imagine a parent insisting on the reality of Father Christmas to her daughter, but having a heart attack when a soot-covered fat man rolled out from her fireplace onto her lounge carpet! To enjoy his imagined presence was one thing - but to experience him was quite another!

Put to the test in your own life what I have said. Invite God to be active, to meet you at your place of need. Bring your needs and problems to your Eucharist+, expect God to start dealing with them - and note when and how he does.

**f) CONFERENCES**

Christian experience at Conferences generally differs from weekly worship at home. Even devout Sunday worshippers only give God a couple of busy hours at most (for most Christian worship is excessively busy!).

At Christian conferences, however, people can stop and give God a few days or even a week, rather than hours. A Eucharist+ that concludes a week spent in communion with God may well celebrate and seal some wonderful acts of God in people's lives which have been taking root or blossoming during the previous days of retreat/preparation.

Such gatherings can be both negative and positive. They can become negative if Christians tend to locate God elsewhere rather than on their home patch. They can be positive if they reveal more clearly the sort of things God longs to do 'back home'.

Back home, the easiest way to open worship to God's action, as well as to his Presence, is to brush the veneer of familiarity off all the words, and treat them as if you were hearing them for the first time, and that they mean exactly what they say: *The Lord is here!*

## **PART III - YOUR INVISIBLE MINISTRY**

### **1. Preparation**

#### **a) FASTING**

Many Christians traditionally fast before the Eucharist+, as a way of expressing its priority in their lives. Scripture does not require us to do so before the Eucharist+, but it is an appropriate and meaningful discipline. It is a personal thing and if you have a soul-friend or spiritual-director talk about it with him+ if it is an issue.

Bear in mind that it is one thing for a devout and disciplined member of the congregation to feel a little weak or slightly dizzy for a moment or two, to sit down, and then, perhaps, even be driven home. It is quite another thing if this happens to the Server of the Wine! If you would be prone to such spells if you did *not* eat, the sensible course is to eat enough before the service for your particular metabolism to function reliably - bearing in mind that none of us is quite the same in such matters.

Like so many aspects of Christian behaviour and devotion it is a matter of priorities. When I have been on duty as a priest - in whatever capacity - I have always tried to put my physical well-being first, since the inability of a public speaker or Eucharistic+ Minister+ to continue has such discomfiting and complex repercussions among any assembly of Christians, that I would do almost anything to avoid causing that. To eat as much as necessary rather than fast would be my own personal way to try and ensure that my service to others is as reliable as possible. (I might well fast on the day before.)

#### **(b) DON'T RUN ON EMPTY**

Give your Serving ministry the priority and time it requires.

- Don't be tired
- Don't be rushed

You will not minister well if you are weary. Good ministry 'takes it out of you'; if tiredness has already done that, it means that you will be running on 'empty'. (It comes near to cheating to assume that God will automatically enliven you for ministry, and that there is therefore no reason for you to avoid tiredness!) Make sure you run on 'full' - for God's sake and for his people.

Do not let mismanagement and any lack of discipline rob you of time. Rushing runs counter to spiritual health. While God gives us peace, rushing gives us anxiety.

When things go wrong and I cannot find my keys and have mislaid my glasses and maybe I've left the car unlocked and did I let the dog out and what about the gas... !!! (In too much of a whirl even to insert commas!)

You know exactly what I mean - and it generally happens because we lacked the discipline to allow ourselves sufficient time.

You are doing this ministry for God himself. It is not a casual thing, like popping into a neighbour, but a royal calling and a divine task. Give it your royal treatment, and grant it the time it deserves. Only in that way will you bring to the Communion of others a peace, prayer and poise that can enrich what God is doing rather than contaminate and cloud everything around you with anxiety.

## 2. Prayer

There are communicants who hear proclaimed 'The Lord is here!' and who respond 'His Spirit is with us!' but who assume that nothing should happen as a result! Has Scripture and its exposition taught them nothing? Unaware of the invisible blessings God is offering them, they cannot receive because their hearts are not open to *feed on him...with thanksgiving*.

This (all too common) frozen situation is one which the Server of the Wine should do everything possible to melt - and the main means of doing that is by your prayers and your presence.

### a) PRAYER POINTERS

Here, then, are some prayer pointers - not so much to guide you as to encourage you.

(i) The rightness of your Christian life and Christian commitment has a bearing on the quality, authenticity and sensitivity of your ministry of serving.

(ii) You should prepare for ministry, therefore, by trying to ensure as far as possible that you have re-adjusted your current distortions, that you are in what has traditionally been called 'a state of grace' - reconciled and forgiven. Relationships and priorities should be in God's good order, sins dealt with, and you should be *intending to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in his holy ways*.

To put it at its most stark: if you were not on speaking terms with somebody, you would not be the ideal person to administer God's love and acceptance to them!

(iii) You should ask God to share his shepherd's heart for those of his flock to whom you will minister.

(iv) During the earlier parts of the service pray for 'your' communicants that they would allow God to use each part to minister to them - to forgive sins, to reconcile, to change priorities, to govern choices, to renew their minds, to strengthen their faith, to deepen their understanding, to increase their commitment, to focus their callings, to strengthen their weaknesses, and so on and so on - in other words, the invisible realities of normal Christian worship.

(v) When you receive the Bread and Wine yourself, pray that God will enable you to minister visibly *and invisibly* to those who come. Recall the words (even if not part of your liturgy) '***That we may evermore dwell in him and he in us.***' Pray that communicants will encounter Christ *in you* as well as in the Communion which you partly enable.

(vi) Servers - more especially men than women I suspect - can experience the intrusion of the most inappropriate thoughts. I would regard this as the results of a (fairly predictable) spiritual attack at a key occasion aimed to undermine your confidence and calling. Never let it do any such thing! Now that you have read this you'll be prepared not to be over-disturbed or shaken by them. Just shrug them off and press on. Do not play it the devil's way and exaggerate it or wallow in self-criticism. Treat such thoughts or temptations as little more than a spiritual hiccup - something over which you have little control, is regrettable, but insignificant.

(vii) Most servers will find it impossible to keep spiritually focused throughout their time administering the Wine, and it is probably as well not to try too hard to do so. But the action and the words are repetitive, and so do not always retain our full attention.

### **(b) A FOCUS**

To help focus my thoughts - but without strain - I have, over many years, found it helpful to imagine that I was giving each communicant a blessing. I envisage myself making a sign of the Cross slowly over them, and allow my eyes to trace the pattern of the Cross over them. It will have no value in itself - least of all would I regard it as any sort of magical action. Its usefulness for me lies in its ability to keep me and my mind reasonably focused on Christ when I might otherwise tend to wander off!

[This habit developed from my long-established way of praying for people. If I am in the church congregation, prior to Communion I would naturally pray for the rows of people sitting in front of me. I would mentally go along each row, and ask God's blessing upon each of them. I would mentally use words but also mentally make the sign of the Cross over them, as an aid to my praying for them - as an expression of my intention that they would move even deeper into the Gospel and closer to their Lord. The Cross can be used in many ways in our devotions. Its downward stroke has, to me, always related to the widespread need of Christians to have God move what they know about him from their heads down to their hearts! The late Edgar Trout used to say that he was bald because God had to hit him so much on the head to accomplish precisely this!]

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## **3. Presentation**

### **a) APPEARANCE**

Your appearance matters. If we want God to be the communicant's focus, we do not want dirty shoes, frayed cuffs, chipped nail varnish or dirty nails to predominate their limited view, interrupt their thoughts or trouble their minds.

Dirty trainers/sneakers may be wholly acceptable to the younger generations, but communicants consist of *all* generations. The older ones will have been brought up to admire and respect a man+ with clean shoes and to distrust a man+ who obviously does not bother himself with such things.

### **b) ROYAL OCCASION**

It can come as a considerable cultural shock to older generations to find someone with the status you have in the Church acting publicly without (in their mind) bothering even to clean your shoes. In Britain it would be assumed that you would wear clean shoes to see the Queen - and they rightly put God and the House of God above Buckingham Palace. It may seem quaint to you, but it is not an inappropriate way of thinking, and should be highly respected - even if you wish not to aspire to it yourself.



## **PART IV - PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF SERVING**

### **1. General Care**

There are no boundaries to ministering God's love, so don't be so totally preoccupied with serving the Wine that everything that is happening around you passes you by.

Within a few feet of you there will - from time to time - be those whom you can help, directly or indirectly, with just a glance, a nod of the head, or a small hand-gesture. It is good to be aware of them. Some will be asking themselves

- where shall we go?
- should we stand?
- ought we to be kneeling?
- should we be having the Bread and Wine?
- are they expecting to pray for us?
- what should we be doing with the kids?
- should we return to our seats now?
- which way do we get back?
- how do I get up from kneeling? (I do it so rarely that I didn't realise that my knees can't get me up any more!)

The Church is being user-*un*-friendly when it puts people into such positions. To make matters worse, it more or less insists on silence, discouraging them therefore from asking questions, and puts us in no position to answer them verbally! That's no way to treat newcomers!

I value quiet, but I have always regarded it as a bit of a contradiction when good Christian devotion gets so tram-lined that it prohibits Christians from loving their neighbours!

Fortunately for these sorts of situation there is likely to be a Server of the Wine who is on the spot and who is caring and sensitive about such anxieties.

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### **2. Accidents Can Happen**

Never allow yourself to forget how very unusual some Christian practices are. We all eat bread and drink - but how very differently we expect people to do those things in church!

If Wafers are used (rather than real bread) they are not bulky enough to be firmly held. Christians usually receive these in cupped hands. Anglicans (for some reason as yet unknown to me) tend to keep their hands flat, have the Wafer on their palm, and then take it into their mouth by a 'lapping' action of the tongue. Such un-cupped hands, especially among the elderly, can mean that (very, very occasionally) a Wafer might slide up a sleeve or slip to the floor. Depending on the communicant's beliefs, it might not matter much, or it might cause him+ the most considerable distress and embarrassment imaginable. Be prepared for that. He+ will probably be too enclosed by other communicants and a communion rail to be able to retrieve it.

Consecration does not seem to prevent a Wafer from sliding downhill, any more than - as you will learn later - it enables Wine to flow uphill!

I have mentioned a stray Wafer here because, if it happens at all, you, the Server of the Wine, may be the only person to see it, and perhaps the one to take steps to put it right.

Each situation is different, so no fixed instruction can be given. But reading this, and facing the possibility (however remote), will equip you to think and act in the best way should such a situation occur. Use this article if necessary to raise it with your church leaders. It is better for the subject to be aired *positively* before it occurs, rather than discussed *negatively* afterwards.

- Do nothing that would 'enlarge' the incident by drawing attention to it. Continue to act reverently and discretely.
- Don't over-react or rush. You'll be holding a Chalice of Wine. It is likely that some *other* person should be the one to retrieve the dropped wafer.
- Dismiss any thought of the communicant being 'guilty'.
- Promptly alert the Server of the Bread to supply and administer another Wafer (for he+ will have them to hand) and, hopefully, he+ may retrieve the dropped one.
- By your style minimise any distress and guilt on the communicant's part.
- Put the communicant's needs first.
- If the Wafer has fallen on the floor, it would for a number of reasons (in my view) not be appropriate for the communicant then to eat it. To take such a line smacks of a parent punishing a child for wrong-doing.
- Since we would not dream of serving someone food off the floor at home, there is surely no reason to do so in church, especially as other arrangements can so easily be made.
- Try and contact the person before he+ leaves the service, to cement your very important 'all is well' message. This you will do perhaps more by your warm style of personal acceptance than by anything you say.

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### 3. A Need for Vigilance

#### a) Use and Misuse

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries communicants each brought a contribution of bread and wine to the service, and afterwards they would take home a little consecrated Bread to make their communion on weekdays. In later times, Christians who wanted to share the Sacrament with, say, a sick relative at home, would remove the Bread to take to them. Since this encouraged superstition, and local Christian leaders had no oversight concerning what was done with it, the church banned such practices. It is perhaps to discourage this that in some traditions the Wafer is placed directly on the tongue of each communicant.

The tradition of receiving the Bread on the open flat palm of one's hand (mentioned in the last section) was probably a precaution to prevent a communicant taking it away.

Today, some terrible misuse does continue. You should be aware of its remote possibility because as the Server of the Wine you could be the first person - perhaps the only person - to spot it.

People who choose to identify with real evil, e.g. those involved in Black Magic / Satanism, can attach more importance to the Christian sacraments than do some Christians! Since they know the reality of cursing, they accept the reality of Christian consecration and blessing. To them, therefore, the consecrated



Bread is such a potent symbol of Jesus Christ that it is the most obvious item for the vilest satanic desecration that they can devise - way beyond their well-known penchant for inverting crucifixes.

#### **[[b) THE RIGHT WAY UP**

I cannot let mention of inverted crucifixes pass without expressing the quite unnecessary pain it can cause a communicant who loves his+ Lord to be served a crucifix-embossed Wafer in its hatred-of-Jesus position, i.e. *upside down*. Probably all of us would naturally share a photo of a loved-one to a friend by passing it the right way up. Why don't Servers of the Bread do the same? Since we love Jesus, why cannot we adopt the same natural courtesy to him and to communicants?

If crucifix-embossed Wafers are used, Servers of the Bread should *not* present them downward in the hatred-of-Jesus position. It is simple enough to avoid this. In over forty years I have never *ever* offered a Wafer in its Satanist position, (but to be fair, crucifix-style Wafers have not cropped up very much in my ministry). It is quite easy to get into the habit of righting any inverted crucifixes. It is not difficult, costly or time-consuming - and even if it were it should, in my opinion, still be done!

If Servers are unwilling to show this small courtesy to communicants, then persuade your local church leaders to have either plain wafers or wafers with a simple + on them. These avoid the problem completely, because however placed, they never appear inverted.

I am sorry to digress slightly, but publicly to make known my view on inverted Wafers may well help others to whom it gives pain not to let it pass, and to bring nearer the day when it is only done by Satanists, and not by Christians.

If you are a communicant and are given such an inverted Wafer, I suggest that quietly and discreetly you right it before consuming it. This is not only appropriate, but acting to put it right can offset the pain of the event for you.

You could share with your minister the distress such careless serving causes you, or simply show him a printout of this page.]]

#### **c) SPIRITUAL FRONT LINE**

Some churches retain the consecrated Bread for devotions or for Eucharists+ in home or hospital. Consecrated Wafers can, therefore, sometimes be stolen from a church's aumbry or safe. A more risky method is for a Satanist to go to a large gathering of Christians – e.g. on Christmas Eve - and hope to pass unnoticed. While pretending to be a communicant, he takes the Wafer but does not consume it. Instead he presses it onto a sticky patch in the roof of his mouth.

The Revd Reg Allen, a Rural Dean whose Curate I was many years ago, told me when a man tried this on. The man picked the wrong vicar! Reg was a huge, tough, rugby-playing ex-RAF Chaplain; he held the man's wrist in an iron grip and made him eat the Consecrated Bread!

Such an occasion is very rare, and I have not mentioned it to make you uneasy. I did so because it is a timely reminder that at the Communion you stand at the front line of God's Kingdom-forces pushing back and exposing the darkneses of the world. It is a place where the invisible is as real and as important as the visible - and it is good to have some idea of it. (So much more will be happening than is implied by the phrase 'Doing the Chalice'!)

If anti-Christians are aware of God's Presence and power at work in and around our Christian sacraments - how much more should *we* see them in their real and full dimensions?

## 4. The Chalice

### a) JUST A CUP?

When would-be communicants are first prepared, the Chalice - in an attempt to make it less off-putting - is often described as 'just a cup'. That is unlikely to give much reassurance, since it is utterly unlike any *cup* that they will ever have seen or used!

We know what a 'cup' is like. But the average Chalice is huge, has no handle, is top-heavy when filled, is not made of china, has no saucer, and looks as if it has been stolen from a museum! The nearest thing a home might have to a chalice would probably be grandad's golf trophy!

To the comparative outsider, the Chalice is a very strange object, and to make matters worse, Christians appear to treat it oddly as well!

Christian leaders expect a person to use it immediately *after other people have done so*. That is something that in many Western cultures feels too repugnant to be allowed to happen at home.

If you doubt the reality of what can be felt, the playwright Alan Bennett has described how, when young, because of his mother's extreme emphasis on hygiene, he would habitually - very shortly after communicating - spit the Wine out into his handkerchief for fear of infection. Alan Bennett may not be that unusual in feeling this way. What is unusual is his willingness to let others know about it.

As well as expecting people to drink from the same cup the church tells them one thing but expects another. It says 'Drink' but means 'Sip'! (See Drinking/Sipping in Part IV, Section 7.)

You need to be sensitive to such real fears and anxieties that others may have of those things with which you are so familiar.

As a Server of the Wine you may not be directly responsible for the teaching and training of those who receive the Sacrament, but you *can* use your knowledge and experience to see that Christian teachers take steps to minimise the strains of unfamiliarity among those they instruct.

### b) UNFAMILIARITY

If unfamiliarity is not dealt with, the stress it creates will result in newcomers to Communion being pre-occupied with themselves rather than enjoying the things of God.

Among younger people, giggling and 'being silly' are usually signs of embarrassment. If this happens, the young person has been inadequately prepared. (The symptoms of similar embarrassment among adults can usually be stifled with more success - although their fear can be even greater.)

As well as teaching about the Sacraments, leaders should take active steps to minimise all anxiety among future communicants that might drag their attention away from the wonder and joy of their 'Communion' with God himself.

As far as the Chalice is concerned, this is easily done, and should be started some weeks *before* a person's first Communion (so that it does not get missed by those who are absent from the last teaching sessions!)

- Have one, or more, Chalices at the place of teaching.
- Allow the young people to handle it/them in a relaxed way.
- Explain to them why a Chalice is like it is (see d) SHAPE & FUNCTION).

- If possible let them sip from it. (If you are uneasy about this see next section.)
- Aim to get them completely familiar with what the Chalice feels like and how they will be expected to use it at their first Communion.
- Allow them to draw it, and/or to make designs for one, and/or see Chalices depicted in art.
- The leader will not, of course, encourage silliness, but should allow folk to be silly and giggly if their fear and anxiety are such that they cannot help it. Once such anxiety surfaces it can begin to disappear for good! If, however, the teacher represses this emotion, it will bubble to the surface at an *in*-appropriate time. The teacher should create an 'appropriate time' - when such symptoms of strain can run their course without criticism or embarrassment.
- By getting the giggles over-and-done-with in classes, they will never appear in worship to embarrass the individual and hamper his+ own worship, and perhaps disturb others.
- Communicants find it easier to focus on the reality of Christ's Blood shed for them, once they have got over their anxiety and embarrassment at sipping Wine from a heavy handle-less medieval-looking goblet!

[The following section is written for those who are uneasy at using the Chalice for non-sacramental drinking by future communicants. If this does *not* worry you, skip to section d).]

#### e) INFORMAL USE ?

I realise that any informal use of the Chalice may be a new idea to some readers - and may even shock some. If so, please look at my reasons for suggesting it which are quite clear.

- (i) The practical difficulty of obtaining a chalice that is *not* used for Communion.
- (ii) The conviction that reverence requires a certain inner-stillness, but fear and embarrassment create an inner turmoil.
- (iii) That dealing with fear and embarrassment is necessary *before* a right reverence and a deep 'Communion' can be experienced.
- (iv) The Chalice is not an end in itself, but a *means* to an end. Its 'sacredness' derives from its task, which is to contribute usefully to the making of a true 'holy Communion' in a Christian's life.
- (v) My steps to diffuse fear and embarrassment by using the Chalice in a limited way informally, *is using it for exactly the same end*, i.e. to ensure that it contributes to a 'holy Communion' event in the life of each individual being prepared.
- (vi) I see this very restricted use of the Chalice outside of formal liturgy to be compatible with its use within it.
- (vii) Examine my motive and purpose before you dismiss the idea.
- (viii) If there are Christians under an almost legal requirement *not* to use their Chalice in such a way, then my comments should not be taken to imply that they should, merely that others may.

#### d) SHAPE & FUNCTION

Working upwards, Chalices have four parts -

- A large **base**
- A **stem**
- A large **knob** (on the stem)
- A **drinking bowl**

##### (i) Base

- The **base** is large and heavy to act as something of a counterweight to the drinking-bowl at its top when filled with wine.
- It was found that if Chalices had round bases they could roll off a worktop, when laid down during washing or cleaning. To prevent this they redesigned their bases with straight sides - usually six.

- One of the sides is usually marked or decorated in some way to indicate the 'front' of the Chalice (to which I make reference below).

(ii) Stem

- The **stem** from the base supports the drinking bowl and tapers considerably. In the absence of handles, this enables the Chalice to be held very easily because the stem is narrow enough to have added to it a vitally useful knob, or knop.

(iii) Knob

- The **knob** (midway between the bottom and top of the Chalice) makes the stem easy to hold. There is never any worry that it could 'slip through your fingers', as a straight-sided tumbler might.
- Furthermore, its position midway between the weight of the base and the weight of the Wine-filled bowl means that it can naturally act as a pivot - like the centre of a see-saw. This is a great help to the Server. (See e) THE ART OF PIVOTING)

(iv) Bowl

- The shape of a Chalice **bowl** is usually like the shape of half of an egg - not like a mug with parallel sides.
- A few Chalices have a tulip style bowl, i.e., they start tapering towards the rim. Fortunately these are fairly rare because they make it difficult for the Server to see what is going on!
- There are some bowls - the opposite of the tulip design - that are wok-shaped. They are usually small and are well suited to serving bedridden communicants, especially if they cannot sit up very much.

Implications

- The Chalice design, with only one knob to hold and without multiple handles, was simply *not* made for passing from one person to another. Only one person can hold the knob at any one time, so that the person to whom it is handed is immediately at a disadvantage both in having to use two hands, and in not having its one knob/handle available for his+ use. The receiver ends up holding it where it was never intended to be held, by its base and by its usually very smooth bowl.
- Since the heavy base counterbalances the Wine-filled bowl, and the holding-knob is the natural place to hold it, the Server can pivot the Chalice.

**e) ART OF PIVOTING**

Let me explain 'pivoting'.

Imagine holding a Chalice upright with one hand - holding the side of the base nearest you. If you tipped the drinking-bowl *away* from you (as if to offer a drink) at 45 degrees, your other hand would have quickly to support the bowl, because the Chalice could no longer be held one-handed by its base. In fact the moment it is not vertical it can require two hands.

To pivot the Chalice, hold it one-handed by its knob. To offer a drink, tip the drinking-bowl *away* from you. The Chalice will naturally pivot where you are holding it and its base will swing gently *towards* you. This basically one-handed action means that you spend much more time standing upright.

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**5. Purificator / 'Holy Hank'**

If you hold the chalice by just one hand, this frees your other hand for the purificator, or 'holy hank' as it is popularly called.

This is a small linen square (about 10" / 25cms), which is reduced to a third of its size by having two opposite sides folded inward. Keep it folded this way. It is not unlike a miniature version of a towel on a rail, and can hang effortlessly over the second finger of your other hand. You don't have consciously to hold it, since your first finger rests on top of it and prevents it slipping. My personal view is to avoid opening it out when it can get bulky and a bit out of control, and to keep it folded so that it remains small and unobtrusive.

Its purpose, obviously, is to enable the Server to wipe the rim of the Chalice after each person has drunk from it. This is easily done by simply moving the hand holding it up against the far side of the drinking-bowl to the rim. Usually there seems little need to clean *over* the rim, but Servers do testify to lipstick occurring on the inside - so there are occasions when some 'inside' cleaning is necessary - but when that happens you'll be able to see it.

This is a neat and tidy move, and is easy to perform without unfolding the purificator. However, diligent sacristans, or their assistants, tend to over-starch such items and what should be your soft flexible cloth can become a recalcitrant white bundle with a life of its own!

One Server (a doctor who helped me by reading an earlier draft of this) feels that unless we 'turn' the purificator - as we would naturally use different areas of a tea-towel to dry something - it may simply replace what has been removed!

You might assume that the major problem of using a single cup is saliva. No! It's lipstick! Since you cannot see the far side of the drinking bowl, watch out for communicants wearing heavy lipstick and ensure that their unintentional donation of half of it to the church gets off the Chalice and onto your purificator where it belongs! It is very unpleasant for someone to drink where there is a greasy splurge of someone's red lipstick. That's an experience best kept for a motorway service station - not a Eucharist+.

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## 6. Rotating?

This raises the question of whether the Server of the Wine should rotate the Chalice slightly after each Communicant.

- The advantage is that communicants *feel* that they are sipping from an unused surface. (Although after the first dozen communicants the Chalice has probably turned full circle, and that may no longer be true.)
- It does mean that the entire rim of the Chalice bowl gets used for drinking.

This is not the neatest way to do it.

The alternative is not to rotate the Chalice at all. This style is quite common. Each person drinks from the same place - usually the front. (As I have mentioned, Chalices are usually marked on one of the panels of their base so that they have a front.) Some Ministers+ would expect only the front to be used.

You need to be aware of this, especially if you are serving in an unfamiliar situation. The Minister+ will pass you the Chalice for your use with its front already ahead of you, and you would eventually pass it back similarly ready for his+ use.

- This is a slightly tidier style than revolving the Chalice. It probably gets cleaned better because it lends itself to a more identical routine.

(You will still experience the occasional person who cranes their neck and tries to drink 'round the corner' to ensure that they do *not* drink from the place used by the last communicant! That's Life!)

Some Servers do not use a purificator at all. There is less danger than some imagine in drinking wine from the same cup, since wine is an antiseptic - hence its use by the Good Samaritan in the victim's wounds.

As far as hygiene goes, the purificator probably does not actually do very much - its use may be more of a psychological benefit than a medical one. But we must not make the mistake of thinking that because a benefit can be labelled 'psychological' it therefore is not real. I think it makes it more pleasant for a communicant to drink if he+ knows or sees that the Chalice has been carefully wiped before he+ is expected to drink from it. Anxiety is just as real - even if unfounded. Easing anxiety is a prerequisite for God's Spirit to work in worship - hence my constant emphasis to diminish it.

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## 7. Drinking/Sipping ?

It can happen, although rarely, that a communicant literally *drinks* from the Chalice instead of sipping from it. He+ is not guilty of anything - merely ignorant of Christian custom. After all, earlier in the service he+ will have heard both Christ's command to drink, and the Minister's invitation that he+ should do the same! He+ will have heard no instruction to do otherwise. If a communicant does really *drink*, the fault is the Church's not his+ !

Christians cannot ease their consciences by arguing that 'drink' means 'sip'.

Until such time as someone invites you to a pub '*for a sip!*', or you are invited to '*sip the health of the bride and groom!*', or urged to '*sip up your tea, dear, before it gets cold!*' - 'sip' and 'drink' will remain two different activities!

A possible result of a communicant drinking (rather than sipping) is that you may unexpectedly run short of wine. If you think you will, promptly tell (or get a message to) the Minister+ so that he+ can re-arrange his+ supplies or consecrate some more wine if necessary.

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## 8. Supplementary Consecrations

### a) RELUCTANCE

I'm saddened to write this, but I have to warn you that there can be professional reluctance to consecrate bread/wine a second time - although it does not take long. Don't, as a Server, be intimidated by it. Such a negative view contrasts badly with the attitude of Christ at his first miracle at the wedding-feast at Cana [John 2:1-11] - and would seem particularly inappropriate if the reluctance comes from a Minister+ who accepts the title '*Celebrant*' as a leader of a *Celebration*!

I was once a Curate in a very large 'training-parish'. The Vicar viewed any running-short of Wine as the direct result of mismanagement by the Server involved, and so - to train his team (as he thought) - he would never consecrate more wine if one of us ran out. I was *absolutely appalled!* To disregard the needs of his communicants in this way seemed to me to be the complete *opposite* of the priorities and love of God which both he and we had been ordained to express!



I have shared that experience in print for the first time (after over forty years) to encourage you to stand firm against any negative view of a supplementary consecration. If time is short there are plenty of elements of Christian worship nearer its fringe from which minutes can easily be lopped-off if it is absolutely necessary.

Time should not be skimmed on the service's most central elements. It can happen that the same Minister+ who resents the extra minute-or-two consecrating more wine, will happily wallow and meander his way through ten wasted minutes of undisciplined chatter under the guise of giving out the notices!

It is all a matter of priority.

### **b) INDIVIDUALS MATTER**

Once, many years ago, I was celebrating the Eucharist+ at a very large occasion. After all the communicants had returned to their seats, and my Servers had brought the remaining Bread and Wine to me, the leaders and I consumed the sacred elements. I was just about to recommence the prayers when a message reached me: 'What about the lady in the wheelchair?' There was no wheelchair in my view. My prompt and thorough consuming of the Bread and Wine ensured that there was absolutely nothing left! I had the joy of consecrating more Bread and Wine (not a long process) - for just one Christian. I hoped that my oversight would be a reminder to the crowd of the importance of every single individual within the Christian family.

If you run out of Wine, think of Cana - and don't feel guilty!

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## **9. Holding or Controlling?**

It is worth remembering that even consecrated Wine can not flow uphill! I remember when I first started serving the Chalice that I sometimes forgot this.

### **a) NOT FLOWING UPHILL !**

I found that if I held the Chalice too low, an eager communicant, who was quicker off the mark than I was, could bow his+ head *over* the Chalice to partake - akin to someone trying to drink directly from a river! If ever this unhappy position is reached there is a double problem:

- you cannot easily raise the Chalice, and
- your communicant cannot drink from it!

The reason is very simple - the Wine will not flow uphill.

The solution is also simple: back away and start again!

Prevention is easy -

- Never hold the Chalice lower than the chest of your communicant, (except for Intinction - see section 10 Hygiene)

### **b) HANDING OVER THE CHALICE**

#### **(i) Importance of Accepting**

I recall, at Durham University, Professor H.E.W.Turner's insistence that virtually every communicant took the Chalice. To ensure this he held it so low down that the only way communicants could get near

the Chalice was to reach down, take it and lift it back up again! I suspect that Turner's style was visibly and physically to stress the two-sided nature of Communion: that it is not enough that God should offer union with us; it requires our active acceptance to become real. The '*Blood of Christ*' requires also '*Drink this...*' for a full holy Communion to take place.

A less-physical way used nowadays of expressing our human acceptance of God's offer is, after the words 'The Body of Christ' and 'The Blood of Christ', for the communicant to make public his+ reception with an *Amen*. This great 'YES' of affirmation and welcome should, of course, be said *before* the communicant partakes, and you should allow time for that. (Some Servers are in such a hurry that the Communicant cannot get in his+ 'Amen' until afterwards! )

#### (ii) Some Exceptions

Whatever theory or theology might imply, there can be good reasons for the Server retaining hold of the Chalice. Here are some:

- There are many communicant Christians - probably a third or even half of them - who have *always* experienced the Chalice held entirely by the Server, and who have never touched the Chalice or had need to. They should not have the strain of an unfamiliar practice imposed on them at the very time of their holy Communion.
- Among the aged there are those who cannot kneel, and who - if standing unsupported - do not have the firm balance to hold the Chalice reliably.
- Those with painful hands or tremors will not want the responsibility of holding the Chalice themselves.
- With younger children now taking Communion there are likely to be those for whom it might be quite an ordeal to have sole control of so large a cup full of Wine.
- A mother with a young one in her arms is in no position to take the Chalice herself. If one arm is free she will most naturally use this at the time of communicating to restrict her child's arms from waving around excitedly !

Remember the type of Chalices that we generally use are *not* designed to be passed from one person to the next. A corporate drinking bowl will have three external handles for the purpose. Two would be used when drinking from it, and the third handle left free for the receiver to begin to take it. When being transferred, all three handles will be in use. Chalices have none.

#### c) ALWAYS RETAINING HOLD ?

Just as it is not possible always to hand the Chalice over, so it is also not possible always to retain it.

Sometimes the Chalice needs to be handed to people. They can find themselves hindered from getting near enough to you by wrongly-placed bits of church architecture or furnishings. Some obstacles will be centuries old, some - like music keyboards and amplification systems - will only have been in place since the concert last Saturday evening!

#### d) THE QUESTION OF CONTROL

Distinguish between

- *holding the Chalice*
- and
- *controlling the Chalice.*



This is very important for you so I shall take you through how it works in practice - bearing in mind that Server and communicants don't meet beforehand to plan things.

Suppose, firstly, that the Server decides to *hold* the Chalice but not to take *control* of it, so that the communicant has complete freedom to do so.

Suppose, secondly, that the communicant opts to *hold* the Chalice (as a sign of his+ 'taking') but feels it is the Server's responsibility to retain *control* of it.

Both views are sound enough and held by many.

But when a Server and a communicant have them *at the same time* they become a recipe for difficulty. The Chalice would end up in mid-journey *held* by four hands but going nowhere because no one was taking *control* of it!

Let's take this hypothetical situation just one short stage further.

Just suppose that exactly the same thought then occurred to both the Server and the communicant:

*Oh! I needn't be holding this. I can let go because he+ has got it !*

My role is to encourage you, not to alarm you. I invented that situation to impress on you the importance of thinking through your ministry, ideally before you ever start it, so that you manage it in a way that does not create anxiety, is clear, straight-forward and efficient. It is not a ministry where you can dither or keep changing your mind. You will serve effortlessly if you first spend some thought and effort thinking it through - which, if you have read this far, you are probably already doing!

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## 10. Hygiene

Folk will vary in their reactions to drinking from the same cup; we should not expect them all to feel the same way. I have already mentioned the antiseptic nature of wine. (Further comments on hygiene are above, in section 5 Purificator /'Holy Hank')

### INTINCTION

Some communicants with an infection will not drink from a single cup to avoid it spreading. This should be encouraged, and is far better than staying away. (Infection is not an issue in those Christian traditions that use small individual glasses - a pattern adopted more widely in the U.K. in 2009 to check swine flu.)

To avoid touching or drinking from the Chalice, the communicant momentarily dips part of his Wafer in the Wine. This is called *intinction*. As the communicant's intentions are always visually obvious it poses no extra strain on your ministry.

Simply -

- Hold the Chalice lower than usual to enable the communicant to do it.
- Use your usual form of words.

(It would be pedantic, in my view, to alter them to avoid the word 'drink'.)

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## 11. Ministering in Pairs

When there are enough Servers available, it halves the time taken if there are two Servers of the Wine. When this happens -

- They serve side by side, and move along the row as a pair. They don't alternately overtake each other.
  - Their pace should be dictated by the slowest, so that they keep together. If you are the first, don't get way ahead of your partner. If the two Servers move far apart, people who have not communicated can arrive between them and this can cause some confusion.
- 

## 12. My Own Choice of Style

I have written out a description based on the style of Serving that I adopted early in my ordained ministry, and which I have had no reason to change. I invite you to ignore it, modify it or adopt parts of it as is right for *you* and your situation. In writing it down I do not imply that there is one 'right' way to do things, still less that I have found it!

- I am convinced that a great many Christians are anxious about taking their Communion but don't let on because each assumes that no other Christian could possibly be as anxious as they are! The longer my experience, the deeper this conviction grows.
- I aim to keep hold of and to control the Chalice as much as possible, but I allow exceptions (see below).
- It is easier for Servers if they have a basic policy of who is going to be responsible for what, rather than having to make a hundred different instant decisions with a hundred different communicants.
- Retaining hold of, and control over, the Chalice is not to impose any seniority or domination over the communicant. It is (in my view) the neatest way to free the communicant of the nitty-gritty of the physical necessities so that he+ may give his+ heart and mind more fully to the invisible realities of his+ 'communion' with God.
- I aim to be very relaxed and sensitive to the gentle guidance given by communicants who like to hold the Chalice. I welcome them doing that.  
(A wholly passive Communicant is more difficult to serve than one who is helpful in this way.)
- Although I encourage folk to guide the Chalice - I will *not* mislead them by transferring its weight in their direction. I want to give them the complete assurance that in every sense it is 'in my hands'. I want them to know that the Chalice is totally safe and that it is my responsibility and not theirs.
- I believe that only then can they really *relax* about it, and give their fullest attention to the invisible meeting with God for which they have come.
- I have mentioned exceptions. If one is serving within one's own local Christian community you know the people involved. I would hand the Chalice to anyone who made it clear to me that he+ was very clearly assuming to take it. This is most likely to be the case with clergy. In such cases I would make sure that I transferred it into their hands below chest height, *not* drinking height - thus making it absolutely clear what I was doing.
- With standing communicants I would still assume to retain hold and control of the Chalice. It is certainly more awkward - and were I not reasonably tall, I might opt to hand it to them.

## Part V - YOUR SPOKEN MINISTRY

### 1. The Words

These are in themselves a rich source of teaching, and worth your while to absorb and understand.

In Christian traditions where your words to your communicant are printed, they are likely to be very much shorter than in former times. The advantage is the saving of time.

(This is no new problem. Writing around a.d.150 Justin Martyr begins his description of the Eucharist: 'The memoirs of the apostles are read, as are the writings of the prophets, *insofar as time will allow.*' (Italics mine))

I will leave the disadvantages for you to discover as you read on, by comparing one traditional form with one modern one.

(i) Traditional (but slightly updated) -

*The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ  
which was shed for you,  
preserve your body and soul  
unto everlasting life.*

*Drink this  
in remembrance that Christ's blood  
was shed for you,  
and be thankful.*

(ii) Modern Style

*The Blood of Christ.*

---

### 2. Their Meaning

In the traditional words

- The first sentence declares what Jesus has done, what God is offering, and its purpose.
- The second sentence advises how communicants should most profitably accept God's offer.

In the modern phrase - *The Blood of Christ* - there are no such verbal pointers to its meaning or application.

#### a) LITERAL ?

An outsider might assume that *The Blood of Christ* meant what it says, i.e. the four to five litres of blood which, 2000 years ago was pumped around the body of Jesus of Nazareth by his heart, but which ceased to flow when he died. The term *The Blood of Christ* is only *self-explanatory* if this is what it means.

When Christians use the term *The Blood of Christ*, if they mean something *different* from this (and they usually do!) then the term can no longer be self-explanatory to the outsider. It then becomes the responsibility of the Church to avoid misunderstanding, and to explain any special meaning of the words

it uses. (There have been times in history when Christians have been thought to be cannibals because of their failure to do this.)

To give *meaning* to the phrase *The Blood of Christ* was -

- exactly what the longer traditional words were designed to do,
- and
- it is exactly what the short modern form (deliberately?) avoids!

Scholars will rightly argue that the meaning of the short phrase *The Blood of Christ* was made clear to the congregation earlier in the service. But that was true of the older, fuller usage as well.

### **b) PERSONALLY EXPLAINED**

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century they, perhaps instinctively, realised that it is one thing to proclaim deep truths to a *crowd*, but quite another to have them repeatedly summarised and told to you *personally*. So, every time a communicant partook of the sacrament he+ was personally given a five-part summary of its meaning and application:

- Jesus gave his body for him+, and shed his blood for him+.
- That the Bread and Wine would be God's means to bring him+ fully as a person to eternal life.
- That he+ should eat and drink remembering that Christ's death was for him+.
- That he+ should not only feed physically but welcome God's coming into the very centre of his+ life.
- Gratitude to God should be his+ main response.

The longer wording gives adequate weight to the two sides of the communion-meeting: God's initiative and our response. They are inseparable:

- Without God's giving and mercy there would be nothing to receive.
- It is our fully receiving that turns God's offer to us into God's gift within us.

Different Christians at various times have fought hard to maintain the truth of one side against the truth of the other, but the truth lies in both together (See Part VII, section 12: The Problem of Definitions)

Such two-sidedness is nothing strange to us.

A lad might present his girl-friend with a ring in the hope that it would mark their engagement. The ring, however wonderful, would not become a real sign or real gift until the girl understood the symbol, said 'Yes!', accepted it and the two moved into a more committed and closer relationship.

I hope that even if you do not have the joy of using the older form of words that you will bring to your own Communion and to those you serve something of that understanding.

### **c) SAVING TIME**

Let's turn to practicalities.

- Sometimes you may find yourself as a Server in a Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion service (a surprising number still take place). If you do not know the Server's words already, learn them now. It could be a strain to try to memorise them reliably on your first day of using them.
- Find out from the Minister+ how he+ wants you to use the words of communion.
- It is unlikely, but bear in mind that, when all things are equal, each communicant should have *both* sentences addressed to them.

- If you use the full two sentences ideally the communicant would only drink *after* you have told him+ how to do so, i.e. *in remembrance that Christ died for you*. In practice, except when small numbers are involved, the sipping of the Wine usually begins more or less straightaway - which is a pity.

There are various ways of saving time:

(i) One popular solution is for communicant numbers 1,3,5,7 and 9, to be told what God is offering them, and for communicants 2,4,6,8 and 10 to be told what their response should be! As you will have guessed by the way I have chosen to describe it, it is not a style that I find very congenial. Those who favour it point out that each communicant obviously *hears* both sentences even if only one is actually addressed to him+.

(ii) Another solution is for the Servers just to use the first sentence to each communicant, and omit altogether how they should receive it. There are other options that you can devise, e.g. the words can be addressed once to the entire row, etc.

(iii) My own style, if there was not time for the full words to be said to each, would be the following compromise -

- Stand mid-way between two communicants.
- Turn half left to serve the first with the words *The Blood of Christ that was shed for you.*
- Turn half right to serve the second in the same way.
- Then, address them both with the remainder of the words.

This results in -

- each communicant having all the words addressed personally to them
- while significantly reducing the time needed to do it.

(In common with most other solutions, the communicant still hears the command to drink *after* he+ has sipped.)

## **PART VI - GENERAL ASPECTS OF YOUR SERVING**

### **1. Problems of Standing**

There is a question of standing both for you personally and for your communicants. Let's deal with your standing first.

#### **a) YOUR OWN STANDING**

Our spines are built for us to stand upright, and prolonged leaning strains our lower back muscles. There is always a tendency for Servers to lean too much, especially if they opt to retain hold-and-control of the Chalice with both hands.

- Lean only when absolutely necessary and for the shortest time.

My comments about using the Chalice (Part IV, section 4, d) & e)) showed that it is not necessary to keep two hands on it, since its knob makes one-handed use possible. This enables the Server of the Wine to stand straighter and to bend less.

If you get back-ache, in the short term do a surreptitious backward stretch at the end of each row! In the longer term, check your stance. Your concentration will tend to lock your muscles anyway (unless you take steps to check this). Do not accept back-ache passively as an inevitable cost of such ministry, because it will tend to draw your attention away from God, and away from those you are serving; it will drain your sensitivity to others and your energy.

#### **b) COMMUNICANTS STANDING**

There are many situations when your communicants will not be kneeling, among them will be -

- Older people who should/could not kneel.
- Very large services where pairs of Servers are placed at strategic 'stations' around the building. Communicants walk past and partake - much as if someone has pressed some 'pause button' during their walking for the purpose!
- The building and the furnishings may dictate that communicants have the Chalice handed to them.
- Leaders of some churches and some occasions can prescribe standing as the appropriate stance for receiving.

Here's a brief comment about three of them.

##### **(i) The Elderly**

With older people and the problem of kneeling, be sensitive to the fact that they may have to avoid large gaps in a communion-rail if they wish to kneel and get up unaided.

It can be embarrassing for them to have to communicate standing if they have never ever done so, and they will feel very conspicuous - and probably guilty.

They will also feel embarrassed if they have to break ranks from other communicants to find some other empty space with a supporting communion-rail to kneel at.

##### **(ii) The Big Occasion**

It will not be difficult for you to minister as one of a pair at a large service.

Just bear in mind that in a cathedral like Winchester you may be a quarter of a mile from where the Bread and Wine might be replenished! In practice there may be no topping-up facilities available to either of

you two Servers. To avoid communicants receiving in one kind only, the moment either the Bread or the Wine are finished, the pair of you have to cease serving.

### (iii) A Standing Policy

There are a number of reasons for taking communion standing. I will mention two - one good, and the other questionable.

The early Christians stood (since which time Christians in the Eastern church have always done so). Various reasons were given -

- a) Following on from the Passover where Jews ate it ready-for-the-off
- b) Communicants are God's children not slaves
- c) It was a sign of being raised with Jesus.

A second reason sometimes creeps in nowadays. There are some who insist on standing to avoid - as they think - 'grovelling' before God, and they wish to make a statement about human dignity.

In my view this seems an error at many levels.

In western society -

- people who grovel don't, nowadays, kneel - the essence of grovelling is to disguise it!
- kneeling can indicate honouring.
- kneeling is not about the low status of the kneeler, but the very high standing of the other.
- the status of humans however high can never be higher than their Creator-God.

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## 2. Kneeling

### a) HISTORY

Kneeling only gradually became the norm in the Western church between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### b) HONOUR

I had the privilege of attending a Royal Investiture at which my closest friend, David Dorey, was honoured by the Queen for his long service as Dean's Verger at Westminster Abbey.

He, and all the others, naturally *knelt* to receive the monarch's affirmation of their worth, a position from which they all rose in even higher social status. None present would have viewed such kneeling as 'grovelling'. It was the position of honour.

Christian kneeling expresses the status of the Divine Majesty before us. It is not a position into which God crushes us. It is one in which he affirms our worth by communing with us, and from which he raises us up to new life in Christ.

Western Christians tend to use their bodies simply to sit or stand in worship. If kneeling is dropped as an option, their range of bodily expression gets even more dull and meagre! This goes against the rediscovery that our body is a wonderful temple of the Holy Spirit [I Corinthians 3:16] and can be a major means of our glorifying God.



### c) WITNESS

The fact that in everyday life we do not kneel to people means that when Christians are seen to kneel before the invisible they are giving the clearest possible witness to God's reality, to his greater status than theirs, and to their allegiance to him. That's an impressive witness!

It is interesting that Scripture records Jews in the Old Testament kneeling, so Christians often adopted the posture. Nowadays Jews tend to avoid it - because it is now so strongly identified with Christianity!

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## 3. Wheelchairs

With folk in wheelchairs, they either come to you or you go to them.

If they come to you at the communion rail the wheelchair, their sitting, and their being down-a-step all tend to position them further from you. You may not even be able to reach them. Wherever possible it is more practical to be *alongside* the wheelchair, and such disabled folk can be helpful if they approach the altar/communion rail last. This enables the Servers to leave the sanctuary and serve them more readily right alongside.

According to their disability they may not be able, or it may not be practical for them, to take the Chalice. Be prepared should the Server of the Bread opt to intinct the Wafer (see Part III, section 10 'Hygiene') which would leave you not communicating them directly.

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## 4. Non-Communicant Adults

These will have come forward for a blessing, and by the time you are in front of them they will have received a blessing from the Server of the Bread.

Usually churches ask non-communicants, if they wish to come forward for a blessing, to hold a service sheet in their hands so that you will know. The process is not infallible.

The Server of the Bread should not get too much ahead of you, but govern his+ tempo by your progress with the Wine. Sometimes the Server of the Bread (having a quicker, easier task than yours) moves on regardless. He+ should keep close to you so that the status - communicant or otherwise - of those you are coming to is always visually clear to you.

Many points that might be raised regarding non-communicating adults are set out in section 5 (below) about non-communicating children. You will have the same basic ministry to extend God's welcome and love to both young and old.

If you are, in some churches, authorised to do so, there is the possibility of your giving them a further Blessing. If you are not authorised to bless, then increasingly Servers are encouraged to pray formally or informally. The Anglican compilation *Common Worship*, in 2000, typically stated: *...and of those distributing the sacrament, ordained or lay, may pray for any non-communicants who come forward in these or other suitable words (underlining mine): 'May God be with you' or 'May God bless you.'*



The words are all right as far as they go, but they seem to me not to go very far! Four words is certainly time-saving, but it is less than generous. It is a pity that such a person's 'close encounter' with God at the very heart of *Christian* worship carries no distinctively *Christian* content. 'God be with you' (often shortened to 'Good-bye') can be said by folk of many faiths and of none!

With so many folk longing

- to be loved,
- to be rescued,
- to be cleansed,

why not use the opportunity to alert them to the reality of a God who meets these needs, typically as -

- God the Father,
- God the Son,

and

- God the Holy Spirit.

A prayer such as -

*May God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless you*

- increases the content *immeasurably*, but only doubles the words. (Note that the initial '*May...*' means that it is technically a prayer *for* a blessing, not the giving of one - which many churches confine to an ordained person.)

As God's minister, above all, be warm to non-communicating adults. Do not regard them as a 'problem' because they do not fit into the most usual communicant pattern. Be glad they have come, rejoice that God has blessed them.

If they are not that familiar with Christian worship - or are visitors - they may not be at ease, but anxious and possibly confused.

- Is he+ going to give me a drink?
- Will he+ want to bless me as well?
- Should I have remained kneeling?
- When should I get up?
- Should I wait until this other Server has moved past me?
- Which way should I go back to my seat?
- etc.

A nod, a move of the head, a smile, a little movement of a hand will enable you to ease any uncertainties that might from time to time occur.

In the name of God, you will at least be able to lift up the light of your countenance upon them and give them peace. Remember the principle that Jesus now 'has no hands but ours' extends to our smiles as well!

## 5. Non-Communicant Children

### a) BLESSING ?

The usual ministry to young children with communicating parents is for the Server of the *Bread* to give them God's blessing. But what should *you* do?

What the first Server does has repercussions for your ministry, so you'll be helped by knowing just a little about it.

#### (i) Dab and Mutter Treatment

First the bad news! Unfortunately there is, what is best described as, a 'dab-and-mutter' school of priestly blessing. This appears to express *indifference*, and if so it is the *exact opposite* of God's loving care which communicants enjoy. This casual approach takes no time, requires no effort, demands no care, and expresses no love. It is not widespread, but is to be resisted if ever encountered.

Children, to whom we often deny Communion, ought to be given - as some sort of compensation - as rich an experience of God's love through the Christians around them at the time of Communion as is possible and appropriate.

Younger children, in particular, will expect to be treated like their parents. You may have seen children copy their parents, and expectantly extend their hands - and be visibly disappointed when they get nothing. They should not leave their place of Communion feeling that they do not matter.

#### (ii) Quality Time

Clearly, Servers should be as generous at Communion in giving quality-time to children as they are in their giving it to adults. Failing to do this does not reflect God's immense love for them, but confirms and deepens in the child, the parents and the Christian community that a child is one of God's 'second class' citizens. Christ's teaching: ***Unless you change, and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of God*** [Matthew 18:3] is a vivid reminder of their worth and importance to God.

Fortunately 'quality time', however brief, reflecting God's love to a child is easy and natural for most of us.

What should you do (assuming that the child has already been warmly blessed by the Server of the Bread) ?

(These following comments only apply to those Servers who can give a blessing - which in most instances means that they are ordained.)

- i. To repeat the words of the first blessing would be meaningless.
- ii. Distinguish between a repeated blessing and a further blessing.
- iii. Two blessings do occur in services, e.g. at a wedding. In principle two blessings can be rich and meaningful if, say, one is general and the other specific, or the second is a development or application of the first.

### b) EXAMPLES

Here are examples of such blessings. You will note that a second blessing is likely to be given extempore - but it need not be. (For some Christians extempore prayer is very natural, but for others it is very difficult.)

In both blessings there would be the laying-on-of-hand(s). (This would be by one hand, in your case, as the other would be holding your Chalice!) Christian ministers usually bless individuals with touch and word. With crowds, touch is impractical as Scripture shows.

First Blessing given by the Server of the Bread

*May the blessing of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you this day and evermore. Amen.*

Here are three extempore blessings: for a younger child, an older child, and one involving a third person.

(i) For a younger child -

*Jesus has just blessed Mummy, and we ask him to touch you as well, to hold you in his love, and keep you happy inside. Amen.*

(ii) For an older child -

*Naomi, with Jesus in your heart we pray the Holy Spirit's special blessing on you that he will keep you faithful and empower you to witness at home and at school that Jesus is your Lord. Amen.*

(iii) For an older child and including a third party -

*Bill, God has already blessed you, so now I ask God to strengthen you for your visit to Jack in hospital this afternoon, and that he will use you to express his care. Amen.*

You will note that in an extempore blessing its contents inevitably have to slide between information, prayer and blessing in the way that good formal prayers do not.

Whether you give a blessing or not, you should -

- Acting on God's behalf, lovingly affirm the child in any style that is appropriate for you and meaningful to him+.

### c) INFORMALITY

(i) Good and Bad Informality Distinguished.

Some Christians equate things being *done decently and in order* [I Corinthians 14:40] with formality. This is wrong. Things can be done with a measure of informality but can still be perfectly decent and in order - as, I believe, are my informal prayers above.

There is good and bad informality. It is easy to tell the difference.

- Bad informality is a spiritual distraction, and draws attention to its perpetrator.
- Good informality is a spiritual enrichment, and draws attention to God.

Words used informally can allow God to touch areas that formal wording cannot reach.

When the Risen Lord greeted Mary at the tomb he did not address her with a formal Jewish benediction *May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord cause his face to shine upon you...etc.* [Numbers 6:24-26] - wonderful as that would have been. His main message he summed up in one word - *Mary!* [John 20:16] - a good pastoral use of informality!

(ii) Ministering God's Love

If your ministry is steeped in prayer, you will affirm God's love for the child because God will give such love to you for the occasion. Do not be anxious that you will have to 'be someone else' should your own personal love of children in general not be of the overflowing variety. (We all differ - that is no criticism.)

It is probably needless to write about it, but any item(s) from the following would underline the child's experience of God's welcome and love. What is actually done will vary with the personality, sex and age of the Server and with the child's sex and age.

- An attitude that is warm
- Eye-contact
- A smile
- Using the child's name (if known)
- A pat on the head, or touch on the shoulder
- Any natural word of welcome/acceptance
- Some informal prayer or assurance of God's blessing

At the very centre of Communion lies the immense love and utter generosity of God. Whatever our ministry to others, we are called to reflect God's love and generosity to them. (It should, of course, not give us an excuse to smother them if that is our natural tendency.)

To express God's love and acceptance of a child within a formal setting in *informal* terms seems a natural and appropriate thing to do. Formality and informality are not enemies. In such situations it is the strength of the formal framework of the occasion that allows appropriate informalities to be good, and not to draw attention to themselves.

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## 6. Informal Eucharists

### a) REAL BREAD - BROKEN

Christians can be richly blessed when a Eucharist is not too formal. Quite often the seating for such an occasion is changed from the traditional bus layout to circus-style. When the seats are in-the-round the pattern is that each receives the Bread and Wine from one neighbour and, after partaking themselves, they serve the other. If the group is large and there are outer circles of worshippers, then in the rear rows the Bread and Wine can hardly be administered in any other way.

Some Christians find it very 'real', and it has certain strengths.

First among them, if wafers are not used, would be that the Bread is recognisably Bread. In addition, each communicant is likely to see it broken right in front of him+ before he+ can eat. There is also the (quite difficult) experience of breaking it for another.

(The widespread use of wafers - and usually unbroken ones at that - to my mind undermines and weakens our Christian witness to the importance of what Scripture calls *The Breaking of the Bread* [Acts 2:42]. One public breaking of a large Wafer can go unnoticed by many - especially those who keep their heads in their books - whereas if the Wafer they received was broken before them, it would be so much more central to their communion-experience.)

### b) THE D.I.Y. DRAWBACK

There is one absolutely obvious but considerable drawback to not being served, and that is that you have to do it yourself! That comment is not as trite as you might think!

When everyone serves both Bread and Wine the busy-ness shifts from just -

- a couple of Servers each doing just one thing,
- to everyone having to do everything!

This is a gigantic change.

In practice this tends to mean that the communicants are too busy to have their minds stilled and hearts open. Not many people, when having to serve both Bread and Wine informally to the person sitting alongside, will be able to have had their heart and mind stilled for their own communion with God.

The difficulties increase. To stand and serve the Chalice to a communicant kneeling is easy. To do the same thing when you are sitting down next to them is a very different matter indeed.

The situation is brim full with decisions - if not questions. The following contains some of the thoughts that are likely to be buzzing around a communicant's head. My point is not to make heavy-weather of it (and most certainly not to ridicule it) but simply to say that if the communicant is both

- serving
- and

- taking responsibility for the serving of others

there's a lot going on. The following is to give you an idea of just how much. (These are the thoughts of a person who has just received the Communion - they do not record what he+ thought earlier.)

*What shall I do with my service sheet - oops, its slipped on the floor and I can't now pick it up because I have this dish and piece of Bread perched on my lap. Barbara is still holding the Chalice she served me - I hope that's not holding up her neighbour who wants to serve her the Bread. I wish my lap didn't slope so much. When I break a piece off the Bread, I won't have a spare hand to prevent the loaf rolling onto the floor! Wish I had a table. It took me ages to eat my Bread, I must make sure I break off a smaller bit because I don't want to give my neighbour too large a piece. There! I've done that. Barbara just now used some different words - I'd use the same had I not already forgotten them. I hope the Minister won't mind. What shall I do if I dry-up in the middle of saying them? Oh gosh! Ah 'The Body of Jesus Christ that was given for you.' Did it! Oh - did I miss out the word 'Lord'? Barbara is still holding the Cup. I'll take it. My service sheet is still on the floor and I can't pick it up. Oh! Barbara's got a white cloth with it as well! I suppose - when my neighbour has finished chewing, that I should simply hand him both the cup and the hanky-thing. Though on second thoughts, it might be better if I began by just handing him the Cup. Oh, I hope I don't get the words wrong. Here we go. 'The Blood of Christ'. I don't think I remembered to wipe it after I had drunk, perhaps Barbara did. Should I wipe it for Harry? Ah good, he's taken the hanky-thing and has done it himself. One thing less. I must pick up my service sheet, I'm glad no one slipped on it. Phew!*

My point is a simple one.

- If you are served both Bread and Wine
- and

- do not have to serve your neighbour Bread and Wine

then your thoughts instead of racing around like the 200 or more words above. They can much more easily move gently between just a few: *Father...Lord...Jesus...Thank you...Welcome... etc.*

Please be clear about what I am saying. I am *not*, repeat *not*, saying that an informal style of Eucharist+ is *less* of a blessing than a more traditional one.

**c) BE STILL or BE BUSY ?**

What I am saying is that, at such an informal Communion, at the actual time of receiving the Bread and Wine, if all the serving is done by your neighbour and yourself, there will be a very great deal 'going on'. This is in total contrast to the traditional pattern which is designed to ensure that the absolute minimum is 'going on' so that you can give yourself as totally to God as possible without distraction.

The Psalmist's injunction to *Be still and know that I am God* is one which most Christians have linked to their time of actual Communion, and found helpful. To have a lot going on - mentally / spiritually / physically - runs so counter to this that I am not sure that any gain - during the time of actual Communion - is greater than its loss.

To make matters worse, if the seating is circular, the scene before each worshipper is not the building's stillness and inspiration, but the communicants opposite - trying their best to cope well with having both to receive Bread and Wine from one neighbour and then to serve Bread and Wine to the other.

They may do this in comparative quiet, but do not confuse quiet with personal stillness. A library's reading room will have a quiet crowd which is mentally extremely busy. It is inner stillness that is the goal - which quiet does not necessarily indicate nor noise extinguish.

**d) A NEW DESIGN**

In Christian gatherings where serving each other the Wine is regularly done, why not ask a designer to make a cup suitable for such use? It would not be so high, because instead of its central knob having to be on a slender stem, there would be at least two - ideally three - handles. They would not be fancy swirls like sports trophies, but lower and practical, and fist-sized like those on an average large mug. (It was probably a two-handled cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper.) It would not be top-heavy, but squat. It would have no pivot point, so its base would exist simply for it to stand on, not as a counterweight to a bowl full of wine.

Why be dictated to by the past if what was right in the past does not suit your present needs? It should suit the finances and local culture of the Christian community using it. It might be silver, it might be earthenware.

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## **7. Make His Way Straight**

What might read like my pre-occupation with detail for its own sake is no such thing.

My aim is having once covered the details for you, thereby to free you of them, so that they need never again pre-occupy you. I have tried to make your road straight, to prepare it as a way for the Lord. There should now be no stumbling blocks to trip you up, no hidden corners to surprise you, or slippery patches to endanger you.

My aim is so to set you up that you can exercise your ministry of Serving with the minimum of strain, and so with an inner stillness.

In that mode you will enhance your ministry by bringing to it, an active awareness of God, his Presence within, and some living knowledge of the *inward and visible graces* that he longs to give those he loves - not least, of course - you.

## PART VII - SOME RELATED TOPICS IN BIBLE & HISTORY

Below is a selection of short outlines of topics that you, as a Server of the Chalice, might find interesting. Their titles are as follows:

1. Jews, Cups and Jesus
2. The Last Supper
3. The Eucharist
4. The Earliest Errors
5. The End of the Meal
6. Regal Chalice
7. The Two Chalices
8. 'Out of Reverence' so Out of Sight
9. Elevated Beliefs
10. The Question of Development
11. Reform
12. The Problem of Definitions
13. Some Fruits of Reform

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### 1. Jews, Cups and Jesus

Jesus, being a Jew, was immersed in the Scriptures which we call the Old Testament. Because wine could be drunk moderately for pleasure or excessively to drunkenness, a 'cup' could be a symbol both of pleasure or pain - of God's blessing or of his punishment.

#### a) BLESSING

A cup is a symbol of God's blessing in, for example, the well-known 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm - *My cup overflows*. The Psalmist also sings of the *Cup of Salvation* [116:13], while Jeremiah [16:7], referring to the lovely Jewish custom of friends sending food and wine to bereaved ones for their mourning feast, writes of the *Cup of Consolation*.

#### b) PAIN

Jesus's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane uses 'cup' as a symbol of pain or death: *Father take this cup from me...*[Mark 14:36] Earlier, with James and John, he used the cup-symbol in the same way [Mk. 10:38-39].

Nowadays a 'poisoned chalice' describes an unpleasant and near-impossible task. The phrase may derive from a story about St. John.

John experienced God's protection when his communion Wine was deliberately poisoned. Artists [probably influenced by Mark 16:18] depict the poison slithering out of a Chalice in snake-form! This symbol of St. John appears in Coventry cathedral's famous tapestry: *Christ in Glory*, as a six-foot panel immediately under Christ's feet - a good, and traditional, place for conquered evil!

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## 2. The Last Supper

This took place during, or immediately prior to, the Jewish Passover Festival.

### a) THE PASSOVER - ITS INSTITUTION

In this religious festival the Jews celebrated the Lord God's delivering them from slavery in Egypt. The feast united - and still unites - all Jewish families every spring.

#### (i) Its Name

Where does its name come from? God's Chosen People, the Israelites, had been slaves in Egypt, at Goshen, for over 400 years. To persuade the Pharaoh to let the Israelites go [see Exodus chapters 7-12] God smote everyone in Egypt with a succession of plagues - although he demonstrably kept the Israelites in Goshen free of them. After a nine-plague saga, God's final plan was to slay all of Egypt's first-born.

Before he did this, however, God initiated a scheme to protect the Israelites which required their co-operation. He instituted a meal so that he would spare or 'pass-over' them.

#### (ii) The Sign & the Meal

They were ritually to slay a flawless lamb. This animal became known as the Passover Lamb - or simply the '*Passover*' [e.g. St. Paul's usage in I Corinthians 5:7]. They were to eat it roasted and to smear some of its blood around their door as a sign. Before God acted, he promised the Israelites : '*When I see the blood I will pass over you...*' [Exodus 12:13].

As time was of the essence, they were to have only *unleavened* bread (no time for yeast to work), they were to eat quickly, staff in hand and dressed ready-for-the-off.

The first-born of the Israelites were spared, and, as God had predicted, Pharaoh gave way, and let his people go (even if he did change his mind and have his army pursue them - but that's the next chapter of God's deliverance: the Exodus).

The Passover, linked with a seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread, was to be celebrated annually.

### b) THE PASSOVER - ITS CUPS

#### (i) Four Promises

At the Passover *four* corporate cups of wine were used - two before the meal and two after it. In Exodus 6:6-7, just *before* God's plagues on the Egyptians, God made to the Israelites four promises. Each of the Passover cups acted as a reminder of one of them.

#### No. 1 - The **Cup of Sanctification** -

*I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians...*

#### No. 2 - The **Cup of Judgement/Deliverance** -

*...deliver you from slavery to them*

#### No. 3 - The **Cup of Blessing/Redemption** -

*I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great judgement*

#### No. 4 - The **Cup of Praise/Restoration** -

*I will take you to me for a people and I will be your God.*

#### (ii) Your Chalice

The Chalice which you serve is a direct descendant of the Jewish Passover's third cup, the **Cup of Blessing/Redemption**, for, as stated above, the Last Supper (according to the first three Gospels) was a



Passover meal. It was a celebration of God's promise to redeem his people, and the Jews used the **Cup of Blessing/Redemption** to symbolise the blood of the Passover Lamb.  
We turn now to Christ's use of this third cup.

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### 3. The Eucharist

#### a) THE 'EUCHARIST' TITLE

When Paul describes Christ's institution of the Eucharist (see below) the Greek word he uses of Jesus when *he had given thanks* is *Eucharist-esas*. This is the same word used by the Gospel writers of Jesus when he fed the 5,000 and the 4,000 [John 6:11, Mark 8:6] and by Luke in his account of Paul's grace for the sailors' last meal aboard the stricken ship in Acts 27. Little wonder that Christians, from as early as a.d.110, have used the term *Eucharist*. The word at its heart is Greek *charis* - a key New Testament word meaning 'grace'.

#### b) THE EUCHARISTIC ACCOUNTS

The first three Gospels all have accounts of Christ's institution of the Eucharist [Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20]. John does not, but the fullest and earliest account comes from St. Paul. The accounts are very similar, and their minor differences need hardly concern you here.

##### (i) Paul

Paul, writing to the Corinthians no more than 25 years after the event, hands down what he himself had been told (numbering inserted by author):

*For I received of the Lord what I also handed on to you,*

1. *the Lord Jesus on the night that he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,*
2. *and when he had given thanks*
3. *he broke it and said,*
4. *'This is my body that is \* for you. (\*some manuscripts have broken for you)*
5. *Do this in remembrance of me.'*

6. *In the same way he took the cup also, after supper,*
7. *saying 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.*
8. *Do this as often as you drink it*
9. *in remembrance of me.'*

[I Corinthians 11:23-25]

##### (ii) Mark

Mark's account is a summary. He omits Christ's command to *do it in remembrance of me*, and that Christ's covenant is 'new'.

##### (iii) Matthew

Matthew used Mark as a source. He clarified it slightly and included the explanation that Christ's blood was *for the forgiveness of sins* (26:26).

##### (iv) Luke

Luke, a travelling companion of Paul, has an account that is closer to Paul's (above) including Christ's instruction to *Do this*.

### c) THE EUCHARISTIC CUP

#### (i) The Cup of Blessing

The actual cup at the Last Supper will have most probably been a fairly squat two-handled corporate domestic drinking bowl of earthenware, or perhaps glass.

When Jesus took the cup, it was *after supper*, so it was the *third* cup of the Passover, the **Cup of Redemption** or **Blessing**, in which the Jews symbolised the blood of the Passover Lamb.

Jesus says of it: *This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.* [Luke 22:19-20]  
What a shock that must have been to hear such a claim for the first time!

This is not the place to outline how Christians down the ages have understood this. I shall simply conclude this section with two sentences of St. Paul -

- *For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the Festival...* [I Corinthians 5:7, NIV translation].
- *The cup of blessing which we bless is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?* [I Corinthians 10:16]

#### (ii) ...And Water

The Jews added water to reduce wine's alcoholic content and to avoid drunkenness.

(This Jewish tradition is symbolically retained today by many Christian Ministers+ who add a little water to the wine. It has become devotionally linked to the blood and water which, according to John 19:34, flowed from Christ's pierced side.)

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## 4. The Earliest Errors

### a) DIVISIONS

We know a great deal about how the Corinthian Christians behaved at their Eucharists because Paul wrote at length, [I Corinthians 11] to stop their abuses, and remind them of Christ's institution of it.

Corinth was a wealthy cosmopolitan seaport renowned for its immorality. St. Paul lists the former sins and vices of the Corinthian Christians [I Corinthians 6:9-10] but insists that they should stop. Their worst sin was their divisions [11:18].

### b) DRUNKENNESS

The Eucharist and family-meal suffered because Jewish reverence was being undermined by the behaviour of non-Jews/Gentiles. Paul did not mince his words:

- *When you come together it is not for the better but for the worse...* [11:17]
- *When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk!*
- *What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in?* [11:20-22]

Perhaps to shock them out of it, Paul attributed weakness, sickness and even death to those who partook unworthily [11:30], for all who ate or drank unworthily brought **judgement against themselves** [11:29]. (This may have had sad repercussions in later centuries - (see 6(b)).

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## 5. The End of the Meal

### a) PERSECUTION

When Christians began to be persecuted, and when Rome forbade group meetings, Christians had to forego their public evening meetings for private and secret fellowship under cover of early-morning darkness. Catering became more difficult. They continued the Eucharist -

- taking bread and wine
- praying over them
- breaking the Bread
- and distributing

Considerable steps were taken to ensure that the Eucharist was distributed to any sick that were unable to attend.

The meal itself was dropped.

Since Jesus, a Jew, could only be understood in Old Testament terms, it was natural even among mainly Gentile Christians to preface their Eucharist with Synagogue-style readings and prayers. This basic structure has remained unchanged for 2,000 years.

### b) SHIFT OF EMPHASIS

When the Eucharist was part of a family meal, the 'Body of Christ' was seen primarily as the *community* of Jesus Christ - as Paul taught: ***You are the body of Christ, and individually members of it*** [I Corinthians 12:27, but see vv.12-30]. Since Paul's insistence that Christians ***discern the body*** [11:29] was written before a.d. 60, it was far too early to refer to the later theories about the Real Presence. The ***Body of Christ*** was, at that stage, Christ's people. St. Augustine (a.d. 354-430) taught his people: 'You are the bread on the altar. Be what you see. Receive who you are.' [Sermon 227].

When the meal was discontinued, the Bread and Wine gradually became the focus of attention. The act of consecration was therefore stressed, and the question of who could, or could not, do it became acute. This altered the importance, the value and the understanding of the Eucharist, so that in due course ***the Body of Christ*** became seen primarily as the *sacramental Presence* of Jesus Christ, rather than the Christians who were gathered to partake of it.

This rupture between Eucharist and meal had devastating effects, and did much to drive a wedge between the sacramental and the ordinary. This split was quite foreign to Christianity's massive Jewish inheritance - at the climax of which the sacred literally invaded the secular: ***the Word became flesh***, God could be worshipped incarnate on Mary's lap - and the Christian faith was born!

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## 6. Regal Chalice

### a) CHRISTENDOM

#### (i) Regal Religion

In a.d.313 the Emperor Constantine freed the Christian church from persecution to become the state religion of the Empire. There were tremendous changes in the Eucharist and in what was thought about it. But although persecution had stopped the meal, it was not reintroduced.

The liberated church – inevitably, but perhaps unfortunately - adopted many of the characteristics of the state. Monarchs and wealthy patrons built Christian 'Basilicas' (literally *Royal Palaces*) for their worship. The bishop's 'seat' became the bishop's '*throne*', and he wore royal purple. Christians had to adopt styles suitable to large public buildings instead of homes.

#### (ii) The Minister+

In a 1<sup>st</sup> century house-group Eucharist and meal, the Minister+ was essentially one-of-us. In the great basilicas, the Minister+ had to acquire visual and verbal dominance to lead so large a gathering. He was necessarily raised up at the end of the building to be seen, and dressed accordingly. This created an us-and-them feeling among the congregation - and beliefs, unfortunately, followed feelings. The Minister+ and his assistants had their own part of the building - a sacred place (*sanctu-ary*) which was, significantly, separated from the people by a balustrade (not a low communion rail as we are accustomed to today, because the communicants received standing).

#### (iii) The Thanksgiving

The Prayer of Thanksgiving changed too. The short, mainly spontaneous, giving of thanks that was natural in a home expanded into the style of a rhetorical public declaration - loud and long! (This influence is still evident today in some over-wordy Prayers of Consecration!)

#### (iv) The Chalice

The architecture, pomp and pageant of the law-courts was adopted, processions were introduced, and patrons adorned Christian buildings with the finest they could afford, dressed its leaders in sumptuous garments, and ensured that all its equipment - including Chalices - was as beautiful as human skill and cash could create.

Chalices changed as patrons vied with one another to produce the greatest splendour. They were frequently made of gold and encrusted with precious jewels. There was resistance among some of the religious communities who had vowed 'poverty', to go along with such regal splendour. St. Boniface in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, was familiar with Chalices made of wood.

### b) WORTHER OR RARER ?

Such regal surroundings sprang from the massive church-state alliance called 'Christendom'. Its religious reality was expressed thus: *The faith of the King is the faith of the people*. This was no great advance for the Christian church, because membership became mostly nominal as vast crowds - sometimes on pain of death if they refused - were enrolled by baptism into the state religion, usually with no teaching.

The most tragic result of the new state-church relationship was a new partnership of power-and-belief. The state could use force to promote orthodoxy and to punish heresy. It could claim that its political aspirations were divinely inspired. This combination shifted religious beliefs into the political arena, and has had horrendous repercussions throughout Christian history - and its blood line can be traced today in, for example, Northern Ireland.

Inappropriate behaviour in worship was inevitable by those who did not understand it. In an attempt to right this, the clergy over-stressed the need for communicants to partake worthily. Probably Paul's teaching (quoted above in 4, b)) that bringing judgement against themselves could result in weakness, illness and even death, scared them off! For whatever reasons, the laity began to feel too unworthy, and so made their holy Communion rarer rather than worthier. By 1215 the numbers had so dropped that a Council of the Church in the West had to require that Christians communicated at least once a year. This was a low point, and is in sharp contrast with Acts 2:43-47 where the Eucharist was, most probably, celebrated daily.

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## 7. The Two Chalices

### a) AN INCREASING DIVIDE

Before the 12<sup>th</sup> century the growing divide between clergy and laity expressed itself in the use of two types of Chalice.

#### (i) Consecration Chalice

A small 'Consecration Chalice' was used only by the Minister+.

#### (ii) Ministerial Chalice

One, or more, larger 'Ministerial Chalices', with handles for carrying, were used by the Servers. The wine for these was brought up by the people at the Offertory, but not consecrated. The church acted on its belief that a little Wine poured from the Consecration Chalice into the Ministerial Chalices was sufficient to consecrate the wine within them. A Server had only to *hold* the Ministerial Chalice because a communicant no longer drank from it as such, because...

### b) GOLDEN 'STRAWS'

Communicants were lent a gold or silver pipe (variously called a *fistula*, *pipa* or *calamus*) to use as we would use a drinking straw! (The Pope on certain occasions still uses one.)

Communicants made their communion standing in these early centuries, and would have had no need to touch or take the Chalice.

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## 8. 'Out of Reverence' so Out of Sight

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Chalices tended to become smaller because there began the trend to withdraw the Wine from Christian worshippers. An underlying fear that someone might spill it did nothing to discourage the process.

### a) NO CHALICES

Communion in one kind only, was sanctioned at the Council of Constance in 1415. According to the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* the reason was that: *The Church has withheld the chalice from the laity out of reverence for the Precious Blood.*

Is this not akin to refusing water to a dying man in the desert because of how exceedingly precious the water is? And has the water in that situation any other purpose?

Many will see this only as an error of belief. It is simpler than that: it is a simple error of priority - the failure to put first things first.

- the love of the medicine is put *before* -
- the love of the patient - for whom alone the medicine exists.

Three earlier Popes, two in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and Urban II in the 11<sup>th</sup>, had condemned those who had refused to receive from the cup - so the move was not a development that progressed forward, but more of a U-turn.

Not surprisingly, in the light of Christ's command to '*Drink from it, all of you*' [Matthew 26:27] the denial of the Chalice to Christian laity provoked considerable protest. Various groups emerged who derived their names from issues involved: the *Calixtines* from *Calix* - a Chalice, and the *Utraquists* from the Latin for 'In Both Kinds'! The badge of one militant group expressed both the topic and their emotions: a Chalice & Sword!

#### **b) NO BREAD**

After withdrawing the Chalice from the laity, the church was eventually to withdraw even the Bread.

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### **9. Elevated Beliefs**

#### **a) 'PIETY OF VISION'**

To compensate for the lack of eating and drinking, a 'Piety of Vision' was promulgated. This taught that a person's eating of the Bread could be replaced by merely *looking* at it - with the full assurance that the viewer would receive no less of God's grace than a communicant.

The food that Christ gave us and commanded us to consume was increasingly regarded as too sacred for anyone but a priest even to touch! This divorce of the sacred from the ordinary reached its peak in a view of the Bread and Wine called '*transubstantiation*'.

#### **b) GOD AND THE GHOSTLY**

Transubstantiation is one theory of the relationship between the 'Body and Blood of Christ' and the consecrated Bread and Wine. In spite of its long name it is very simple. In this extreme view, the sacred and the ordinary are of two such totally different worlds that they cannot intermingle - so that the Bread has to be annihilated to make way for it. The Body and Blood of Christ are only bread and wine in appearance.

Some Christians in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries (*'Monophysites'*) took a similar view of Jesus Christ's divinity and humanity. They felt unable to hold the two together - as is now universal Christian belief - so promulgated the view that Christ's earthly body could not be real - it was just a spook. This view of divinity lightly wrapped in a ghostly appearance of humanity was condemned by the church as heretical.

The belief in Transubstantiation is very similar and is arrived at by the same assumptions and reasoning: since the divine and creation cannot touch or mix, the bread and wine can no longer really *be* bread and wine. This can, I think fairly, be described as divinity lightly wrapped in the ghostly appearance of bread and wine.



Such a change would indeed be 'wonderful' in its own way, but it could not be described as 'sacramental' in the usual Christian sense, which is based on God's amazing grace to work *in and through* his creation, not to have to by-pass it.

To leap ahead for a moment - the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England state that transubstantiation 'overthroweth the nature of a sacrament'. In 1662, the Book of Common Prayer affirmed that the consecrated Bread and Wine was the 'Body' and 'Blood' of Christ - but wisely left the mystery undefined and did not, and could not, upgrade any belief about it to be necessary to salvation, since none was given in Scripture. It did, however, carefully spell-out to communicants that what they will be drinking and eating is not ghostly.

*And grant that we,  
receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine  
according to thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution...  
...may be partakers of his most blessed Body and Blood...*

### **c) OVER DOGMA-TISM**

#### **(i) Council of Constance**

In 1215 there was a Council in Constance to sort out the Popes! (At that time there were no less than two Popes and an anti-Pope (John XXIII, Gregory XII and Benedict XIII). The details need not concern us here, but suffice it to say that the time and energy spent in solving what was called the 'Great Schism' meant that its other tasks - to deal with reform and heresy - were not thoroughly tackled. Its failure to reform ultimately led to a massive movement of reformation largely *outside* the church rather than within it.

#### **(ii) De Fide**

Sadly, the Council worked in some instances counter to reform. For example it took the theory of Transubstantiation and upgraded it as high as possible. The belief became a *de fide (catholica)* - a belief so expressly declared by the church that to contradict it (as I must do) would render the believer a heretic. When any church does this it is not split by 'enemies' outside it, but by its own over-dogma-tism.

### **d) UNREFORMED & REFORMED**

Expressed in the simplest of terms, the Church of the Roman Empire fell geographically into two, Eastern and Western. There were some, comparatively small, differences of belief so that the church divided in 1054, with the mainly European West being led by the Pope in Rome. As long as European Christians were one church it can usefully be called the 'Western Church'. Once reform-minded Christians were excluded from it - or excluded themselves - then different names were needed to distinguish them and their groups.

Those Christians who remained unreformed but loyal to the Pope are most conveniently known as Roman (Catholics). But note, 'catholic' means 'universal', and is not exclusive to those in the Roman tradition, since all Christians who use the Christian creeds regularly affirm their belief in the 'one holy, catholic and apostolic church'.

Christians of the various movements of reform in the following centuries could be named after a number of different things: areas (e.g. Anglicans), individuals (e.g. Lutherans), doctrines (e.g. Baptists), structures (e.g. Congregationalists) or even their nickname (e.g. Methodists).



## 10. The Question of 'Development'

In the accounts above you will have noted considerable 'developments' in Christian belief and practice - not least regarding the use and non-use of the Chalice.

'Development' can go in one of two directions which I shall label developmental *progression* and developmental *diversion*. (I wanted to use the headings 'straight ahead' and 'round the bend', but on reflection felt that the latter might have implied not just criticism but ridicule - which would never be my intention.)

(Over time, *diversion* can creep into *progression*, so that situations can be the result of both.)

### a) PROGRESSION

This is when the development remains true to its original purpose even if it expands or reapplies it. Here are three examples:

#### (i) Pastoral Progression

The practice of 'Intinction' is not commanded by Christ, and is not mentioned in Scripture. It is a response to a problem: how do those having to lie flat in bed or those with an infection partake of the Blood of Christ if they cannot / should not use a Chalice? One pastoral solution is to dip the Bread into the Wine.

This is a development of 'progression'. Its change is completely in line with its original purpose. It has not diverted off-course, gone off at a tangent or done a U-turn.

#### (ii) Cultural Progression

The change from earthenware cups to silver Chalices is a cultural modification. We may not personally like it, but it does not - by itself - change the purpose of the cup. An earthenware cup could replace a Chalice without any essential change - only that of style.

#### (iii) Practical Progression

Although leavened bread was used for the first 1,000 years of Christian history, most Christians nowadays use wafers rather than real bread, and sip the Wine rather than drink it. Practical considerations have modified Christian practice. We may or may not like the changes, but they have been undertaken with the intention by all of eating and drinking in obedience to Christ's command and promise. The changes have not diverted from the original purposes, nor gone off at a tangent, nor done a U-turn. Most Christians would see them as, perhaps, not ideal, but as a progressive developmental option.

### b) DIVERSION

Developmental *progression* is true and positive, developmental *diversion* is not. When there is developmental *diversion*, the original foundations, purposes and aims become clouded or even contradicted.

A number of examples have occurred in this Part. The most obvious example of interest to you was when the church (see 8 (a) above) '*withheld the chalice from the laity out of reverence for the Precious Blood.*'

Such a 'development' is the worst possible example of diversion. It has lost contact with its roots and purpose, and done a complete U-turn which contradicts Scripture, tradition, revelation and reason.

## 11. Reform

### a) THE NEED

Human groupings, including the church, are in constant need of reform. This is because the characteristic of life is growth and movement, while humans tend to find their security in ensuring that things remain static!

### b) THE REACTION

For centuries there were aspects of the Christian church which individuals and groups knew needed reforming. Ideally those with the insight to discern this and the courage to act on it should have been welcomed, but reform is almost always felt to be a threat, and the natural reaction is not to adjust to it, but to dig-one's-heels-in!

Whenever the church reacted in this way, hope of reform was pushed away. As we can see today, the church *did* change - and change considerably (see below) - but the change was very slow.

### c) SOME SELECTED AIMS

Around the reformers a range of new Christian groupings were created. Not surprisingly they stressed those things that they had fought for. As far as these notes are concerned we need only record that -

- Worship should be in the worshippers' language;
- Scripture was authoritative, e.g. in matters of 'development'.
- The Eucharistic Bread and Wine should once again be available to the laity.
- They dismissed the 'Piety of Vision' as an alternative to holy Communion.

### d) THE CHALICE REAPPEARS

Among the new reforming groupings, the Chalice was experienced once more. For the Reforming leaders were not, as is sometimes assumed, *against* the existing church: they sought its renewal. Calvin, for instance, advocated a daily Eucharist+.

Once the Chalice was back again, the pre-Reformation Chalices (only used by the Minister+ ) were found to be too small. Where there was not money for a larger Chalice, they took the base and stem of an old one and brazed onto it a larger bowl.

### e) CHALICE EQUALS 'CUP'

All groups seek an identity and establish this by their own jargon, dress and other matters. Among the spectrum of reforming movements words were chosen simply to avoid Roman Catholic usage - which has left us with an unhappy legacy. With the increase in the use of the vernacular at services, some dropped the use of 'Chalice' (Lat: *calix*), and used 'cup'. (The Anglican Prayer Book, 1662, retained both.)

[I would personally prefer 'cup', as it relates more immediately to Scripture and to the words of Jesus. I felt, however, that the article needed to be headed 'Doing the Chalice' for the maximum number of readers to know instantly what it was about!]

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## 12. The Problem of Definitions

Even brief sketches of items of Church history require some understanding of how definitions work.

Definitions can restrict our understanding of God's invisible presence and workings. The process works like this.

### a) DEFINING - THE PROCESS

Take the colour turquoise as an example. It can be defined as 'a shade of blue', or 'a shade of green'. Each definition is correct up to a point. We can imagine two groups:

- one rejecting the too-narrow 'blue' definition because turquoise clearly relates to green!
- the other rejecting the too-narrow 'green' definition because turquoise clearly relates to blue!

This throws much light on Christian groupings. Both of the groups above are correct in their claim about turquoise, but neither of them has grasped the *truth* about it. The truth about turquoise can only be reached by embracing the two apparent contradictions and holding both narrow definitions together.

### b) NARROW vs. BROAD

This illustrates the principle by which -

- If we use narrow definitions we divide Christians.
- If we use broad definitions we unite them.

My broad definition of the truth of the Eucharist / Communion / Mass / Breaking of Bread / Lord's Supper etc. is that -

- **The Lord makes himself known to us in the Breaking of the Bread.**

This is so real, so certain, so wonderful and so widely attested by Christian experience in every age, place and tradition, that I have felt no need here to define narrowly what Luke so well defines broadly. [Luke 24:35]

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## 13. Some Fruits of Reform

I wrote of the Roman Catholic Church that 'the Church *did* change'.

Many reformers gave their lives to uphold some of the truths illustrated by this excerpt from an authorised introduction to an English Roman Catholic service book:

*Christ promised: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." This is particularly true when the people of God gather together to celebrate the Eucharist. Christ's Spirit is then present and active in the community, and is the source of their prayers and praise and the proclamation of God's wonderful works.*

*Christ speaks to his people in his word and gives himself under the Eucharistic signs of bread and wine to be the life and food of the community. When the priest greets the people with the words "The Lord be with you", he is stating a fact - the Lord is with his people as they gather to celebrate his Eucharist...*

...[This is ] *an act of worship in which all present acknowledge and praise God. During the liturgy of the word when the scriptures are read to the people it is God himself who is speaking. That is why the renewed [i.e. reformed] liturgy gives such a principal place to the readings - they are an essential element in the act of worship...When we listen to the Gospel we meet Christ himself.*

*The worshipping community is the people of God, won by Christ with his blood, called together by the Lord, and nourished by his word. This people is called to offer to God the prayers of the whole human family; it is brought together and strengthened in unity by sharing in the body and blood of Christ. The more the people enter into the mystery of the eucharist by conscious, active and fruitful participation, the more they grow in holiness.*

*As we listen to the word of God, join in the prayers and song, offer the sacrifice, and share the Lord's table together, so we become one body, which is Christ the Lord.*

This excerpt was written to accompany the then-new liturgy of 1975 which was designed to 'encourage congregations to share much more actively in celebrating the Eucharist.' It was predicated that it would be received 'with great joy'. It was. In its first three years 80,000 copies were sold in Britain.

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The Chalice is back - and back for good. Your ministry as the Server of the Cup has, perhaps, never been more widely recognised as now. I hope my writing will help you retain the sheer wonder and importance of your ministry to serve to others -

***the cup of blessing which we bless -  
is it not a sharing of the blood of Christ?***

[I Corinthians 10:16]

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See these other articles on this website –

*Laying on of Hands  
Children and the Healing Ministry  
But I Can't Pray Aloud*

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