

Chapter three: Moving to the Sacrament

This chapter continues the commentary on The Service of the Lord's Day/The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

THE SERVICE OF THE LORD'S DAY

The Sacrament of the Lord's
Supper

The Sending Forth of the
People of God

Communion Beyond the
Gathered Congregation

We return to LB 88/PB 62 where the change of route occurs for non-sacramental services. The service in *Uniting in Worship* takes its order from the primacy of the Lord's Supper for Christian worship. Therefore, on Sundays when that norm is observed, the minister and congregation move through the service without interruption at this point.

For the first part — the remainder of The Service of the Word — the response section is the same, but there is no hymn between creed and offering.

12 AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

There are some variations, however. It is expected that an historic creed — and the Nicene is printed — will be used for any affirmation used at the sacrament. For the reasons, see the comments in the previous chapter [p. 54].

13 OFFERING

Those who have been using *Holy Communion One* from the 1980 interim service booklet will miss the combination here of two acts: the taking up of the collection (on which see the section in the previous chapter p. 54) and the bringing forward of the bread and wine (and perhaps other symbols of life and work) sometimes called an 'offertory procession'. The prayers at that point spoke of the bread 'which earth has given and human hands have made which will become for us the bread of life.'

The first point might be made about these prayers. They draw on the Jewish tradition of blessing God over bread and wine — the grace which may well have been used by Jesus when at table with his disciples. Mod-

ern liturgical scholarship acknowledges that this kind of prayer underlies the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving at the communion table. In which case, the 'offertory prayers' have pre-empted the central prayer of the sacrament, have given thanks and blessed — just before the Great Prayer does exactly that. The Commission on Liturgy has thus chosen to use this kind of language only in the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving itself, and there are several examples of this.

But there is a more serious theological point. The prayers, and the offertory procession, can be read as suggesting that what happens at the Lord's Table is a combination of God's offering and ours — the gifts of nature and human skill. It is not. The sacrament is a thanksgiving for what God in Christ has done for us, without our help. The doctrine of 'sola gratia' — by grace alone — is at stake.

Both Reformed and Catholic theologians have expressed doubts about the introduction of offertory processions. The Commission on Liturgy chose to maintain the earlier Reformed position and make a clear distinction between the bringing of gifts which symbolise our human response and those which symbolise Christ's once-for-all offering and nothing else. We have retained the Offering (of money and other symbols of life and work if desired) as part of the response section in the Service of the Word, and kept the Setting of the Table (where the bread and wine are unveiled or brought to the Table) as a separate act in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Perhaps the collection should not be placed on the Table at all — if the Table is a place from which we receive and not an altar where we offer. If it is an altar, it is only so as the place where we remember what Christ has offered for us — and of that the proper symbols are bread and wine, at his command. And the Great Prayers of Thanksgiving make the point that the church offers its life and mission in union with Christ when it makes its sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving through him.

With thanksgiving we take this bread and this cup
and proclaim his death and resurrection.

Receive our sacrifice of praise.

(Great Prayer of Thanksgiving C, LB 110)

Therefore, Father, as he has commanded us,
we do this in remembrance of him;

and we ask you to accept our sacrifice of praise
and thanksgiving.

(Great Prayer of Thanksgiving F, LB 119)

15 PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Again, see the comments in the previous chapter [pp. 55]. The difference is that in the sacrament, our prayers of thanks are offered at the Table — so the focus of the people's prayers at this point is on intercession.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

16 THE PEACE

This simple action has a long history. For Paul, as for others of his and similar cultures today, a kiss is the usual form of greeting between men and men, and women and women. Yet the kiss between Christians had a special quality. It was precisely not the kiss of human affection, a greeting. It was an acceptance that one belonged to a new order, of those who had been made holy in Christ. A 'holy kiss' was a description reserved for the kiss of the baptised, and therefore was placed at this point in the liturgy as the linchpin between the Service of the Word, which was open to anyone, and the Service of the Sacrament, which was open only to the baptised. This is the affirmation of those whom Christ has made one — whether we like each other or not! In Christ, a Jew kisses a Greek, a master a slave, a man a woman; it is a radical new order. Thus the Peace should not be used as a mere greeting, for 'getting to know you'.

Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.
(1 Thessalonians 5:26 RSV)

Greet one another with a holy kiss.
(Romans 16:16 RSV)

Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you that are in Christ.

(1 Peter 5:14 RSV)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.

(John 14:27 RSV)

When we have ended the prayers, we greet one another with a kiss.

(Justin Martyr, *First Apology*,
65.2 [c.150 A.D.])



Photo: Eddy Marmur

It is essentially an action, a movement in our usually static liturgy. It may well be a kiss, but is more likely, in our society, to mean a firm handclasp. A decision on cultural grounds may well need to be made, depending on the customs of a community. But whatever manner of expression is decided upon, it should reflect Christ's acceptance of us, rather than our enthusiastic feelings for particular people.

17 HYMN

On the theme of the eucharist: the 'communion hymn'; of sufficient length to cover the bringing in of the elements, or their unveiling.

18 SETTING OF THE TABLE

See also the comments on Offering in the previous chapter. (p. 54)

The essential elements of the celebration of the Lord's Supper are found in all the biblical accounts: Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples; he took a cup (at least one), gave thanks and passed it around the table. Over the centuries these seven actions have been refined to four: taking, thanking, breaking and sharing.

The Setting of the Table is the practical demonstration of 'taking'. The action is domestic, but it is also ritual. That is, as special care is taken with food at a festive meal in our home, so care is taken in unveiling the elements and seeing that all is ready. In some churches of the Scottish tradition, the table is literally spread at this point, elders bringing in from the vestry the cloths, the vessels and the bread and wine.

No words are necessary. The action should speak for itself. It may be appropriate to give an invitation, and examples are at LB 649–651. Equally some may wish to offer a prayer, perhaps Prayer D of the Prayers before the Service LB 81/PB 57 (a 'prayer of the veil', at the unveiling) or E in the same section, the 'Prayer of Humble Access'. Other such 'Prayers of Approach' are at LB 653–654. However, such prayers are elaborations of the liturgy, and can clutter the flow of the service from Setting the Table to the prayer which is the centrepiece of the whole sacrament.

19 GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

THE INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

It may surprise some to discover that this section contains the only real difference in the liturgical customs of the three uniting churches. It need not continue to be so. Reformed practice is distinguished by the reading of the scriptural basis for a liturgical action before performing it. This was Calvin's principle for purging the service from merely human inventions. If an action or doctrine in worship could not be so justified, if it had no 'warrant', it may not be used in Reformed churches. Thus, the Narrative of the Institution of the Lord's Supper was taken out of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving (where it is in every other tradition) and read before the Thanksgiving.

It may be doubted whether Christians need this form of assurance today. Arguments over the validity of acts and beliefs should not now be had in church. Overseas churches of the Reformed tradition (Scotland,

U.S.A.) no longer regard the warrant as the necessary safeguard of the biblical nature of worship. However, the Assembly Commission on Liturgy recognised that the custom was valued among many ministers, and so provided for it (LB 92).

The minister must make a decision at this point. If you wish to follow the Warrant tradition, it must be read now. If, what for the sake of a brief title, we may call the Prayer tradition is chosen, this section on LB 92 is omitted, and you proceed directly to one of the Great Prayers of Thanksgiving (where the Narrative is part of the Prayer). But be warned! this decision will be dictated by which Prayer you have chosen — see below.

'Warrant tradition'	'Prayer tradition'
LB 92 Read the Narrative	Omit the Narrative on LB 92
If the main Great Prayer is used, begin on LB 93, The Lord be with you, etc.	
(Decide whether to use a special thanksgiving from LB 94–101 or omit)	
Include the Holy, holy, holy Lord LB 93 and 102	
and the thanksgiving which follows—	
'We thank you that you called a covenant people . . . for by grace we are saved, through faith.' LB 102	
[See the rubric] Omit the Narrative in the Prayer LB 102 'We bless you, Lord God, . . . to . . . for the remembrance of me.' on LB 103	[see the rubric and read on] Include the Narrative in the Prayer LB 102 'We bless you . . .'
Continue on LB 103 from 'With this bread and this cup we do as our Saviour commands'	and read all the Prayer
to the final Amen. (LB 103)	to the final Amen. (LB 103)
OR read the Narrative on LB 92	OR omit the Narrative on LB 92
then choose one of the Alternative Great Prayers of Thanksgiving	
B LB 107–8	A LB 104–6
C LB 109–10	D LB 111–13
G LB 120–21	E LB 114–16
	F LB 117–19
	H LB 122–25
each of which is designed to have the warrant read first (i.e. it has no Narrative in the text of the Prayer).	each of which contains the Narrative as an integral part of the Prayer.
In every case, continue with the service on LB 126 with the Lord's Prayer.	

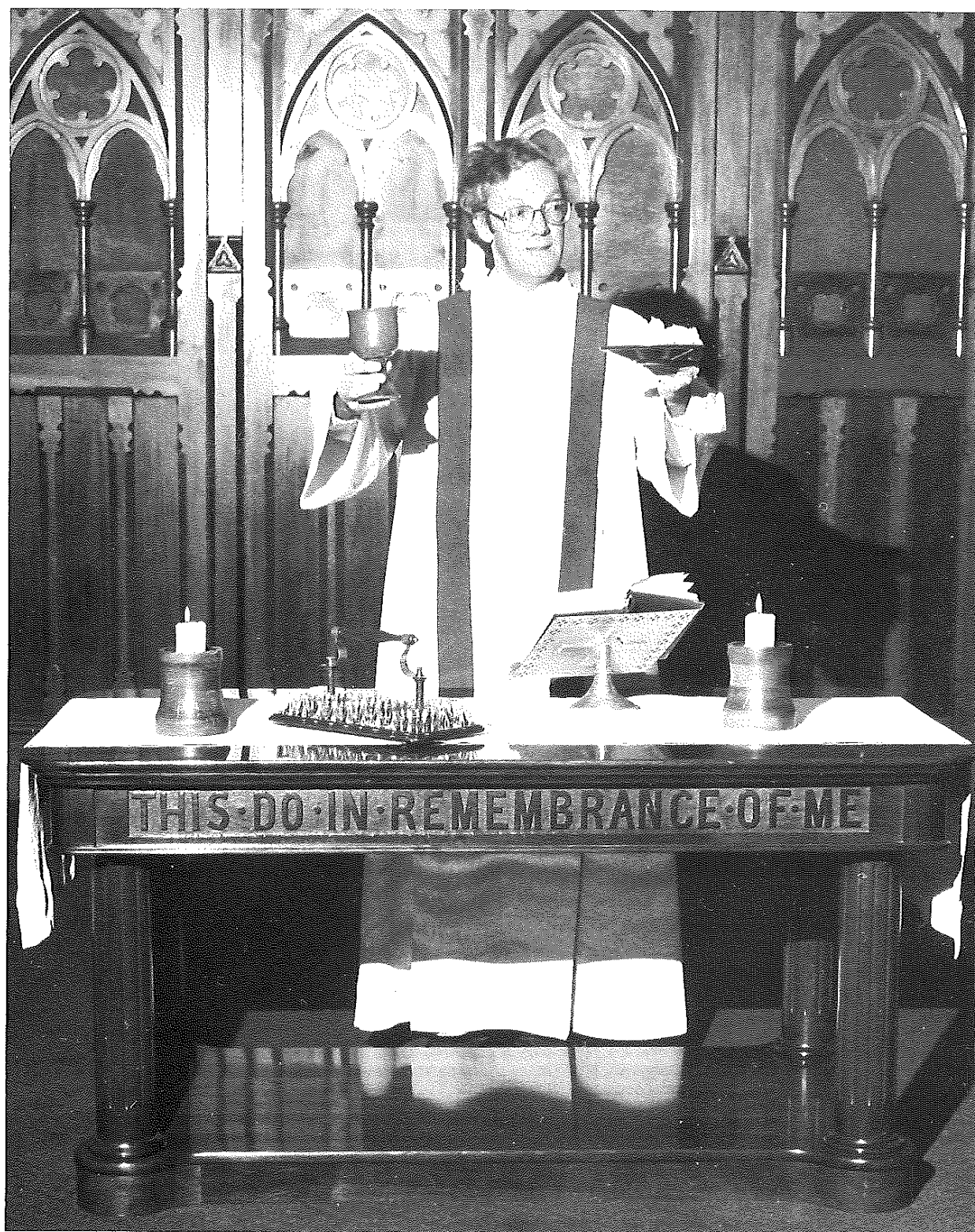


Photo: Eddy Marmur

THE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Now we are at the heart of Christian worship, which has been called a religion of thankfulness. Its central act is sometimes called 'eucharist', from the Greek word for thanksgiving. In terms of the balance between Word and Sacrament in worship, the two accents would be the readings and the preaching in the first part, and this prayer and receiving the bread and wine, in the second part. When time presses in a service, don't omit this prayer!

This has always been a very rich prayer, a summation of all the thanks we wish to give to God. At its heart is Grace before a meal, which reflects Jesus' own tradition of table fellowship. Jewish prayers bless God for bread and wine, for God's law (Torah) and commandments, for life and health, for bridegroom and bride, for Israel; whenever a phrase like 'Blessed are you, Lord God, ruler of the universe' appears, our prayers become part of a very long history stretching back into the Hebrew scriptures. We also borrow a Jewish and biblical 'style' of prayer, that the American Methodist scholar James F. White has called a 'think-thank' prayer. That is, we think what God has done for us, and we thank God for it. Thus, the thanks are not merely for our own blessings, but for all God's mighty acts for the salvation of the whole world; so the recital becomes the church's great hymn of praise. No wonder many traditions sing this prayer — and we ought to sing as much of it as possible. This prayer is as much a proclamation of the gospel as the sermon is. To declare the glory of God is an evangelical act.

The provision of such prayers in *Uniting in Worship* is also rich. The first prayer (LB 93) was written in Australia for this book. There are also eight alternatives (A–H, LB 104ff).

The work of choosing a prayer and then preparing it for worship is the minister's. It is worth reading each of them aloud in the study to capture the flow of each. There are quite different styles of language and imagery represented in the prayers. The more familiar the minister is with the words, the less tied he/she will be to the book when it is on the table or lectern, and the more the meaning of the prayer can be brought out as it is prayed.

And let the minister pray the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving in its entirety. It is a single prayer, and it is quite false to divide it up into sections for different people to lead. It is also a false view of the ministry of presiding. The gift of the Spirit referred to in 1 Corinthians 12:28 as 'administration' may well refer to the gift of guiding the people of God in their worship. The presider (like a good chairperson at a meeting) does not need to do everything. Rather he/she discerns the gifts for worship leadership already present in the congregation, and finds ways of using those gifts. But he/she has a gift also, and to carve up a single prayer in the name of 'democracy' is to misunderstand the way the New Testament speaks of individuals' gifts being used for the upbuilding of the whole, and probably reflects an uncertainty about leadership itself. Let the presider preside!

The people meanwhile have the luxury of a single page (PB 65) which contains all that they will need for any of the nine prayers. If they learn three responses and the 'Holy, holy, holy Lord' — which has the same lead-in lines in every prayer in the book — they can put the book away and enter into the spirit of the thanksgiving with heart and soul (and eye and voice). And it is entirely right to stand for this prayer — a great deal shorter than most hymns.

When to break the bread

Followers of the Methodist/Anglican forms in former days will be used to breaking the bread while saying the Words of Institution when they appear in the prayer. The Reformed tradition certainly allowed for the bread and cup to be touched or raised as the warrant was read — 'with *this* bread and *this* cup, we do as our Saviour commands' (LB 92) — but the bread was not broken at that point. In this service, there is a separate point for breaking the bread, so that it stands as a distinct act and is not hidden in the prayer (see below and LB 126).

Music

The 'Holy, holy, holy Lord' (for example LB 102, and always PB 65) is primarily a hymn and ought to be sung. Some excellent and easily learned settings are available — for example, in *Sing Alleluia*. Most choirs and organists would be delighted to prepare and teach one of these. Choose one in consultation with the organist, and then use it for at least a year (12 communions?). Participation is enhanced as a tune becomes known — and the hymn book can be put away.

Responses

The opening dialogue between minister and people is an important exchange. In the first couplet, the older response 'and with thy spirit' expressed the faith that the minister has a spiritual gift which he/she exercises in leading this prayer. (In modernising it, it might have been fruitful to have substituted the original exchange in Ruth 2:4 — 'The Lord bless you!') The second couplet is the real beginning of the Great Prayer: 'Lift up your hearts!' It should be said confidently, and may be accompanied by the raising of the hands — the gesture used by the earliest Christians at prayer. The third couplet

states the reason for this prayer: 'Let us give thanks to the Lord our God' — and note the change in the words of the reply, 'It is right to give *our* thanks and praise', a small step in the direction of inclusive language. Finally, with such a rich dialogue leading to prayer, it should be obvious that there is no need to say 'Let us pray' before it!

THE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING OF THE UNITING CHURCH (LB 93–103)

The unique feature of this prayer is that it unites the two liturgical traditions discussed above under the heading of The Institution of the Lord's Supper. It is designed so that either the warrant tradition or the prayer tradition may be followed without the flow of the prayer, or its meaning, being affected. The choice still needs to be made!

The prayer is not so peculiarly Australian that Christians of other nationalities could not use it. Christian prayer must be ecumenical ('of the whole inhabited earth'). The prayer is not so peculiarly Reformed or Evangelical that other Christians could not use it. Christian prayer must be catholic (universal). Yet the prayer does have aspects which sound a particular note for Australians, and which affirm our Reformed and Evangelical emphases.

Amongst the latter must be listed the biblical nature of the language, for example the paragraph about the work of Christ ('In the fullness of your mercy . . .') which is based on Ephesians 2 and concludes with its triumphant affirmation 'for by grace we are saved through faith'. Few more archetypal texts could be found for a church with its roots in the Reformation, and it is notable that Ephesians 2:8 was John Wesley's text for his first sermon in Oxford after 24th May 1738 ('Salvation by Faith'). Protestants do not have sole rights to the Bible, and no sectarian point is made here, but the *Basis of Union* affirms that the scriptures are normative (paragraph 5) and in preaching Christ in Word and sacrament, the church's message is controlled by the biblical witness.

It is already clear that Australians hear particular overtones in the paragraph of the prayer which touches on creation (LB 93). Although dreaming is a major theme in both Old and New Testaments as a vehicle for revelation, the phrase 'in time beyond our dreaming' allows a link especially for Aboriginal Australians between their story and the biblical story. Even the expression 'at the heart of your creation' may be seen as an affirmation of the special relationship which Aboriginal Australians — and increasingly others — feel for the land; a relationship which the people of the Hebrew scriptures understand very well.

Footnote: [For a fuller and more technical analysis of this prayer, see 'Composing a Eucharistic Prayer for the Uniting Church', an article by Robert Gribben in the *Australian Journal of Liturgy*, (Adelaide), Vol. 1, No. 4, 1988 pp. 134–146, and reprinted in *Trinity Occasional Papers*, (Brisbane), Vol. VII, No. 2, December 1988, pp. 74–86.]

THE SPECIAL THANKSGIVINGS

These are provided for insertion when the season or occasion calls for a particular theme to be included in the thanksgiving — it not being a simple matter to make insertions which harmonise with the text. We have taken the opportunity to use a number of images and words from biblical or ancient sources which ought to be preserved, but each text was composed for this Great Prayer of Thanksgiving.

Note that the Advent prayer changes according to the lectionary theme, which moves during the season from John the Baptist to Mary (LB 94). Few congregations will have Communion on Good Friday, but in any case the celebration would properly use the same special thanksgiving as that for Easter Day (LB 97). Similarly, the Easter Day/Easter Season text (LB 98) would be used on any sacramental occasion throughout the fifty days of Easter — Easter not being over in a single day (when many of our people are away on holidays). Baptism of Jesus (LB 95) could be used for any baptism, as could Confirmation (LB 100). The Ordination text (LB 101) was written for this prayer, and fits better than the alternative in the Ordination Service itself (LB 515), which was written before the Service of the Lord's Day was completed.

ALTERNATIVE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING A (LB 104)

This prayer corresponds to the one in Holy Communion One in the 1980 'blue booklet'. In that book, the Commission on Liturgy made some modifications which were not entirely successful, so we have reverted to the original version which is that found in *An Australian Prayer Book* (1978). This gesture is even more ecumenical than it looks! The prayer on which the Anglican Liturgical Commission worked was written by the Rev. Dr Harold F. Leatherland, then Principal of the Congregational Theological College in Melbourne, and later a member of the Uniting Church. It is no small thing that two Australian churches may officially use an identical prayer at the eucharist.

Leatherland's prayer was modified by the Anglican Commission, though he was very pleased with the result. It has many strengths, including a very positive view of creation and our stewardship of it:

You have given us this earth to care for and delight in
and with its bounty you preserve our life.

For other details, see Fr Gilbert Sinden's commentary on it in *When We Meet for Worship*, Lutheran Publishing House, 1978.

One minor difference — when used at an ecumenical service — is that the Anglicans will want to say together the words which follow the narrative about the cup: 'With this bread and this cup . . . in glory', since their order provided for this to be a congregational acclamation. We omitted this provision, and the other common one — 'Christ has died/Christ has risen/Christ will come again' — where it occurs, to keep our responses simple and uniform.

The Words of the Institution form part of the prayer itself.

The prayer is so printed that the presider need never turn pages back — it always moves forward. Thus if no special thanksgiving is used, the prayer connects LB 93 and LB 102 (and the page may be found while people are singing 'Holy, holy, holy Lord'). The rest of the prayer is on one open page.

Note that if the warrant has been used, and the narrative of the institution is thus omitted, the prayer continued halfway down LB 103 (after the indentation) with the words 'With this bread and this cup . . .'.

On prolixity

It is worth noting, if the minister is seeking a shorter prayer, that those which look shorter probably require the warrant in addition. B and C have the same number of lines and are the shortest; less than ten lines — and some lines have one or two words — separate the other prayers, with exception of E and H which are much longer. If the Uniting Church Great Prayer is used with warrant, it is longer by four lines than if the prayer tradition is followed! But no-one will need these statistics . . .

ALTERNATIVE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING B (LB 107)

This is the prayer from 'Holy Communion Two' (Uniting Church Worship Series 1980). It is brief, credal in form and biblical in language.

The Warrant (LB 92) is read before the prayer.

ALTERNATIVE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING C (LB 109)

This is borrowed from the liturgical resources of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. (1984). Our Commission on Liturgy has inserted the standard lead-in lines and the 'Holy, holy, holy Lord' so that it may be used generally, and perhaps particularly on more informal or small group occasions. It was originally designed for use 'when serving Communion in the home or hospital', the idea being that patients or the very old would find making responses a burden. With a similar omission, Uniting Church ministers may find the prayer a useful one for such communions. The prayer does illustrate the possibility of writing a short eucharistic prayer which omits nothing vital.

This prayer also occurs, without the eucharistic references, as a Thanksgiving Prayer for non-sacramental days (LB 611). A study of the differences is instructive.

The warrant is read before the prayer (LB 92).

ALTERNATIVE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING D (LB 111)

This prayer, which includes the words of institution, is slightly adapted from our sister church, the United Church of Canada. A notable feature is the repeated chorus, 'We praise you, O God', in the first part (LB 111–112) and 'Come, Lord Jesus' in the second (LB 113), which provides an opportunity for lively congregational participation, not least by younger members. The words of the chorus do not appear in the People's Book, so a singing group will need to give the lead (and will need the Leader's Book or a nod from the minister). Nor is it necessary to use this chorus; any short refrain which is a cry of glory (for example, something from the Taizé repertoire) will suit.

It is not a prayer for children, but it has great potential for engaging their interest and participation along with others. Many will respond to the story-telling style of the prayer; other names and events can be used in the list, especially if the Christian education program over the previous few weeks is incorporated in a family eucharist, say at the end of a term. It is a prayer which can be taken at many levels, and grown into by people of many stages of understanding.

ALTERNATIVE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING E (LB 114)

Another United Church of Canada prayer, which includes the Institution narrative. It makes extensive use of the Jewish prophetic tradition, evoking its sense of justice (see especially the second last paragraph, LB 116, a passionate plea). The characteristic Jewish blessing formula is also used: 'Blessed is the Holy One of Israel, Sovereign of all that is . . .'. With its full use of the synoptic gospel account of the Last Supper ('Never

again shall I drink from the fruit of the vine until that day . . .'), it would be very appropriate on Holy (Maundy) Thursday. The language is quite different from the heavily doctrinal tone which has marked some eucharistic prayers in the past.

ALTERNATIVE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING F (LB 117)

This prayer, which includes a narrative of the institution, is that of the 'Sunday Service' of the British Methodist Church (1975). It recounts the history of salvation, and has all the other parts of a classical eucharistic prayer, with great economy of words.

ALTERNATIVE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING G (LB 120)

Taken from the supplemental resources of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A., this prayer requires the Narrative of the Institution to be read as a warrant (LB 92) — as its original author would desire.

In 1542, John Calvin replaced the mediaeval canon of the Mass with the Words of Institution and a very long exhortation. He did not provide a eucharistic prayer in the form now generally accepted, so the compilers have turned his exhortation into a prayer, and drawn on other writings of his to provide a thanksgiving with rich overtones of Calvin's theology.

ALTERNATIVE GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING H (LB 122)

This is the full form of the prayer which appeared in Holy Communion Three in the Uniting Church Worship Series booklet (1980). In a deep sense, it is an ecumenical prayer. Its roots are in the ancient Eastern Orthodox traditions, especially that of St Basil (4th century); its modern form is part of the liturgical work which followed the Second Vatican Council, and appears as Prayer IV of the Roman Sacramentary of 1971. The prayer is found in several Anglican and Protestant resources overseas, and we have it in the modified form prepared by the Consultation on Church Union (U.S.A.) which includes the Uniting Church's previous traditions. Some minor changes, including the omission of intercessions, have been made by our Commission on Liturgy. It is a prayer for a grand occasion, or one where there is time to absorb its rich imagery and language.

It includes a narrative of Institution.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

All the alternative prayers merge at this point!

Placing the Lord's Prayer here, as many liturgies ancient and modern do (and as our order suggests for sacramental days) gives a special sense to the petition 'give us today our daily bread'. See the biblical commentaries for what is a curious sentence in the original prayer, referring certainly to more than ordinary food needs.

In the contemporary version, a change has been made in one word from the version we learned for the United Church Worship Series of booklets. We now say 'Save us *from* the time of trial' in the most difficult line to re-translate in the prayer! It conveys the negative in the original ('Lead us not'), which 'save us *in*' did not, and thus brings us closer to Jesus' meaning.

The change is proposed by the international and ecumenical body, the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC).

20 THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

Of the four central acts of this sacrament, the first and the third are basically functional: take (so as to give thanks); break (so as to share). Both are basically actions and require no words — so the rubric offers the possibility of the breaking of bread and lifting up of the cup being done in silence. The words provided as an alternative (1 Corinthians 10:16–17) are a meditation on sharing bread: a single loaf is broken in order that many may eat it; being many, we are one in Christ. Breaking the bread is not symbolic of Christ's body being broken on the cross (see John 19:36).

So let the action speak! Encourage those who prepare the elements to leave a slice to be broken at this point, or use a single loaf for the whole congregation. (Choose a loaf with a soft crust, so that the whole may be eaten — a crusty loaf simply explodes everywhere with crumbs, and afterwards tends to look as if the birds have been at it, leaving a hollow shell.) The rubric says to break the bread 'in full view of the people', encouraging a generous gesture.

Historically the cup is less important: the New Testament refers to the 'breaking of the bread', not the 'lifting of the cup' (see Acts 2:42). The Jewish custom is simply to lift the cup a hands-breadth off the table as grace is said.

Having broken the bread and indicated the cup, the rubrics now suggest that plate and cup be held out to the people, offering 'the gifts of God for the people of God', a phrase which goes back to St John Chrysostom in the 4th century.

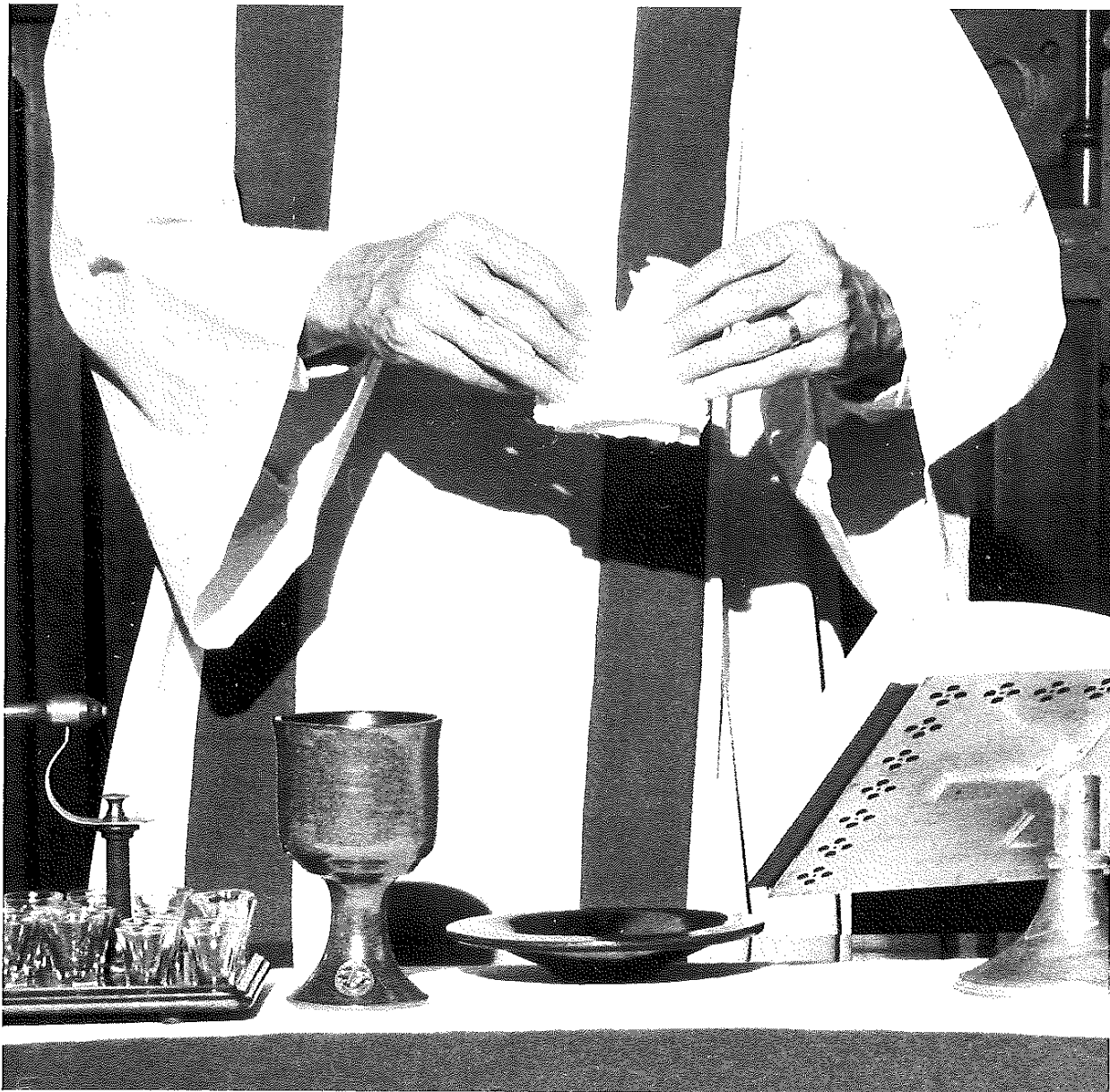


Photo: Eddy Marmur

21 LAMB OF GOD

This litany (prayer with response) was originally sung while the bread was being broken into pieces for distribution. It is thus a reflection on the eucharist, on Christ as the Lamb of God. The scriptural origins are found in Isaiah 53:7, John 1:29 and Revelation 5:6f. It lends itself to being sung by a choir or by all, quietly, as a pre-communion devotion. It is optional — perhaps it might be sung at services in Lent and Easter; otherwise go straight to communion.

There are two versions, printed in both LB and PB: the first is a recently written, freer version of the second, traditional form.

There are many methods of distribution, and it is the responsibility of the Council of Elders to decide the best way (or ways) for a congregation. Beware compromises. The purpose is to help people break bread together in the most faithful way, not to preserve this or that tradition, or to meet this or that sensitivity. Find a way on which all can agree, even if this takes months. Two different methods at the same time (for example, a common cup plus a tray of glasses) simply confuse, and portray disunity. Always go back to the root of the matter: what is it that we are trying to enact here? How can we do that best, decently and in order?

When you come to receive holy communion, do not come with your arm outstretched or your fingers parted. Make your left hand into a throne for your right, because your right is about to welcome your king. Shape your palm into a cup, and so receive the body of Christ our Lord, to whom all authority has been given in heaven and on earth.

(Cyril of Jerusalem, from his lectures to newly-baptised Christians in Jerusalem in the 4th century.)

Alternative words of distribution

Two sets are given on LB 128/PB 67. The simplest (and most ancient) of all is:

The body of Christ.
The blood of Christ.

to which the recipient answers, Amen.

Another suitable alternative is:

The body of Christ,
the bread of life.
The blood of Christ,
the true vine.

The appropriate response to the words of distribution is 'Amen', not 'thank you'.

22 THE COMMUNION

The first rubric (LB 128) implies, but does not require, that the presiding minister receives first. We are in the realm of parable in liturgy, or 'word-act'; the simplest way to put the argument is: a minister may not give what he/she has not received. It is not an act of privilege, it is an act of obedience. (The sometimes elaborate way in which the minister is finally served can, in fact convey the opposite of its intended impression — of a servant waiting on a master/mistress.) The essence of the matter is to do it simply and devoutly. Then serve the other assistants, and, unless distributing yourself, watch over what follows: that is a pastor at work.

If the people are to remain in the pews to receive, then the minister may wish to preface the act of communion with the words provided (LB 128), addressed to all (including him/herself).

23 PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Silence is suggested after communion. This is sometimes difficult to achieve at the end of a longish service, but it is worth the careful planning of the other elements.

Two alternative prayers are provided. The first is from the hand of the Reformer Martin Bucer, and appeared in Holy Communion Two (1980). The second is written by David Frost, professor of English at Newcastle University (N.S.W.). This last is a fine example of the use of biblical images in such a way that the prayer catches you with unexpected turns as it develops, giving food for thought and further prayer.

Other prayers may be found on LB 655–658. Alternatives which could be said together are in the Treasury of Prayers; see at PB 212 #2, PB 214 #6, PB 218 #14, PB 222 #22. The Reformers encouraged the use of the Song of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis) — see PB 145 #11.

THE SENDING FORTH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

For this section, which is common to the Service of the Lord's Day whether the sacrament is celebrated or not, see the notes in the previous chapter.

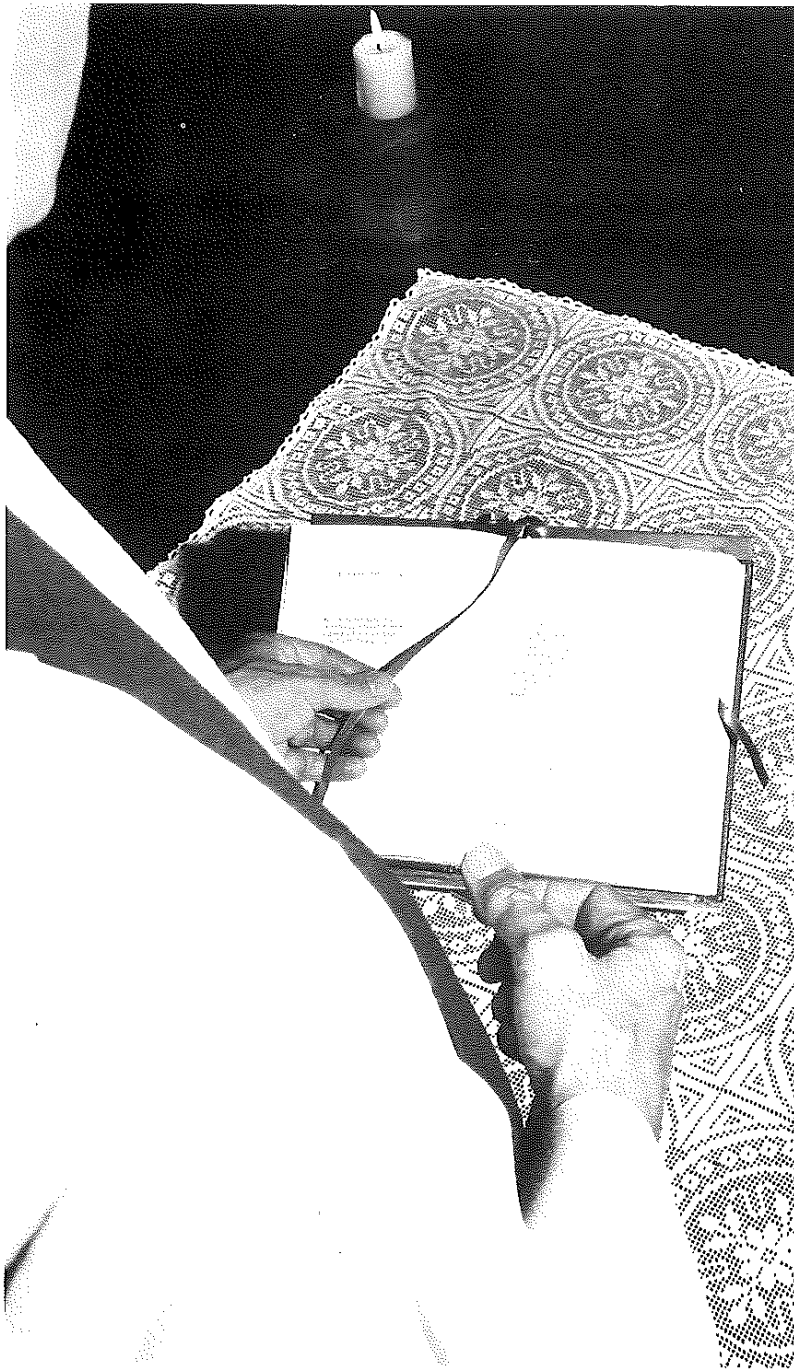


Photo: Eddy Marmur

Leftovers

Note xvi states that it is the responsibility of the minister and elders to decide what should be done with bread and wine left over after a celebration. At first sight this seems a mere detail, but it is worth taking seriously. At one level, we may say that Christians who have just given thanks over bread and wine should not throw them out, especially in the face of a world where most people do not get enough food to live. At a deeper level, through this bread and wine God has nourished us with Christ's body and blood. That thought will still be with us at the end of the celebration: simple gratitude suggests that we dispose of them in a suitably reverent manner. What 'reverence' means no doubt varies from person to person. Many Christians find it offensive that bread and wine are disposed of like rubbish. Ecumenical respect should make us sensitive. No suggestion is being made that the bread and wine are other than bread and wine, for all the deep significance of their use during the sacrament. How many of us find it difficult to throw away an old and well-loved Bible!

But the problem diminishes with some forethought. If the amount of bread and wine is calculated with a realistic eye to the usual number of communicants, there will be little waste. The note suggests the most natural way of disposing of bread and wine: eat and drink them. A few people (not necessarily children) could be asked to assist the stewards after the service to finish the remainder and conclude with a prayer.

Another service for use with the sick is a Service of Healing — see LB 416/PB 90.

We all stand up together and offer prayers; and . . . when we have finished praying, bread and wine and water are brought up, and the president likewise offers prayers and thanksgiving to the best of his ability, and the people assent, saying the Amen; and there is a distribution, and everyone participates in the elements over which thanks have been given; and they are sent through the deacons to those who are not present.

(Justin Martyr, *to the Emperor*,
c. 150 A.D.)

COMMUNION BEYOND THE GATHERED CONGREGATION LB 134/PB 72

This service is a response to a particular pastoral need: sacramental ministry to those who cannot attend church services. The beneficiaries of this ministry may not be sick — they may simply be old or otherwise disabled. For the sick, a minister may choose to cel-

ebtrate a brief but complete Communion Service (see Note ii) in the home or hospital. Where time and physical ability allow, this is the right provision. It provides a ministry both of Word and sacrament, in the context of pastoral care by the minister of the Word and the elders. The Service of the Lord's Day is easily adapted for such short services — using, for instance, Alternative Great Prayer of Thanksgiving C (LB 109).

But frequently the sick cannot concentrate for even this length of time; or there may be several residents of a particular nursing home, where it is inappropriate to conduct the usual service and certainly inappropriate to conduct an adequate eucharistic liturgy by each bedside. This service of Communion Beyond the Gathered Congregation may assist in such cases.

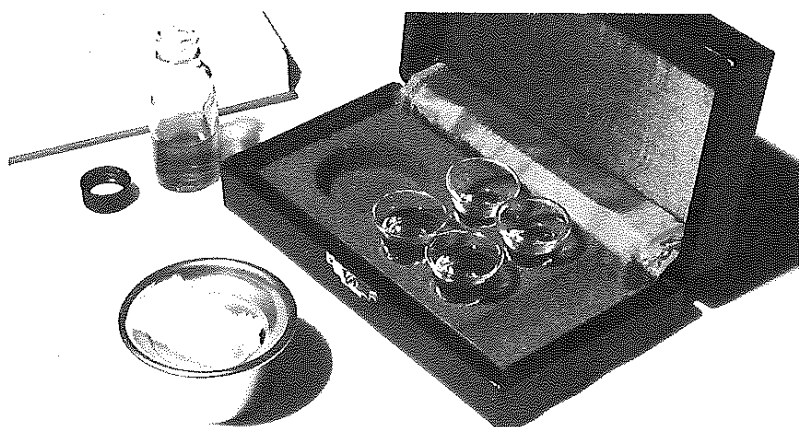
It is an 'extended' service — it does not stand on its own. It is not an order for a Communion Service, and it is not a 'home communion' in the ordinary sense. It is part of the normal sacramental worship of the whole local congregation and stems entirely from it.

The decision to use this ministry is made by the minister and council of elders. It should be as specific as possible — we will use it for members A and B at home, and members X, Y and Z in the Nursing Home. Elders should visit, explain what is intended, and help the member prepare. A copy of PB might be left for them to read, and they might use some prayers from it for preparation, for example, in the Treasury of Prayers (PB 211 ff), Nos. 7, 8, 12, 14, 18, 25, 27, 28, 30, 33, 39, 45, 49, 50, 51. A number of the Psalms are helpful too — for instance, 23, 24, 46, 51, 67, 90, 95, 100, 103, 111, 113, 121, 145. The intention here is to strengthen the sense of being members of a worshipping congregation.

Then, on the day of the Lord's Supper, certain elders or others are designated to make particular visits (the times of visits having been set beforehand), and the people being visited are named during the intercessions. There are several ways in which the 'extended communion' might be organised. For instance, at the point where the congregation receives communion, the communion visitors might come forward, and be given the bread and wine to take out — and they receive their communion at the home or institution, with the people they are visiting. Or, the visitors receive in the congregation in the usual way, and at the Sending Forth of the People of God (LB 133), are charged with their ministry (Word of Mission), leaving the church after the Blessing to go straight to their members.

Two things are vital to this ministry. First, adequate preparations both of visitors and members. It should represent a real spiritual bond between the congregation in church and the congregation dispersed. Secondly, what happens at the place of communion should be carefully planned and tailored to the needs and capacities of the people receiving. The rubrics give general guidelines, and all is flexible excepting at the point of receiving the elements (LB 137/PB 76) where the designated introduction, prayer and words of distribution should be used. Special care must be taken so that the person visited is comfortable, able to hear or see to the best of their ability, and so to participate prayerfully.

People well tutored in the Reformation controversies will recall that there was strong objection in the 16th century to the consecrated elements being taken from the church and 'carried about'. The concern then was for possible superstitious use of the elements, or for their 'adoration' separately from their use for communion. These are unlikely to be our fears today. Our temptation is not to treat the sacred elements with too much, but with too little respect. Nevertheless, the service in *Uniting in Worship* is carefully designed to be a ministry centrally linked to the worship and pastoral oversight of a particular congregation. It is not an 'extra-liturgical devotion' and it is not the 'reservation' of elements. A minister or elder will often make the journey to the back pew for a communicant who cannot come to the communion rail; this service does no more than extend that hospitality by a limited and predetermined distance and time.



'Adequate containers'

Note (vii) calls for adequate containers for the bread and wine to be taken from the church building. Churches of other traditions are better prepared for this. Many ministers will have a 'travelling communion set' which will have some individual communion glasses and a small container for the bread (called a 'pyx') kept secure in a carrying case. Otherwise a small bottle with screw top is adequate for the wine, and the bread could simply be carried wrapped. There is no need to take more of the elements than is strictly required for the number of persons to be visited, and so there will be no need to 'consume or otherwise reverently dispose of' what remains; it hardly needs to be said that all vessels need to be thoroughly washed and cleaned.



Photo: Eddy Marmur

