

# Wine of the Lord's Table

*A paper prepared by the Commission on Liturgy for the members of the Assembly Standing Committee.  
December, 1985.*

## HISTORICAL

The history of beverages mentioned in the Bible is long, complex, and at some points vague. For the purpose of this paper, it is sufficient to say that the *yayin*, referred to in the Old Testament and the *oinos* in the New

Testament were the fermented juice of the grape. When the fermentation process had not run its full course, it was referred to as *neos oinos* (new wine). The term *neos oinos* was used to describe both the newly-pressed grape juice and also the grape juice during the early part of the fermentation process. The point of our Lord's parable about the wineskins (Matthew 9 :17) is that the *neos oinos* must be put into new wineskins so that the more flexible skins can take the strain of the expanding grape juice during the fermentation process.

There is no evidence in either the Old or New Testaments, nor in any Jewish literature of the inter-testamental period, that the people of Jesus' day knew of or employed any method of preserving grape juice in its unfermented state.

The Jewish wines were light and in earlier Old Testament times were probably taken neat. In the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees 15:39, it says that 'it is harmful to drink wine alone, or again, to drink water alone, while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one's enjoyment. The Oral Law which guided every Jewish family in our Lord's time encouraged the use of one part of wine to two or three parts of water.

The use of fermented wine, both in religious ceremonies and in the numerous family occasions each year, has an unbroken history right up to the present day in Jewish communities. Similarly, for the first 1850 years' of the Christian Church's history, there was the universal practice in both West and East of using a light fermented wine at the Lord's supper. This means that churches in the Reformed and Methodist traditions have used fermented wine in holy communion for the larger part of their history.

Standard communion ware in congregations of the Reformed and Methodist traditions in the 18th and 19th centuries comprised two metal patens, two chalices and two ewers for the refilling of empty chalices during the distribution. Some congregations in Australia have some or all of these pieces of a communion set. They should be encouraged to value and use them as a significant part of the heritage of their life and worship.

## THE TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT

The movement had its organised beginnings in the 1830's in England. It was in a sense an out-working of the influences of the Evangelical Revival of the previous century on the moral and social life of Great Britain.

However, it is inaccurate to assume that evangelical preachers and philanthropists of the 18th and 19th centuries who were strongly committed to temperance were in their personal lives total abstainers. Most of the 18th century evangelical leaders were outspoken prophets about the dangers of strong drink, but there is no evidence to suggest that they were teetotal themselves. Perhaps no person more than John Wesley was responsible for the closure of the gin shops of England in the latter part of the 18th century; and yet Wesley frequently drank a pint of ale when he was in good health and wine when he was feeling physically weak.

Moving into the 19th century, the eminent Scots divine, orator and theologian Thomas Chalmers was strongly

committed to temperance. That commitment for Chalmers involved a personal resolve not to take more than three glasses of wine at a sitting. Lord Shaftesbury fully recognised the evils of drunkenness and continually preached on temperance; but he also commended the moderate use of wine as a stimulant to sociability. A leading member of the Society of Friends, Elizabeth Fry, on her exacting evangelistic journeys on behalf of prison reform, had frequent recourse to beer as a means of keeping up her strength.

By the 1860's, the Temperance Movement had taken on the general - although not universal - character of a total abstinence movement. During the second half of the 19th century, this change in emphasis from temperance to total abstinence caused a ferment within the Methodist and Non-conformist churches of England. For example, in 1840, when two candidates for the Methodist ministry confessed that they were teetotallers, they were told by the Conference to forsake immediately their opinions or else cease to be candidates. The Methodist Conference of 1841, meeting in Manchester, resolved: "1. That no unfermented wines be used in the administration of the sacrament of Holy Communion. 2, That no Wesleyan chapel be lent for meetings of the Temperance Society. 3, That no preacher shall go into another circuit to advocate teetotalism without the consent of the superintendent of the circuit to which he may be invited".

The story of the Temperance Movement in its first 50 years is a very exciting one. By the 1890's, it had enlisted the support of most of the Free Churches of England. The Church of England Temperance Society was established in 1872, although its policy was to recommend rather than require abstinence by its members. There was a similar society established by the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. The first 50 years also witnessed the formation of the Independent Order of Rechabites, the Sons of Temperance and the Independent Order of Good Templars. With its beginnings in England, the movement quickly spread to other parts of the English speaking world, principally North America and Australasia. It made less progress in Scotland and considerably less growth in non-English-speaking Europe.

By the last decade of the 19th century, most of the Free Churches of England and Wales were moving away from the use of fermented wine at the Lord's supper. The adoption of the use of grape juice had its beginnings in Australia at about the turn of the 20th century. The influence of the Temperance Movement on the sacramental practice of many churches coincided with the development of methods of preserving fruit and fruit juices and staying the natural processes of fermentation. Consequently the Free Churches had an alternative product from the fruit of the vine that was available in its unfermented state through all the months of the year.

Shortly after the adoption of grape juice as one of the sacramental elements, there was the move away from the common chalice to the individual cup. Concern for health and hygiene strengthened this preference, and by the first decade of the 20th century the use of the individual cup had become widespread.

## **OTHER CHURCHES**

The Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints use only grape juice at communion and make abstinence from all alcoholic beverages a condition of membership. Conservative Protestant churches such as the Brethren and Pentecostal groups generally use grape juice. The churches in the Baptist, Disciples of Christ and Methodist traditions generally use grape juice and encourage their members to consider the standard of personal voluntary abstinence. Presbyterian and Congregational churches have generally advocated temperance - in the original sense of the word - as the standard for their members. There is therefore much variation from congregation to congregation in the type of the fruit of the vine used in the communion service. The churches in the Reformed but non-English-speaking countries have generally retained

the use of the common cup and fermented wine. The congregations of the Reformed Churches of Australia (mainly Dutch in background) use the chalice and fermented wine. The Christadelphian 'ecclesias' use fermented wine, but administer it in individual cups.

The several churches of Orthodoxy, the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran churches and the churches of the Anglican communion retain the practice of the common cup and the use of fermented wine. Some members of these churches would regard the use of anything other than fermented wine as unscriptural and unhistoric, and of sufficient seriousness as to call into question the validity of such a sacramental service.

## **THE CHALICE**

In the early Church, the common cup of the eucharist was usually made of glass. By about the 4th century metal cups had become common. Some were of a base metal such as pewter or lead, but chalices of precious metal such as silver and gold were more common. Occasionally cups would be fashioned out of precious stones. The chalices of the Reformed churches of Europe and Britain were metal. With the restoration of the cup to the laity, the design and size of Reformed chalices changed, but the long-established custom of using only metal cups continued.

It is noted that an increasing number of UCA. congregations is returning to the use of the common cup, usually offering it together with individual cups for personal choice by communicants. It is also noted that some chalices in use in our congregations are made of pottery or wood. The use of chalices other than those made of metal should be discouraged. A pottery chalice - however well-glazed and a wooden chalice are much more porous than a metal one and it is more difficult adequately to wipe the lip of the cup.

Common concern about AIDS has prompted the Commission on Liturgy to seek advice from a medical expert Professor David Penington, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Melbourne, has responded to our enquires as follows:

'The position is that the virus associated with AIDS has been identified in cells carried by saliva. However, there has not been a single case where spread by saliva has been documented in any country so far, and the only circumstance where it is likely to be a real problem would be with prolonged deep kissing where there must be some slight risk; and for dentists whose fingers are in the mouths of people where blood as well as saliva abounds. We have given specific advice to the dental profession on this problem. Any theoretical minimal risk associated with the use of the common cup at the eucharist would be reduced a further one hundred-fold by wiping the cup with a clean cloth between each communicant, as normally occurs where the common cup is used. By this I mean simply the use of a single cloth to wipe the lip of the cup dry. The same cloth could be used repeatedly as long as it does not become damp. Clearly, because of community concerns about AIDS, it is important that sensible and simple precautions be taken. However from all I know about possible risk, I see absolutely no reason to discourage the use of the common cup.

There are infectious diseases other than AIDS which are spread by saliva; for example, hepatitis A, glandular fever, mumps, the common cold and other viral infections. Pastoral advice should be given to all our communicant people so that they know what to do when they either think or know that they are suffering from any type of infectious disease, either mild or serious. The simplest and best advice is to recommend the reception of an individual cup. However, if a person has a strong preference for receiving the chalice, or if there is no alternative other than a chalice, it may be advisable for that person to receive

the cup from the server, hold it while the words of distribution are said, say 'Amen', and then return the chalice to the server without having partaken of the cup. A reformed alcoholic who is distressed by the smell either of a fermented wine or unfermented grape juice should be given similar pastoral advice".

It is suggested that, if congregations decide to use the common cup at the Lord's supper, they should consider the following:

- The chalice be of metal.
- The chalice be wiped carefully by the server after each communicant.
- The wiper be of good quality pure white linen, or a dense white paper table napkin. (One or more tissues are not adequate.)
- The wine be fermented, but may be diluted to one part of wine to one part of water. (The wine has a natural antiseptic effect and was used for that purpose in the ancient world. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, [Luke 10:34], the point of the reference to pouring in oil and wine' is that the oil was for healing and the wine was for the antiseptic cleansing of the wounds. However, it should be pointed out that a liquid would need to have a 90% or more fortified alcoholic content - such as methylated spirits - to be completely antiseptic.)

## **HYGIENE GENERALLY**

Congregations of the Uniting Church should be encouraged to practice the highest standards of hygiene in everything that relates to the service of the Lord's table. The bread and wine should be prepared within an hour before the beginning of the service at which they are to be consumed - not the night before or the day before as sometimes happens. The prepared bread and wine should be covered with a white linen cloth, either on the communion table or on another table in the sanctuary, if the bread and wine are to be presented at the Offertory. What remains of the elements after all have communicated should also be covered with the cloth.

Individual glass cups should be washed in very hot water with detergent, rinsed in very hot water and then dried with a clean, good quality linen tea towel that does not leave a deposit of lint on the wiped glasses. The trays should be carefully wiped down, both in the section that holds the glasses and the underneath section which supports them. When the glasses have been replaced in the trays, the trays should be put into clean plastic bags and sealed from exposure to the air with a rubber band or clip, before being returned to the communion cupboard. Similarly, the metal plates for the bread and the chalices should be cleaned regularly with the appropriate metallic polish, washed and rinsed in hot water each time they are used and then stored in sealed plastic bags.

## **OTHER GUIDELINES**

Congregations and their councils of elders should be urged to practise certain standards without exception. They are:

- The elements used in holy communion should always be from 'the fruit of the vine'.
- It is not appropriate to use diluted black currant syrup or raspberry cordial.

All the wine - as well as the bread - to be used in the service should be on the communion table by the time of the Offertory. It is not appropriate for a few token communion trays to be on the table during the Service of the

Eucharist while others are in the vestry or kitchen to be filled with grape juice from the refrigerator during the distribution of holy communion in the church. A practice such as this would have shocked our Reformed and Methodist forebears, and it is quite beyond the comprehension of many present-day Christians that such a thing could ever happen in an assembly of Christ's people. If the number of communicants is likely to be unusually large, the simplest procedure is to place on the communion table the number of trays that it can conveniently accommodate, together with a communion ewer filled with an appropriate quantity of wine. As the distribution begins, a communion steward takes the ewer to the vestry or kitchen where the stewards fill the additional trays required. If the provisions made by the stewards before the service are exhausted during the distribution, the additional elements - be they bread or wine - should be placed on the table by a communion steward or elder who advises the presiding minister that these are new elements which were not, on the table during the Great Thanksgiving; the minister then says again the appropriate words of institution from the Great Thanksgiving prayer.

All the bread and wine on the Lord's table that remains at the conclusion of the service should be appropriately disposed of, either by eating and drinking, or in some other reverent way. Until late in the 19th century, many of the service manuals of the Reformed and Methodist traditions provided rubrics requiring the minister, together with the elders or communion stewards, 'to reverently consume what remaineth of the consecrated elements'. It seems that the introduction of individual cups and the use of grape juice have created a number of practical and logistical problems that we have not adequately thought through and resolved over the last 100 years.

## **UNFERMENTED AND FERMENTED WINE**

Much could be written about the merits and demerits of both alternatives. Those who have a strong preference for one or the other would possibly include the following points in their presentation:

### **UNFERMENTED GRAPE JUICE**

Its use in the eucharist is a reminder that living a joyful and healthy life does not depend on the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

It helps to keep before the church the social problems of alcoholism and the devastating effect that alcohol has on some people's lives, as well as the other members of their families. It reminds the church that the undisciplined, consumption of alcohol is the main cause of the carnage on our roads.

Some reformed alcoholics find that the smell of an alcoholic beverage underlined or threatens their moral resolve never to drink alcohol again. (Similarly, it should be recognised that some reformed alcoholics also find the smell of grape juice distressing.)

Its use in the Lord's supper in many churches of the Reformed tradition and in all churches of the Methodist tradition in Australia has a history of almost 100 years. Such a lengthy period gives it a significant place in the history of these churches.

Its use in the Uniting Church maintains a common practice with congregations in the Baptist, Churches of Christ and Pentecostal traditions.

Grape juice is not necessarily divisive. A moderate drinker is less likely to object to drinking fruit juice than a teetotaler is likely to object to drinking an alcoholic beverage.

## **FERMENTED WINE**

It is the type of wine that Jesus would have used when he instituted his sacrament in the Upper Room.

Its use is the longest standing practice of the Church in West and East in Catholic and Reformed. "Wine" means the fermented juice of the grape; it is not being faithful to common English usage to employ the word to describe grape juice, let alone a substitute such as dilute raspberry cordial.

The Uniting Church has a strong commitment to the ecumenical movement. The other major churches in Australia - Roman Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox and Lutheran - have maintained the historic practice of the Church. As convergence in eucharistic theology and practice continues to develop, it would be good if there could be a growing openness in the Uniting Church to the use of fermented wine.

It is a stronger symbol to convey the reality of Christ. Its sharpness of taste is a reminder of the bitterness of the cross; its overtone of joy and 'making glad the heart' is an expression of the risen Lord who binds his people together.

Wine draws no particular attention to itself but points to the reality it signifies. The other alternative, grape juice, draws attention to a particular moral tenet - that alcohol is potentially evil and that the responsible christian position is one of total abstinence.

Fermented wine can be offered alone with grape juice. In some congregations where wine is used, grape juice is served in individual cups and fermented wine in a chalice. Where a choice is offered, all may receive the cup of the Lord in a way that is personally helpful for them.

## **PUBLISHED GUIDELINES BY THE COMMISSION ON LITURGY**

Note 18 in the General Directions of the booklet Holy Communion says: 'It is the responsibility of the council of elders to decide what type of bread and wine are used - unleavened or leavened bread, pre-cut or unbroken loaf unfermented or fermented wine, in individual glasses or common cup'. The booklet was published in 1980. Shortly after publication, two or three letters were received from parishes in New South Wales expressing concern that fermented wine had been listed as a possible choice. For several years there has been no other correspondence received by the commission on the subject. Then, in the early part of 1985, correspondence was received from two parishes and two presbyteries in Queensland.

When the General Directions were framed back in 1979 it was not the intention of the commission to promote any particular type of element or communion vessel, but simply to suggest that decisions about these matters should be worked out, within each congregation, and particularly by its- council of elders. The commission was aware that the Uniting Church had inherited a variety of practices from the three uniting churches, and it decided that it would be unwise and unhelpful for an Assembly agency, particularly in the early years of our new life together, to make strong suggestions or pronouncements on such matters.

The Commission is aware that the matter under discussion is a highly emotional and potentially divisive subject. It would seem that a minority of Uniting Church members today have made a personal commitment to total voluntary abstinence. While statistics are not available to verify general impressions, it is possible that the percentage of Uniting Church teetotallers may be rather small. Nevertheless there are thousands of our members many of them in senior years, who would be very distressed if the Uniting Church appeared to be giving its blessing to the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Therefore it is suggested that it would be prudent for the

Assembly Standing Committee and the Commission on Liturgy to be restrained in anything that is said on the subject.

## **PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS**

Nevertheless, we are called to express our diversity of opinions within the unity of the faith and in the bond of peace and love. There is a variety of opinions and emphases on most doctrinal, political, social, pastoral and liturgical issues. Just as the Uniting Church recognises three modes of baptism, so our people must be helped to recognise that there is a diversity of ways of celebrating the Lord's supper, both liturgically and in practical matters such as methods of distribution of the elements and type of elements used. In regard to the wine questions it seems to be assumed that the only people who have sensitivities on the subject are those who advocate grape juice exclusively.

It appears that there may be a considerable number of Uniting Church members who are becoming increasingly sensitive about the church not using fermented wine at the Lord's Supper.

However, there is one practical thing that can be done. Grape juice is not everywhere easily available. It is quite often cloudy and frequently sharp in taste. Sometimes it does not keep for more than a week, even with refrigeration. If not marketed in bottles, it tastes 'tinny'. It frequently settles out and forms a sludge of fruit crystals at the bottom of the container.

One attractive alternative to the various brands of grape juice currently on the market is a non-alcoholic wine called 'Patri'. There may be other beverages of similar quality and suitability. Non-alcoholic drinks are becoming increasingly popular and socially acceptable, and the wine producers have been quick to recognise this expanding market. Gratitude should be expressed by our church to the Temperance Movement in Australia, particularly the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, for promoting these attractive and palatable beverages.

The commission would like to see the Uniting Church make an official approach to a reputable wine-maker, with the request that it market a product that is attractively and clearly labelled 'Sacramental Wine - Non Alcoholic'. On the church's part, we could undertake to promote the drink and encourage our congregations to use this sacramental wine. Together with other congregations from the Churches of Christ, Baptist and Pentecostal traditions, we could offer, such a large demand for this product that it would be available in most supermarkets throughout the land. 'Patri' is a clear red drink palatable, not too sweet not as sticky as grape juice, and not sharp in taste. With refrigeration it keeps for many weeks. Its price is about the same as a comparable-sized bottle of Sanitarium grape juice.

## **DECISIONS OF THE ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE, 8-9 MARCH 1986**

86.1 It was resolved:

- that the Liturgy Commission's paper *'The Wine of the Lord's Table'* be received.
- that it be affirmed that the wording of No 18 in the General Directions in the booklet Holy Communion is adequate and appropriate; and that it places decisions about the choice of elements for holy communion where they properly belong - in the life of each congregation and particularly with its council of elders.
- that in normal circumstances the church use the juice of the grape, avoiding substitutes which are unscriptural and unhistoric.
- that the Commission on Liturgy be encouraged, as and when appropriate, to offer guidelines to the church:

on the use of the common cup;  
on the maintenance of high standards of hygiene in the care of the communion vessels and the preparation of the elements;  
on the placing of all elements to be consumed during the distribution on the communion table by the time of the Offertory;  
on the reverent disposal of the elements which remain after the distribution of holy communion;  
on the use of the beverage 'Sacramental Wine - Non Alcoholic' for those congregations who decide to use unfermented grape juice.

- that the Commission on Liturgy be encouraged to negotiate with a wine producer for the marketing of a beverage under such name as 'Sacramental Wine - Non Alcoholic'.
- that the Liturgy Commission be encouraged to circulate the document 'The Wine of the Lord's Table' on request.

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