

White House officials said they had spoken beforehand with local church leaders in South Africa about whether President Clinton could receive communion when he attended Mass in Soweto March 29. Clinton, a Southern Baptist, and his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, a Methodist, both received communion at the Mass in Regina Mundi Church in Soweto.

Salesian Father John Coleman, the Johannesburg diocesan vicar for liturgy, said in a telephone interview that if he had been consulted on the possibility of Clinton receiving communion, "my first reaction would have been to say no, unless there are very good reasons." If Clinton had presented himself for communion without warning, the priest concerned "certainly wouldn't refuse him, as it is the norm not to presume bad faith," Coleman said. But in this case, as the parish priest said, there had been prior discussion on the issue and it was no surprise that Clinton came up for communion.

The program for the Mass in the Soweto parish, which invited all baptized Christians to take part in communion, was drawn up by the U.S. organizers of the trip — who said, however, that it reflected their understanding with local church officials.

Coleman said organizers of Clinton's visit appeared to have misjudged the effect of the action, which "surprised and hurt many Catholics, especially American Catholics whom Clinton wouldn't want to alienate."

Father Mohlomi Makobane, the parish priest involved, said that in giving communion to the Clintons and other non-Catholics in the congregation, he was applying the terms of the recent, local ecumenical directory published by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. (See *Origins*, the current volume, pp. 606ff in the edition dated Feb. 26, 1998.) He said he had not asked permission from his bishop.

Father Emil Blaser, media officer for the Southern African bishops, told Catholic News Service April 2 that Father Makobane made a mistake in judgment in ap-

Pastorally, the church recognizes that in very limited and exceptional circumstances Christians of other denominations may be permitted to receive the eucharist. This occurs only when all five of the following conditions are met: The person 1) must be in a situation of grave necessity; 2) must be unable to request the eucharist from a minister of his or her own church or ecclesial community; 3) must ask for the sacrament of his or her own initiative; 4) must be spiritually and morally prepared; 5) must give evidence of holding the Catholic teaching on the eucharist.

The Catholic Church encourages all its members to reach out to all other Christians and work to overcome whatever divides us from one another. Reception of the eucharist must always be a genuine sign of the faith professed in word and manifested in deed.

While presuming the good faith and intention of the president and the priest who celebrated the Mass in Soweto, serious questions exist regarding the application of church guidelines in this case. It would appear from the information provided at this time that not all the conditions required for lawful reception of communion by President Clinton were fulfilled.

Cardinal O'Connor

"Holy communion is neither to be received nor to be given as merely an act of courtesy or a spiritual gesture," Cardinal John O'Connor of New York said when he preached April 5, Palm Sunday, in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. Commenting on the reception of holy communion by President and Mrs. Clinton March 29 in a Catholic church in South Africa, the cardinal said it was his unconditional conviction that "the action taken by the priest in South Africa, however well intentioned, was legally and doctrinally wrong in the eyes of church law and church doctrine." O'Connor discussed the matter in light of church law and doctrine. He commented, "Holy communion means not only our union with Christ in the eucharist, but our union with other Catholics holding the same beliefs in the real presence of Christ." O'Connor's homily follows.

I would ask that all of you here remember in this Mass today in the generosity of your prayers the soul of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, who was tragically assassinated 30 years ago yesterday. Moreover, may I remind you that Passover begins the day after Good Friday and runs through Easter. We pray for a fruitful and a holy season for our Jewish brothers and sisters, together with us sons and daughters of the one God and descendants of Abraham.

Permit me to begin with a beautiful passage from St. Andrew of Crete, who reminds us specifically of what Palm Sunday means. The meaning is much deeper than the external aspects of today's beautiful ceremonies. St. Andrew says:

"Let us go together to meet Christ on the Mount of Olives. Today he returns from

Bethany and proceeds of his own free will toward his holy and blessed passion to consummate the mystery of our salvation....

"Let us run to accompany him as he hastens toward his passion and imitate those who met him then, not by covering his path with garments, olive branches or palms, but by doing all we can to prostrate ourselves before him by being humble and by trying to live as he would wish. Then we shall be able to receive the word at his coming, and God, whom no limits can contain, will be within us....

"So let us spread before his feet, not garments or soulless branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves clothed in his grace, or rather, clothed completely in him. We who have been baptized into Christ must ourselves be the garments that we spread before him.... Let our souls take the place of the welcoming branches as we join today in the children's holy song: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, blessed is the king of Israel."

With a certain sadness, I wish to read a statement about a recent widely publicized event in South Africa. I am fully conscious, of course, that today is Palm Sunday. I read this statement not despite the fact that it is Palm Sunday but in part precisely because it is Palm Sunday and we begin the holiest week of the year. It was during this week that Jesus gave us the most precious gift that even he could give us, himself in the holy eucharist. No gift could be more sacred.

This statement is in no way a political statement nor is it a questioning of anyone's character or good will. It is a statement of a bishop required to teach what the church teaches, the pastor of a major archdiocese whose silence could otherwise mislead many faithful people.

Many letters have been received from Catholics perplexed by the reports that a South African priest gave holy communion to the president of the United States and his wife. Purportedly, a number of other non-Catholics received as well. I share their perplexity.

My statement has nothing whatsoever to do with the person of the president or his wife or any of the allegations concerning any alleged misbehavior. It has everything to do with church law and our teaching about the holy eucharist, this rarest of gifts.

First, church law. Following the event in South Africa, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments in Rome made clear once again on March 31 at the Vatican what I had assumed every bishop and priest has always known and practiced. I quote: "Since this is a person who is not a Catholic, he cannot be admitted to eucharistic communion. This is a canonical norm ... and therefore no bishops' conference can advance a different rule." That would include the bishops' conference of South Africa.

The congregation's spokesman went on to say that exceptions authorized by church law were limited and designed for situations in

which other Christians are unable to worship in their own churches. So, for example, an Orthodox Christian unable to find an Orthodox church in his or her area could receive holy communion in the Roman church.

This, however, is not the only requirement, that is that there not be a church of one's denomination available. As a spokesman of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity stated relative to this same incident in South Africa, "In general the Catholic Church permits access to its eucharistic communion ... only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship and eternal life." The church's official Code of Canon Law permits non-Catholics to receive communion in the Catholic Church in cases of "grave necessity" when certain other circumstances are fulfilled as noted above and if, and this is critical, they believe what Catholics believe about the eucharist.

This brings us to the second crucial point, church doctrine. I quote from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the authoritative articulator of church doctrine: "The eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the people of God by which the church is kept in being.... In brief, the eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: 'Our way of thinking [as Catholics] is attuned to the eucharist, and the eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking' [St. Irenaeus]." The eucharist is our way of life, the essence of our faith.

In other words, holy communion means not only our union with Christ in the eucharist, but our union with other Catholics holding the same beliefs in the real presence of Christ, body and blood, soul and divinity. To receive holy communion in the Catholic Church means that one believes one is receiving, not a symbol of Christ, but Christ Jesus himself. One is not engaging simply in a memorial gesture toward the Last Supper and the crucifixion, however reverent and well intended. The eucharist is the fruit of the sacrifice of the Mass today. Christ is spiritually, mysteriously sacrificed today. This is what we believe. We are receiving the same Christ the apostles received at the Last Supper. We are receiving in actuality the same Christ conceived and born of Mary, crucified and risen. It is not a symbolic Christ; it is the same Christ. It is our belief in this reality that is essential to our being a Catholic community, that unity, as the catechism says, "by which the church is kept in being ... the sum and summary of our faith."

Permit me to digress for a moment from this formal statement to cite a letter along these lines unrelated to the incident in South Africa that I received just the other day from a priest in Louisiana. This priest writes to me:

"Recently, I received a letter from a young woman with whom I went to Catholic grade school who has recently left the Catholic Church. In her letter to me, she begged me to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior and to give up the Catholic Church. In reflecting upon her letter, I thought about all that I would miss were

I no longer a part of the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church. In my response to her, I gave a simple profession of faith concerning what I know I would miss the most, the gift of the eucharist."

What would our faith be without our belief in this gift of the eucharist?

Here is what our Holy Father Pope John Paul II says of the holy eucharist:

"The sacrifice of the cross is so decisive for the future of man that Christ did not carry it out and did not return to the Father until he had left us the means to take part in it as if we had been present. Christ's offering on the cross — which is the real bread of life broken — is the first value that must be communicated and shared. The Mass and the cross are but one and the same sacrifice. Nevertheless, the eucharistic breaking of bread has an essential function, that of putting at our disposal the original offering of the cross. It makes it actual today for our generation. By making the body and blood of Christ really present under the species of bread and wine, it makes — simultaneously — the sacrifice of the cross actual and accessible to our generation, this sacrifice which remains, in its uniqueness, the turning point of the history of salvation, the essential link between time and eternity."

From such words it should be clear that holy communion is neither to be received nor to be given as merely an act of courtesy or a spiritual gesture. This introduces one more critical factor, applicable to ourselves and to all Catholics. Believing what we believe about the holy eucharist, we are forbidden to receive this holy mystery, this "turning point of the history of salvation" unless we are in the state of grace. We may not receive if we are in the state of grave sin until we have first received the sacrament of penance or reconciliation, in other words, "gone to confession."

Clearly, it is not for me to judge the conscience or the motivation of a priest, or certainly of the president and first lady of the United States. Nor am I the responsible authority to determine what must be done anywhere except in the Archdiocese of New York. But the church is, the Code of Canon Law is, the Holy See is the responsible authority everywhere. According to such authority and in my own unconditional conviction, the action taken by the priest in South Africa, however well intentioned, was legally and doctrinally wrong in the eyes of church law and church doctrine.

Some of the mail I have received comes from struggling Catholics, who because of some grave impediment such as an invalid marriage may not receive holy communion. Only last Sunday, I met with some 400 such individuals; it was a deeply moving meeting. More than anything else, they expressed as their primary sadness their denial of holy communion. They also expressed their desire to have their marriages validated, if possible. My heart goes out to them. I understand how an event such as that in South Africa could scandalize and pain them. Some

plying the ecumenical directory.

Archbishop Geraldo Agnello, secretary of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, commented on the matter. "Since this is a person who is not a Catholic, he cannot be admitted to the eucharistic communion. This is a canonical norm ... and therefore no bishops' conference can advance a different rule," Agnello said. He also said exceptions to the rule apply to narrow circumstances of pastoral need, which did not appear to apply to Clinton.

No church official publicly questioned Clinton's motives in receiving communion, and he was not the first non-Catholic president to do so. In 1983, then-U.S. President and Mrs. Ronald Reagan received communion at a Catholic funeral at the Navy Chapel in Washington for longtime Reagan aide Joseph Holmes.

U.S. leaders have not been the only ones to be involved in controversy over eucharistic sharing. British Prime Minister Tony Blair, an Anglican whose wife is Catholic, regularly worships in a Catholic church with his family. In 1996, when he was still opposition leader but widely expected to become the next prime minister, he stopped receiving communion at Catholic services after published reports about it led Cardinal George Basil Hume of Westminster to ask him to stop.

Also, last December Irish President Mary McAleese, a Catholic, created a stir when she received communion at an Anglican service. Catholic officials said her action violated norms against Catholics receiving the eucharist at non-Catholic services in all but certain strictly limited cases.

The text of the 1993 Vatican Directory for Ecumenism, issued by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, appeared in *Origins*, Vol. 23, pp. 129ff (the edition dated July 29, 1993). For a discussion of sacramental sharing, see Nos. 122-136 (pp. 147ff) in the directory.

"The international debt crisis became apparent in 1982 when Mexico announced it could not pay its foreign debt, sending shock waves throughout the international financial community as creditors feared that other countries would do the same," according to "Putting Life Before Debt," the position paper by Caritas Internationalis and CIDSE, whose executive summary appears on these pages. Continuing the discussion of the origin of the debt crisis, the paper says:

"The immediate cause of the crisis occurred in 1973 when the members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries quadrupled the price of oil and invested their excess money in commercial banks. The banks, seeking investments for their new funds, made loans to developing countries, often without appropriately evaluating the loan requests or monitoring how the loans were used. In fact, due to irresponsible practices of creditor as well as debtor governments, much of the money borrowed was spent on programs that did not benefit the poor: armaments, large-scale development projects, and private projects benefiting government officials and a small elite. The 1973 oil price increase also had the effect of triggering inflation in the United States and other industrialized countries.

"In 1979, OPEC raised the price of oil a second time. Meanwhile, the United States adopted extremely tight monetary policies to reduce inflation, producing a domestic recession. The combined impact of the rising price of fuel and rising interest rates led to a worldwide recession. Developing countries were hurt the most. Their exports declined as the domestic cost of production rose and the major importers reduced their purchase of goods from overseas. Latin American governments which had taken out loans from commercial banks at floating interest rates (rates that vary according to the current market interest rate) saw the interest on their debt skyrocket. African governments, reacting to the worldwide collapse in commodity prices, borrowed heavily ➤

undoubtedly believe that if one has enough prestige or money, anything goes, just as some believe that with enough prestige or money one has no trouble in having an invalid marriage validated. Neither belief is rooted in reality, but in my judgment, priests, bishops, the church herself must avoid every action which might be perceived to give credibility to such beliefs.

Let it be clear that in the Archdiocese of New York only those practices are acceptable which accord fully with church law, church doctrine and the authority of the Holy See. Our bishops and priests, in fact, adhere to these practices without need of reminder from me.

I say all that I have said, again sadly, with malice toward none and charity toward all. Let this be a teaching moment for all of us.

Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

"The local bishop had not been asked, as required by church practice, whether in his opinion it would have been appropriate under the circumstances to administer holy communion" to President and Mrs. Clinton March 29 in Soweto, South Africa, said Oblate Father Buti Tlhagale, general secretary of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. In a press statement April 3 he said, "It is doubtful whether the priest applied his mind to the conditions that needed to be fulfilled." Tlhagale's statement follows.

As a general rule, Christians who are not Catholics may not receive the sacraments in the Catholic Church. The reason is that for Catholics the sacraments, in particular holy communion, symbolize the unity among us.

Unfortunately we live in a situation where Christians are divided from each other in belief and practice. Nevertheless, as Christians we do have much in common and are united above all by the bond that baptism creates. Therefore,

situations can arise in which it is meaningful for Christians who are not Catholics to receive the sacraments, including holy communion, in the Catholic Church.

Two such situations are singled out by church authority: a) danger of death; and b) pressing need (it is up to the local bishop to determine what constitutes a pressing need). Where either of these situations exist, a non-Catholic may receive the sacraments in the Catholic Church provided the following conditions are met:

1. The person asks for it spontaneously.
2. Is unable to receive the sacrament in his or her own church.
3. Has substantially the same faith as Catholics about the nature of the sacrament, and
4. Has the proper moral dispositions for its fruitful reception.

With regard to the case of President Clinton receiving holy communion at Regina Mundi Church in Soweto on March 29, 1998, the following has come to light:

The parish priest of Regina Mundi states that the staff of the U.S. president asked, prior to the Mass, whether the president and Mrs. Clinton could receive holy communion if they wished to do so. The priest responded by saying that he saw no objection to their receiving communion on what he saw as a special occasion. He said it would have been rude to turn the president away.

The local bishop had not been asked, as required by church practice, whether in his opinion it would have been appropriate under the circumstances to administer holy communion to the presidential couple. It is doubtful whether the priest applied his mind to the conditions that needed to be fulfilled as stated in the 1993 norms published by the Holy See and repeated by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference ecumenical directory. ♦

Caritas Internationalis-CIDSE

Putting Life Before Debt: Executive Summary

Two international networks of Catholic development organizations have called for "the cancellation of the unpayable debt of the most impoverished countries by the year 2000." A position paper launching a worldwide campaign for Third World debt relief was released at a press conference in Washington April 15 by Caritas Internationalis, a network of 146 national Catholic relief, development and social service organizations around the world, and International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity, known as CIDSE, the acronym for its original French name, a group of 16 overseas aid agencies in Europe, New Zealand and North America, including Catholic Relief Services in

the United States. The joint paper is titled "Putting Life Before Debt." "Our concern stems from our firsthand experience of the impact of debt on the poor and years of our advocacy work for debt relief," the paper says. It refers to international debt as "a complex policy issue that carries with it a profound moral challenge." The position paper notes that debt "has both social and financial costs." Debt repayments divert resources needed to fight poverty and to invest in a nation's infrastructure, the paper says. At the same time, "high levels of debt indicate investment risk and thus deter investment." Among its recommendations, the paper calls for drastic improvement of the Heavily Indebted Poor