

No Love, No Eucharist

Some time ago, I read a riveting report from a priest in Calcutta. He had been invited to offer Mass for Mother Teresa and her community at their House of the Dying. When the time came for Holy Communion, he felt deeply how honored he was to be giving Communion to this small, intense woman clothed in sari and sandals. Suddenly he abandoned that line of thinking – abandoned it when he saw the way she looked at the consecrated Host. It was then that he realized that the genuine wonder of the moment was not that he was giving Holy Communion to a living saint, but that he was holding in his hand the Body of Christ.

But that was only part of the story. The priest went on to tell of Mother Teresa's powerful faith. Mother Teresa, he said, believes in two kinds of "real presence." With the eyes of faith, she sees the living Christ under the appearance of bread and wine; and with the eyes of faith, she also sees the same living Christ in the people she serves so tenderly, so lovingly. "Mother Teresa," he wrote, "is a believer. Christ is always there for her in each of the broken and miserable people she ministers to. She reverences them as she does the consecrated Eucharist."

In that context, let me begin with St. Paul and his Corinthian Christians, move briskly to Mother Teresa and her broken people, and end with you and me.

First, Paul. Paul is angry. When the Christians of Corinth come together to a private home to celebrate the Eucharist, to his way of thinking there is no Eucharist. Even though the ritual words are uttered, there is no Eucharist. Why? Because there is no love. Only division. The wealthier come early, eat their own supper, leave nothing for the poor who have been working all day. "One goes hungry and another becomes drunk" (I Cor 11:21). Because the Eucharistic food is the Lord, you violate its sacred character, you violate the Lord's presence by selfish individualism, by disregarding the poor. No Eucharist because no community!

Canon lawyers may shout, "But it's valid"; theologians might echo their protest. But Paul is not interested in our precious validity; he is concerned for a Eucharist that is fruitful, a Eucharist that is a sharing in God's grace. But...no love, no grace. No grace, no Eucharist.

Second, Mother Teresa. Not a theologian, but a woman with incredible insight, unbelievable ability to break through the tortuous stammerings of us theologians and live the wondrous realities we struggle to express. To her, one sentence said it all: "This is My Body that is [broken] for you" (v. 24). Teresa had grasped, had been grasped by, the Eucharistic reality that makes sense out of her life. The Body of Christ that is the Eucharist is not a private party, a me-and-Jesus two-step. The Body of Christ that is the Eucharist makes the Body of Christ that is the Church. It is broken not to satisfy isolated individuals but to build community. It is broken particularly for those who are themselves uncommonly broken, who share more of Jesus' crucifixion than of His resurrection. That Body is broken and given even for those who have not the joy of receiving it.

Teresa grasped and lived the two facets of Eucharistic belief that Catholic spirituality stresses today, has actually always stressed. 1) Christ is really present in what looks like bread, feels like bread, tastes like bread, but is not bread, is simply and truly Christ Jesus our Lord. 2) The same Christ is really present in every man, woman, and child no matter how inhuman; for each has been shaped in the image of Christ, a likeness to Christ that even sin cannot utterly destroy. The 50,000

bodies Teresa and her sisters brought into their home to die with dignity – each was carried in because he or she was Christ, a Christ crucified.

Third, what of you and me? Each day we are privileged to transmute wheat and wine into the risen Christ. Not simply or even primarily for ourselves; not even simply for our parishioners. This Bread, Jesus said, is given “for the life of the world” (John 6:33,51). Each Eucharistic recessional is not an ending but a beginning. It is a movement from Church to world, from altar to people, from Christ crucified on Calvary to Christ crucified on the highways and byways of our world.

For us and for our people, for those who struggle for biblical justice, who agonize over our responsibility for broken brothers and wasted sisters, the Eucharist should be the heart of our spirituality. But our Eucharist is a perilous experience. The peril is twofold, comes from two quarters. On the one hand, the Eucharist is the primes sacrament of unity, and yet it divides us. Not precisely the way it divided the early Corinthian community. But just as effectively: from the music to the ministers, from the exchange of peace to Communion in the hand, from the agenda and baggage we bring with us. On the other hand, the Eucharist should propel our people to the poor of every dimension. Not only the suffering who share our faith; all those who are in pain. It should open our eyes as it does the eyes of Teresa: to see in every human the image of Christ, the Christ of Calvary – the real presence of Christ in those who labor and are heavy burdened. But does it? How can it when only 30 percent of American Catholics are nourished by Christ’s word and flesh at least twice a month? How can it when untold thousands who are so nourished close their ears when “the poor” are preached, when the very word “justice” conjures up lazy welfare folk living off our hard-earned money?

This is not a jeremiad against our people. The longer I live, the more convinced I am that “the buck stops...here.” After God, the initiative rests with us. Paul was clear, unambiguous: “[God] has given us the ministry of reconciliation...entrusting the ministry of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since Christ is making His appeal through us...” (2 Cor 5:18-20). Not indeed exclusively; baptism summons all Christians to be reconcilers. Still, in a sharp, singular way through our ordination. For ordination graces us powerfully to be leaders, to move the minds and hearts of men and women, to organize the charisms of our people so that each parish is a force for reconciliation with God, with one another, with the earth.

How? Especially through the Eucharist. The Word of God and the Flesh of Christ. Is there any power on earth more dynamic than these? Weak we may be, fearful, discouraged; but no weaker, no more fearful, no more discouraged than Paul. But, like Paul, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). I can even preach with fire in my belly!

Yes, but only if I apply Paul to my own ministry: no love, no Eucharist.

Given by Fr. Walter Burghardt, SJ, on the 24th Week of the Year, Monday, year B, to an assembly of ordained priests.

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' (old 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 Agnelo, 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," Agnelo 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

Communion Posture

Universal Norm

From the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 3rd edition, March 2002. The following norm is the universal norm found in the Roman Missal. Note that each Bishop Conference determines the particular norm for its own country. By the general law, each adaptation is then submitted to the Holy See for recognition.

160 The priest then takes the paten or ciborium and goes to the communicants, who, as a rule, approach in a procession. The faithful are not permitted to take up the consecrated bread or the sacred chalice themselves, and still less hand them on to one another. The faithful may communicate either standing or kneeling, as established by the Conference of Bishops. However, when they communicate standing, it is recommended that they make an appropriate gesture of reverence, to be laid down in the same norms, before receiving the Sacrament.

U.S. Norm

The following adaptation of GIRM 160 was approved by the Holy See for the United States.

160. The priest then takes the paten or ciborium and goes to the communicants, who, as a rule, approach in a procession. The faithful are not permitted to take the consecrated bread or the sacred chalice by themselves and, still less, to hand them from one to another. The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel. Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm. When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant. When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.

Recognized by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 17 April 2002, and, promulgated as particular law of the United States by Decree of the President of the USCCB, Bishop Wilton Gregory, 25 April 2002.

History and Interpretation of the Norm

In the 1967 document *Eucharisticum mysterium* (Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery), the Sacred Congregation of Rites (now called the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments) established that,

34. ... In accordance with the custom of the Church, the faithful may receive communion either kneeling or standing. One or the other practice is to be chosen according to the norms laid down by the conference of bishops.

At the time this directive was issued the US Bishops did not establish a posture, although Communion processions with reception standing quickly became the custom throughout the United States, as they did in much of the world.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (3rd edition) gives the same legislation, stating,

160 ... The faithful may communicate either standing or kneeling, as established by the Conference of Bishops.

Acting upon this provision of the GIRM, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) sought and obtained, in March 2002, a particular norm for the United States.

160. The norm for reception of Holy Communion in the dioceses of the United States is standing. Communicants should not be denied Holy Communion because they kneel. Rather, such instances should be addressed pastorally, by providing the faithful with proper catechesis on the reasons for this norm.

This norm seeks a single posture among communicants. The purpose spoken of in the norm is given earlier in the *General Instruction*.

42. The gestures and posture of the priest, the deacon, and the ministers, as well as those of the people, ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, so that the true and full meaning of the different parts of the celebration is evident and that the participation of all is fostered. Therefore, attention should be paid to what is determined by this General Instruction and the traditional practice of the Roman Rite and to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice. A common posture, to be observed by all participants, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered for the Sacred Liturgy: it both expresses and fosters the intention and spiritual attitude of the participants.

While the desirability of everyone in the congregation making the common gestures and postures throughout the Mass is clear (a sign of unity), recent interpretations of these norms by the Holy See provides some insight into the mind of the Church. It should be noted that the Holy See alone can authentically interpret legislation it has initiated or approved. The following was issued in response to a *dubium* of Cardinal George of Chicago. The reference is to the general posture norm, GIRM 43, and whether communicants can kneel down for their thanksgiving after Communion when everyone else is standing, however, it is clear that the mind (*mens*) of the Holy See on the role of posture is expressed. The general principle enunciated in the response would therefore also apply to GIRM 160, and the issues of kneeling to receive and genuflecting before receiving.

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 5 June 2003

Dubium: In many places, the faithful are accustomed to kneeling or sitting in personal prayer upon returning to their places after individually received Holy Communion during Mass. Is it the intention of the *Missale Romanum, editio typica tertia*, to forbid this practice?

Responsum: *Negative, et ad mentem.* The *mens* is that that the prescription of the *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani*, no. 43, is intended, on one hand, to ensure within broad limits a certain uniformity of posture within the congregation for the various parts of the celebration of the Holy Mass, and on the other, to not regulate posture rigidly in such a way that those who wish to kneel or sit would no longer be free.

Francis Cardinal Arinze Prefect