

SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN UNITY

NOTES ON THE
APPLICATION OF THE
ECUMENICAL DIRECTORY

October 6, 1968

UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity announces:

1. In these last few months, in various parts of the world, Protestant and Anglican Christians have been admitted, here and there, to participate in the Eucharistic Communion during the celebration of Mass although they did not have the permit required by the norms in force and therefore despite the reproval of the competent ecclesiastical authority.

2. It therefore seems necessary to recall herewith the measures adopted by the Second Vatican Council and applied by the Ecumenical Directory (approved by the Holy Father on April 27, 1967, and published in A.A.S. of July 5, 1967, pp. 574-592).

3. "Worship in common is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of unity among Christians. There are two main principles upon which the practice of such common worship depends: first, that of the unity of the Church which ought to be expressed; and second, that of the sharing in means of grace. The expression of unity very generally for-

bids common worship. Grace to be obtained sometimes commends it. The concrete course to be adopted, when due regard has been given to all the circumstances of time, place and persons, is left to the prudent decision of the local episcopal authority, unless the bishops' conference according to its own statute, or the Holy See, has determined otherwise." (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 8)

4. "The celebration of the sacraments is an action of the celebrating community made within the community itself of which the celebration signifies oneness in faith, worship and life. Accordingly, when this unity of faith is lacking regarding the sacraments, participation of the separated brothers with the Catholics, particularly in the sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance and Anointing of the Sick, is forbidden. Nevertheless, since the sacraments are signs of unity as well as fountains of grace (cf. Decree on Ecumenism, n. 8), the Church can, for sufficient motives, permit some separated brothers to be admitted to them. This permit can be granted when there is danger of death, or because of urgent necessity (during a persecution, or imprisonment), if the separated brother cannot go to a minister of his own Church and if he asks spontaneously for the sacraments from a Catholic priest, so long as he manifests a faith conforming to the faith of the Church regarding these sacraments, in addition to being well disposed. In other cases of like urgent necessity, the local Ordinary or the episcopal conference will decide.

"The Catholic faithful, in similar circumstances, cannot ask for these sacraments except from a minister who has been validly ordained." (Ecumenical Directory *Ad totam Ecclesiam*, n. 55)

5. These most precise texts determine the conditions required for the admission of an Anglican or a Protestant to receive the Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church. The fact that a Christian belonging to one of the confessions mentioned above is spiritually well disposed and spontaneously asks for Communion from a Catholic priest is not sufficient. Two other conditions are necessary: that his faith in the sacraments is in harmony with that of the Church and that he has no access to a minister of his own communion.

The Directory cites, as an example, three cases when, owing to circumstances beyond one's control when these conditions exist: when there is danger of death, or during persecution or imprisonment. In other cases, the local Ordinary or the episcopal conference can give permission, if it is requested, but on condition that it is a matter of cases of urgent necessity similar to those quoted as an example, and under the same conditions.

When one of these conditions is lacking, access to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church is not possible.

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Promoting Christian Unity

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