

Communion before Penance Advocated by a Laity Board

Washington, D.C. — (RNS) — Amid a series of resolutions covering a wide spectrum of issues, the board of directors of a national Catholic lay organization asked here that Catholic children be permitted to receive the Eucharist before experiencing confession.

The recommendation, one of several emanating from a four-day meeting of the National Council of Catholic Laity board, also asserted that "parents are in the best position to judge their children's readiness" for First Communion and confession.

The NCCL statement followed by only a few days an instruction issued by Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia, who is also president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in which he told his archdiocesan priests and educators to retain the practice of "putting confession ahead of First Communion."

The cardinal said the practice "now enjoys special confirmation" of the Vatican and "is not subject to any arbitrary experimentation or change."

A spokesman for the NCCL said that the board "was not aware" of the cardinal's directive when the recommendation was adopted. She said, however, that the recommendation will stand, but it must be remembered that the board's action does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCCL's 15 million members.

Bishop Joseph L. Bernardin, general secretary of the U.S. Catholic Conference, with which the NCCL is affiliated, told the board members that the lay organization is "a great hope for the future of the Church."

The NCCL, established last Fall to give the Catholic laity a unified voice in the U.S. Church, is a coalition which includes the National Council of Catholic Women, the National Council of Catholic Men, other lay groups and individuals.

In other action, the NCCL board issued statements affirming the co-responsibility of all members of the Church in the mission of the Church, expressing "anguished sympathy" for the people of Bangladesh and calling upon the Catholic laity to support tax credits for parents of Catholic school children.

Calling the report of the President's Commission on Population Growth... "disappointing," the board urged responsible and effective evaluation of proposals for population planning and rejected the commission's conclusions on abortion.

Berrigan Jury Deadlocks On Conspiracy Charge

Harrisburg, Pa. — (RNS) — A tired jury, after a week of trying, failed to reach a verdict on a charge that Father Philip Berrigan, SSJ, and six others conspired to raid draft boards, bomb government heating tunnels and kidnap Henry Kissinger.

At the same time, the Jury convicted Father Berrigan and co-defendant Sister Elizabeth McAlister on a total of seven counts of illegally sending and attempting to send letters in and out of a federal prison.

In addition to its deadlocking on the conspiracy charge, the jury also was deadlocked on two counts, charging the Josephite

priest and Sister McAlister with mailing threatening letters.

"Seven out of ten is pretty good," said chief prosecutor William Lynch.

But the defendants and most observers felt the government had suffered a blow in not winning a conviction on the conspiracy charge that was the heart of its case.

"We all have a feeling of celebrating a victory and I guess in a way we are," said Sister McAlister at a press conference following the verdict.

(The defendants' victory was greater than she knew, according to an early report from a juror to a Chicago Daily News reporter. Contrary to most speculation, the juror said the deadlocked jury was heavily weighted, 10-2, in favor of acquittal on the conspiracy charge.)

The government now has the choice of bringing the defendants to a second trial or dropping charges.

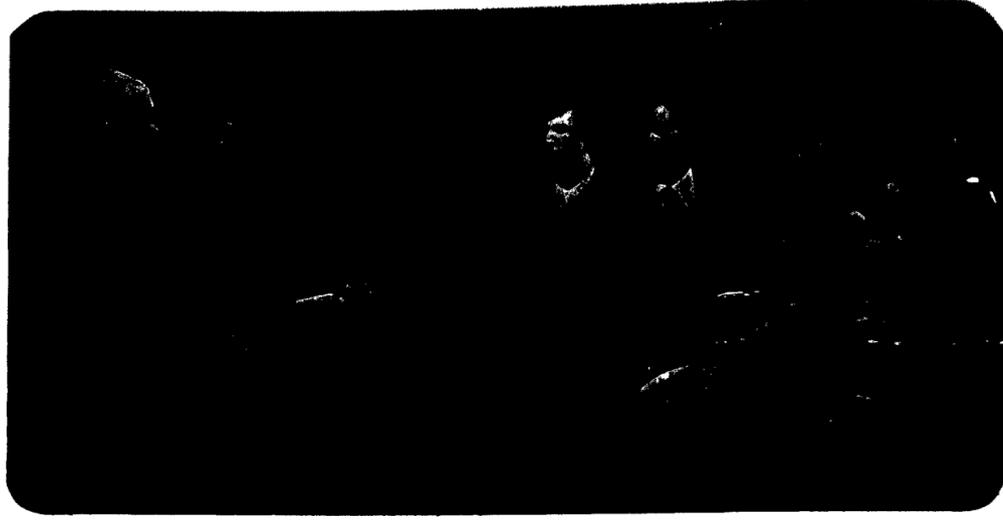
Lynch said, after the verdict (April 5) that he had no comment on what action the government will take. Whatever decision is made will probably come from his superiors — the Attorney General's Office — in Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile, all defendants except Father Berrigan, who is serving a prison term for two draft board raids, are free on bail.

Another possible trial is impending in the case of John T. Glick, one of the Harrisburg defendants who was not tried with the others.

Blind Students Join Cardinal in Song

Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York joins in song with students from the Lavelle School for the Blind prior to taping an Easter Mass for television showing in the New York area. To the accompaniment of two guitarists, the youngsters from the school sang three hymns during the Mass. They also presented three specially made gifts to the cardinal — a lamb, a copper engraving and a tapestry, all made by Lavelle students and all symbolic of the Easter season. (RNS)



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13,450 Priests Left Ministry in Six Years

Vatican City — (RNS) — A total of 13,450 Roman Catholic priests left the active ministry from 1964 to 1969, according to an official Vatican report.

The report said that the number who left — averaging 2,241 in each of the six years — was almost equally divided between diocesan (secular) priests and members of religious orders.

Highlights of the report were published in L'Osservatore della Domenica, the Vatican City weekly, which commented that the clergy loss statistics "are much lower than the fantastic figures that are being quoted by rumor."

All data was based on a pamphlet compiled by the Central Statistics Office, an organ of the Vatican Secretariat of State, set up by Pope Paul VI in August 1967.

According to the figures given in the Vatican journal, there were 425,000 priests at the beginning of 1970. These together with ordained deacons and lay members, men and women, of religious orders brought the total to 1.5 million persons devoted to "the care of souls." The number of baptized Catholics at the start of 1970 was given as 633 million.

Priests who left the ministry or who died far outnumbered the newly ordained clergy in

1969, the statistics showed. In that year, 5,156 new diocesan priests were ordained, compared with 5,014 who died and 1,780 who left the ministry.

Europe, with 727 "defections" from the priesthood in 1969, led the list with North America next with 658 and Latin America, third with 207.

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