

HEAD BOW DURING HOLY COMMUNION

I noticed that some people make a movement of the head — sometimes a deep head bow, sometimes a simple nod — just before receiving holy communion. Is this another new rite to be observed by communicants?

The “head movement” in question is meant to be a sign of reverence to and adoration of the Holy Bread which the communicant in standing position is about to receive. Even after the Philippine bishops decided on kneeling as the uniformed posture of our faithful in receiving holy communion (*Vid. Decisions of the Philippine Hierarchy in Liturgical Matters*, July 4-5 1967, n. 4, in *BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO*, Oct. 1967, p. 726), some still bow or nod the head while already on their knees. And this, either inadvertently by force of habit perhaps, or consciously with the good intention of rendering reverence and homage to the Blessed Sacrament. Whatever the reason, the action is superfluous and must be corrected. You may inform the faithful in your church that “no other sign of reverence towards the Blessed Sacrament is asked from the faithful, whenever they receive holy communion kneeling down, because this very posture (of kneeling) expresses adoration” (*Instructio de Cultu Mysterii Eucharistici*, 25 May 1967, n. 34, b).

• P. DE MESA, O.P.

ON PRIESTS GOING TO THE MOVIE THEATERS

“There is, I believe, a standing order of the Hierarchy of the Philippines prohibiting priests from going to the movie theatres. I understand, however, that the prohibition applies only in regard to indecent films and/or public theatres. Will you, please, enlighten me on the following:

1. What is the main reason for banning priests from going to the movies?
2. Are priests prohibited from seeing movies shown free in public squares for information or publicity purposes?

3. Does the prohibition include seeing movies shown free in a private place, where the public is, however, admitted, viz., hospitals, schools, etc.?
4. Does the prohibition apply to T.V. shows?

What our consultant believes is a fact. Indeed, it is more than a "standing order"; it is a law applicable throughout the Philippines by decree of the Plenary Council held in 1953 and promulgated on 15th August, 1956. Said law is still in effect, for up to the present we know of no repeal or modification introduced therein by the Holy See or the Philippine Hierarchy.

The said law has, on two occasions, been the subject of authentic interpretation, given by the Bishops' Commission established for the purpose in keeping with the decree No. 15 of the said Plenary Council.

For the convenience of our consultant, we hereby reproduce both the law and its interpretations, in their respective original texts, since they would suffice to bring light to the questions contained in the query.

Decree No. 50, of the Plenary Council, reads as follows: "Circa hanc legem (1) statuimus et declaramus sequentia:

1. Sub gravi praecepto omnibus et singulis clericis, non exceptis extraneis in hac regione domicilium vel quasi-domicilium habentibus, prohibetur ne in publico theatro spectaculis, choeris aliisque pompis intersint absque expressa Ordinarii Loci licentia.

2. Sub hac prohibitione non comprehenditur casus peculiaris, quo theatrum ceteroquin publicum ab schola aut societate quadam catholica, Ordinario loci consentiente, ad spectaculum dandum locatione tenetur.

3. Idem vetantur in locis publicis vulgo *cinema* dictis, interesse spectaculis aut ludis cinematographicis; nisi haec sub directione Sacerdotis a Superioribus aprobati in aliquo casu particulari agantur, vel de cinematographicis, ut aiunt, pelliculis (*films*) ab Episcopo approbatis pro sacerdotibus sermo sit.

4. Suspensionem a *divinis* contrahunt clerici in majoribus ordinibus constituti qui post unam admonitionem graves has prohibitiones transgrediantur."

The first authentic interpretation of this decree is dated 19th November, 1957 and was published in the "Boletín Ecclesiástico" in December of the same year. It reads thus:

"12. *Dubium*: Do the words *graves has prohibitiones* of Decree 50, x 4, refer to the prohibition contained in Decree 50, 3, as well as to prohibition contained in Decree 50, 1?

Responsum: Affirmative.

13. *Dubium*: Is the suspension *a divinis* in paragraph 4 *nemini reservata*? Or is it *reservata Ordinario loci*?

Responsum: Affirmative ad primam partem, negative ad secundam."

The second authentic interpretation, that is undated, was published in the "Boletín Ecclesiástico", in July, 1962. It reads:

"30. *Dubium*: Some priests have different interpretations of this Decree. To simplify my queries, may I ask:

1) Is attending classical opera performances where very decent people are present included in this prohibition?

2) What about instrumental performances, like symphonics, piano and violin concertos and the like?

3) And folk dances, like 'Bayanihan'?

Answer: Affirmative. They are included *si in publico theatro exhibeantur*.

31. *Dubium*: I know that some priests attend all kinds of movies in public movie-houses, with no permission of the Ordinary. Can this permission be presumed, provided that the film is rated A-1 or A-2, etc., and not the condemned or objectionable category?

Answer: Negative.

32. *Dubium*: What sin is committed by a priest who violates any of the prohibitions of Decree 50?

Answer: Verba in Decreto adhibita "sub gravi praecepto", "graves has prohibitiones", "suspensionem a divinis contrahunt" clare ostendunt eius violationem constituere posse gravis peccati materiam.

33. *Dubium*: Can't there be a general ruling regarding the seeing of films by priests, so that there will be no need of asking permission from the Ordinary every time they want to see a film for educational, cultural aims or even honest recreation?

Answer: *Recurratur ad proprium Ordinarium loci.*"

It must be noted that the text of the law, as well as its authentic interpretations, makes no distinction between decent and indecent or objectionable presentation or films, but rather insist on the circumstance that the presentation or film be shown in a *public theatre*, that is to say, a hall or locale expressly devoted to these purposes and accessible to all kinds of persons.

Even in the case of a public theatre, the law sets down three exceptions to the prohibition:

1) The case in which, *with the consent of the Ordinary of the place*, a school or other Catholic organisation present a show in a public theatre hired for that purpose.

2) When in a public movie-theatre and in a particular case a film is exhibited under the direction of a priest approved by a Superior competent therefor.

3) When in a public movie-theatre there are shown films approved by the Bishop for priests.

Following the above exposition, it is easy to briefly answer the queries poised:

Ad Primum: Whatever was the reason for the prohibition imposed upon the priests, only the Fathers of the Council, who were the authors of the law, can tell us. Certainly it would not be difficult to surmise which were the reasons that prompted them to do so; but, we would rather not do it, for two reasons. First, because whatever we may say would only carry the weight of a private opinion. Secondly, because it is in no way necessary: the reason for the law is not the law itself; and, although the enquiry and knowledge of the reason or motive of the law may be an aid for its correct interpretation when the meaning of the law, as formulated, is obscure (Can. 18), in the present case the text of the conciliar decree is sufficiently clear, specially in the light of the authentic interpretations.

Ad Secundum, Tertium, Quartum: The prohibition does not comprise the cases indicated by these queries.

An exhibition in an open air public plaza or square is not a performance given in a public theatre; neither is the domicile or dwelling of a family a public theatre nor an establishment open to the public, but not devoted to shows, as, for example, a hospital or a school, even if there be therein an auditorium for the purpose. And a television program is not shown in a public show house.

It could be that, even in the proposed cases, the priests should refrain from attending either because the performance or film offends the norms of morality or because their presence may be a cause for scandal to the laymen, but such does not mean that these instances be deemed included in the particular norms laid down by the conciliar decree.

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