

Father Oscar L. Huber Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 02/21/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: Oscar L. Huber
Interviewer: Jeremiah Collins
Date of Interview: February 21, 1964
Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas
Length: 10 pages

Biographical Note

Father Huber was the Roman Catholic priest who administered the last rites to President John F. Kennedy [JFK] in Dallas, Texas, November 22, 1963. In this interview Father Huber discusses hearing about JFK's assassination and heading to Parkland Memorial Hospital; administering the last rites to JFK and speaking with Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis immediately after; and Catholic beliefs about death and the soul, "apparent death" versus "real death," and the reason behind giving the last rites, among other issues.

Access
Open

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed December 6, 1965, copyright of these materials has passed to the United States Government upon the death of the interviewee. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have

occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Oscar L. Huber, recorded interview by Jeremiah Collins, February 21, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

Gift of Personal Statement
By Father Oscar L. Huber, C.M.

to the

John Fitzgerald, Kennedy Library

In accordance with the provisions of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 as amended (63 Stat. 377) and regulations issued thereunder, I, Father Oscar L. Huber, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.
2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.
3. A revision of the above stipulation governing access to the aforesaid material may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States or his designee if it appears desirable to revise the conditions herein stipulated.
4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

5. The donor retains to himself during his lifetime all literary property rights in the material donated to the United States of America by the terms of this instrument. After the death of the donor, the aforesaid literary property rights will pass to the United States of America.

Signed Father Oscar L. Huber, C.M.
Father Oscar L. Huber, C.M.

Date: November 30, 1965

Accepted Robert H. Baumer
ACTING Archivist of the United States.

Date: Dec 6 1965

Oral History Interview
with

FATHER OSCAR L. HUBER, C.M.

February 21, 1964
Dallas, Texas
By Jeremiah Collins
For the John F. Kennedy Library

This is Vince Garrity* reporting
from radio station WAAF in Chicago.
We have an exclusive interview between
Jeremiah Collins of Chicago, and the
Reverend Oscar L. Huber, C.M., the
priest who administered the last rites
of the Roman Catholic Church to our
late and beloved President, John
Fitzgerald Kennedy. This interview
was recorded February 21, 1964 in
Dallas, Texas. Here is Jeremiah
Collins in Dallas, Texas.

*Introduces interview, but does not
participate.

MR. COLLINS: Father, the first question I have is: would you describe your exit from the rectory and your arrival at Parkland Memorial Hospital?

FATHER HUBER: I had just finished my lunch when Father Thompson, one of my assistants, came from the recreation hall, where he had been watching TV, and said that the President had been assassinated. I went up to the TV myself and heard the announcements, and then, shortly after that, we went to Parkland Hospital because Parkland is in my parish. Upon arriving there, we had no difficulty in getting in. Someone remarked that, or rather, heard somehow that we had trouble getting through the police. That is not true. As we approached the road

that leads into the hospital, the policeman there held out his hand for us to stop. Father Thompson told him that he had the pastor of Holy Trinity with him; we were admitted at once. When we reached the back of the hospital, near the entrance to the emergency room, we were again halted by the policeman. This same information was given to him, and he told Father to park the car and told me to come at once with him. I was taken to the emergency room where I found the President lying on an emergency table; he was covered with a sheet. I walked past Mrs. Kennedy, who was standing beside him and I immediately gave him conditional absolution and conditional extreme

unction. This was followed by the last blessing and various prayers that are read for one who is dying and, also, prayers after death. Shortly after this, I left the emergency room. The President's wife, Mrs. Kennedy, left the room also. I spoke to her outside the emergency room and expressed my sympathy and that of my parishoners to her. Father Thompson and I remained there for some time -- I don't know just how long -- and then returned home.

MR. COLLINS: Father, on your arrival at the hospital, were you able to administer the last rites immediately?

FATHER HUBER: Yes, immediately. There was no delay whatsoever.

MR. COLLINS: When you began administering the last rites, did the President have a white sheet over his face?

FATHER HUBER: Yes, his face was completely covered with the sheet.

MR. COLLINS: Would you say that he was apparently dead?

FATHER HUBER: Apparently dead, yes. Definitely so.

MR. COLLINS: It is reasonable to assume that, while motorcading through Dallas, politics rather than death was on the President's mind. What about the disposition of the recipient toward the sacrament?

FATHER HUBER: You can't answer that question definitely, but it is my humble opinion that any good Catholic, if he happens to commit a sin, will be sorry for it shortly after. I think

we almost live that way. We live with the desire to receive the last sacraments, too. I am confident if a good Catholic would happen to fall into a mortal sin, he would be sorry for that immediately. This sorrow will perdure for a great length of time. So it would not necessarily have to be renewed at the particular time when one receives the last sacraments since it perdures and would certainly have its effect.

MR. COLLINS: Thank you, Father. Now comes the tough one. When does the soul leave the body?

FATHER HUBER: We do not know exactly when. Because the soul is a spirit, you can't see it. We know that there is such a thing as apparent death, which means

a person certainly seems to be dead; but real death comes when the soul actually leaves the body. We are told, and according to medical science, an apparent death precedes actual death. A person dying after a long illness may be anointed within half an hour after he has drawn his last breath. Anointing may be done as long as two or three hours after a sudden death. This was certainly the case with the President. He was a healthy man. He was assassinated. I anointed him conditionally and gave him conditional absolution in less than a half hour after he was shot. So, I am confident he was simply apparently dead; that real death had not set in.

MR. COLLINS: Thank you, Father. If a soul validly receives the last rites of the Church, what are the spiritual results?

FATHER HUBER: They receive sanctifying grace and, of course, whatever graces would follow. Every sacrament gives sanctifying grace when it's received validly.

MR. COLLINS: So in this case if the sacrament was validly received, that would guarantee salvation?

FATHER HUBER: Well, yes. I have no doubt about the validity of the sacrament there. Providing, of course, that the President had sorrow for sin. I feel confident that his soul was in his body. The only thing would be sorrow for sin. I know he was a good man; we all believe that. I see no reason

why he wouldn't be of the mind that death would probably come every time he entered into a large crowd of people. In fact it seems to me someone stated that he said, "If they want to get you, they can get you no matter how many Secret Service men you might have surrounding you." That would show he must have felt that death could come at any time.

MR. COLLINS: To sum up this theological interview, Father, in your professional judgment, did President Kennedy receive the last rites validly?

FATHER HUBER: I would think so. I can't see any reason why he didn't receive the sacrament validly because it is my opinion that his soul had not left his body from what we read from

medical science conclusions.

MR. COLLINS: And there is a common judgment, though it's not a proof, among men that he was a good man.

FATHER HUBER: Yes. Certainly I think there is.

MR. COLLINS: Thank you very much, Father Oscar Huber, of Holy Trinity Parish in Dallas, Texas.

This has been an exclusive interview with the Reverend Oscar L. Huber, C.M., the Catholic priest who administered the last rites of the Roman Catholic Church to our late President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, in Dallas, Texas. This is Vince Garrity reporting from Chicago and Jeremiah Collins reporting from Dallas, Texas.