

Abuse of norms contributed to Tridentine decision

VATICAN CITY - A lack of respect for the norms for celebrating the Mass after the Second Vatican Council contributed to Pope Benedict XVI's decision to grant wider permission for the celebration of the Tridentine Mass, a Vatican official said.

"There is a certain tendency to interpret the post-conciliar liturgical reform using 'creativity' as the rule," said Archbishop Albert Malcolm Ranjith Patabendige Don, secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

An interview with the archbishop was published in the Nov. 19-20 edition of L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican newspaper, after he had given a speech and an interview in which he criticized bishops and priests who were putting restrictions on celebrations of the Tridentine Mass even after Pope Benedict authorized wider use of the rite in July.

In his decree, the pope said the Tridentine Mass celebrated according to the 1962 Roman Missal should be made available in every parish where groups of the faithful desire it. He also said the Mass from the Roman Missal in use since 1970 remains the ordinary form of the Mass, while celebration of the Tridentine Mass is the extraordinary form.

L'Osservatore introduced the interview by saying, "The debate over liturgy is as open and lively as ever." The paper asked Archbishop Ranjith if he thought it made sense that the pope's July document on the Tridentine Mass "reignited the confrontation between the so-called traditionalists and so-called innovators."

"Absolutely not," the archbishop replied, because the two rites for the Mass both belong to the church and are a sign of continuity.

"Regarding the Tridentine Mass, over the years there was a growing request, which little by little became more organized," he said.

"On the other side, fidelity to the norms for the celebration of the sacraments

continued to fall,” he said. “The more this fidelity (and) a sense of the beauty and awe in the liturgy diminished, the more requests for the Tridentine Mass increased.”

“So, in fact, who really requested the Tridentine Mass? It was not just these groups, but also those who had little respect for the norms of a worthy celebration according to the ‘Novus Ordo,’” or new order, he said, referring to the post-Vatican II liturgy.

“For years the liturgy suffered too many abuses and many bishops ignored them” despite the efforts of Pope John Paul II, Archbishop Ranjith said.

“So the problem was not requests for the Tridentine Mass as much as an unlimited abuse of the nobility and dignity of the eucharistic celebration,” he said.

Archbishop Ranjith said that although the church’s liturgy has developed and changed over the centuries “we must recognize that the liturgy has a particular ‘conservative’ characteristic” because it is a part of the church’s heritage that must be preserved.

“This is a central aspect: We are called to be faithful to something that does not belong to us, but is given to us,” he said.

L’Osservatore also asked Archbishop Ranjith about liturgical music and art, saying they were other aspects in “the debate about the liturgy.”

Gregorian chant has a special place in the liturgy, he said, and it should be used “to give praise to the Lord.”

Other forms of music also are appropriate, he said, if one is sure that “they are edifying for the faith, that they spiritually nourish those who participate in the liturgy and truly dispose the hearts of the faithful to listen to God’s voice.”

As for the visual arts, Archbishop Ranjith said the church must find ways to enter into a deeper dialogue with artists to encourage religious art, but also to ensure that pieces of art in places of worship help people pray.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, he said, has scheduled a Dec. 1 study day to discuss ways to promote religious art for liturgy.