

# Document on nature of church aimed at Catholics

SAN FRANCISCO – The recent Vatican document emphasizing that only the Catholic Church possesses the fullness of the means for salvation was created primarily as an instructional tool for Catholics and should not be read as a diminishing of other faith communities, according to the churchman who signed it.

On the contrary, said Cardinal William J. Levada, who heads the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which issued the document July 10, the narrative itself points out that “outside the Catholic Church elements of holiness and truth do exist and that the Holy Spirit is working in those other communities and churches as well.”

During a July 17 interview while visiting San Francisco, Cardinal Levada commented on his congregation’s work, Pope Benedict XVI’s recent instruction on the Tridentine Mass, emerging themes of the papacy and challenges facing the universal church today.

The former archbishop of San Francisco described as “purely coincidental” the fact that his congregation’s document on the nature of the church was made public only three days after the pope’s announcement of his decision to allow broader use of the Tridentine rite.

“Many have tried to see it as some kind of one-two punch,” Cardinal Levada said with a laugh, “but the truth is that it is simply a coincidence that they were published in such proximity.”

In restoring easier access “to the principal way of worship in the church for more than 400 years,” Pope Benedict “expressed a great generosity” toward those intensely devoted to the Tridentine Mass, the cardinal told Catholic San Francisco, the archdiocesan newspaper.

The Tridentine Mass is the Latin-language liturgy that predates the Second Vatican Council; it was last revised in the 1962 edition of the Roman Missal.

The papal directive “was not primarily aimed at the United States,” he said, adding that he feels it will have more impact in France, Germany and Switzerland and little effect in Latin America or Italy.

Turning to the doctrinal congregation’s recent “Responses to Some Questions

Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church," the cardinal said it addresses five questions about the nature of the church "and all five are a commentary on Vatican II documents."

"It has the advantage of collecting all that has happened since Vatican II up to the present time" and explaining how church articulation of its own nature as well as its views of other Christian communities have developed, he added.

He said he has been "somewhat surprised" at the amount of "ecumenical commentary" the document has generated. "It is primarily a document addressed to Catholics as believers and teachers and is intended to clarify the teachings of the Second Vatican Council," he said, "especially the teaching on the nature of the church."

Reaction to the document on the church's nature in the United States where many religious persuasions exist side by side clearly reflects the nation's "egalitarian approach to society and therefore to churches," he said, "where for you to say that your church is the one true church of Christ, and that another's is not quite, is considered not to be the American way."

"Underlying a typical American idea of what a church is," Cardinal Levada said, "is the idea that we are the ones who make the church, we create the church.

"There is the slogan, 'We are the church.' And, of course, there is the sense of the church being made up of all the baptized," he continued. "But we do not make the church. God makes the church. We receive the church as a gift."

He said the doctrinal congregation's document could be "very helpful to Catholics in the United States who are culturally conditioned" to accepting self-organized groups of worshippers as churches.

In its emphasis on Vatican II teaching, the congregation's document was in step with what Cardinal Levada said is one of the clear themes of Pope Benedict's papacy - underlining that the council represents a continuity of church life, not a point of discontinuity.

At the time of Vatican II, there was a temptation and a tendency to place church practices and teachings in preconciliar and postconciliar "baskets," he said. "I know I did it. There was a kind of (attitude of) 'throw this out, here's the new stuff.' I think many of us regret that."

Challenges facing the universal church include "the disconnect between faith and reason in the modern world" cited by the pope in his address in Regensburg,

Germany, last September, Cardinal Levada said.

He said the pope “rightly identified as a very significant challenge” a growing view that modern civilization “makes religion no longer necessary, or some would say, even possible.”

Another challenge, he said, is to infuse “into the body politic” an active “love of neighbor and the service we are called to give each other” by Christ to address global issues of war, starvation and disease.

The pope, he said, “often returns to this theme” and exhorts Christians “to use our human ingenuity and creativity to overcome these evils.”