

Liberalized use of Tridentine Mass is bearing fruit

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI's outreach to traditionalist Catholics by liberalizing the use of the Tridentine Mass already is bearing fruit, said Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos.

The cardinal, president of the Pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei," which coordinates care for traditionalist Catholics, said that thanks to the pope's action "not a few have asked to return to full communion, and some already have returned."

In an interview published in the March 28 edition of L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican newspaper, Cardinal Castrillon said the Oasis of Jesus the Priest monastery of 30 cloistered nuns in Spain "has already been recognized and regularized" by his office and "there are cases of American, German and French groups" who have begun the process.

The cardinal insisted that the only traditionalists excommunicated were the four bishops ordained by the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in 1988 without Vatican permission.

The priests who have followed those bishops, he said, "are only suspended," and so the Masses they celebrate "are without a doubt valid, but not licit." The religious who have followed the schismatic bishops need to have their congregations or monasteries recognized by the Vatican, he said.

In addition, he said, "there are individual priests and many laypeople who contact us, write to us and call us for a reconciliation and, on the other side, there are many other faithful who demonstrate their gratitude to the pope" for his July letter authorizing widespread use of the liturgy according to 1962 Roman Missal.

In his letter, the pope 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.

Cardinal Castrillon said wider use of the pre-Second Vatican Council rite “is not a matter of returning to the past, but is a matter of progress,” because it gives Catholics the richness of two liturgical forms instead of one.

Asked whether he was worried that bringing back into the church “men and women who do not recognize the Second Vatican Council” would alienate some of the faithful who see the council’s teaching as a compass for the church, Cardinal Castrillon said he did not think the problem “is as serious as it could seem.”

The excommunicated leaders of the Society of St. Pius X, founded by Archbishop Lefebvre, “have expressly recognized Vatican II as an ecumenical council,” he said, but they disagree with the way the documents have been interpreted and put into practice.

“These are theological discussions that could take place within the church where, in fact, there exist different interpretive discussions about the council texts, discussions that could continue also with the groups who return to full communion,” the cardinal said.

The eucharistic celebration is a sign and source of the unity of the church, he said, and Pope Benedict’s decision to keep alive the older form of the Mass is an effort to preserve a rich tradition while promoting unity.

“We must never forget that the supreme point of reference in the liturgy, as in life, is always Christ. Therefore, we should not be afraid, including in the liturgical rite, to turn toward him, toward the crucifix, together with the faithful to celebrate the holy sacrifice,” he said.