

Vatican official criticizes narrow reading of Tridentine ruling

VATICAN CITY - The secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments criticized bishops and priests who have given a narrow interpretation to Pope Benedict XVI's permission for the wider celebration of the Tridentine Mass.

Archbishop Albert Malcolm Ranjith Patabendige Don told an Italian Internet news site that he found it difficult to understand the action "and even rebellion" of churchmen who have tried to limit access to the older Mass.

"On the part of some dioceses, there have been interpretive documents that inexplicably aim to limit the 'motu proprio' of the pope," he told the Web site Petrus Nov. 5.

Pope Benedict's apostolic letter, published in early July, eased restrictions on the use of the 1962 Roman Missal, which governed the liturgy before the new Order of the Mass was introduced in 1970.

The papal document said the Latin-language Tridentine Mass should be available when a group of the faithful requests it and should be celebrated by qualified priests. However, differences exist over what the precise characteristics of the group should be and over what specific knowledge and training a priest must have before he can celebrate the Mass according to the 1962 missal.

Behind the attempts to define the terms in a way that limits the availability of the Tridentine Mass, "there hide, on the one hand, ideological prejudices and, on the other hand, pride, which is one of the most serious sins," the archbishop said.

"I repeat: I invite everyone to obey the pope. If the Holy Father thought it was his obligation to issue the 'motu proprio,' he had his reasons and I share them fully," he said.

"The bishops, in particular, have sworn fidelity to the pontiff; may they be coherent and faithful to their commitment," he said.

Archbishop Patabendige Don often is rumored to be in line to succeed Cardinal Francis Arinze as prefect of the congregation; on Nov. 1 the cardinal turned 75, the normal retirement age for bishops and Vatican officials.

“The Tridentine rite,” the archbishop said, “belongs to the tradition of the church. The pope has duly explained the reasons for his provision, which is an act of freedom and justice toward the traditionalists.”

The archbishop’s comments to Petrus were published about a month after he strongly criticized church members, including bishops, who publicly disagree with papal decisions.

Speaking to a Latin liturgy association in the Netherlands, he said, the church needs members who are obedient to God’s will, “which is manifested in a special way through the church and its visible head, the Roman pontiff.”

While discussion and debate can be appropriate, he said, “if it does not in the end lead to a spirit of obedience in the service of unity then it divides and can only be interpreted as a manifestation of the intent of the evil one to disturb and retard the noble mission of Christ. Even those wearing ecclesiastical purple or red are not exempt from the tempter’s enchantments.”