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Cardinal stops Vatican official from saying Mass

by Simon Caldwell by Catholic News Service

LONDON -- An English cardinal has used canon law to prevent a Vatican official from celebrating a Tridentine-rite Mass in Westminster Cathedral and instead has asked an auxiliary bishop to celebrate it.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor of Westminster refused to grant permission for U.S. Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, head of the Supreme Court of the Apostolic Signature, to celebrate Mass in the extraordinary form of the Latin rite, called the Tridentine rite, in the London cathedral June 20. The cardinal used the Code of Canon Law to insist that the Mass be celebrated instead by Auxiliary Bishop John Arnold of Westminster.

Archbishop Burke already had accepted an invitation from the Latin Mass Society, a British Catholic group committed to promoting the Tridentine rite, but the invitation has since been rescinded.

Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor invoked Canon 838, which says that the diocesan bishop and the Holy See have competence over the liturgy.

A spokesman for Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor told Catholic News Service in a Feb. 17 telephone interview that "the cardinal was keen for one of the local bishops to celebrate that Mass."

"He doesn't want to give the impression that it is only bishops from abroad, foreign bishops, who come in and celebrate the extraordinary form, and that's precisely why he asked Bishop Arnold to do it," the spokesman said.

The cardinal, he said, has subsequently discussed the matter with the archbishop and has "apologized for any misunderstanding, and Archbishop Burke has understood the point."

The spokesman added, "Clearly this is a misunderstanding down to the fact that the (Latin Mass Society)

erroneously invited him in the first place -- erroneously because it wasn't their position to ask anyone to celebrate Mass in the diocese. It is for the bishop of the diocese to invite people to celebrate Mass and not the (Latin Mass Society)."

John Medlin, general manager of the Latin Mass Society, confirmed in a Feb. 17 press statement that Archbishop Burke had accepted the invitation to celebrate the Mass.

He said that after a "most friendly and useful meeting" with the cardinal in early February, the society "gratefully accepted" the idea that Bishop Arnold should instead celebrate the Mass.

Archbishop Burke was invited as the society's guest because of his support for the traditional Mass.

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The archbishop, an experienced canon lawyer, was not immediately available for comment.

In 2007 Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor was among European prelates who tried to persuade Pope Benedict XVI not to lift restrictions on the celebration of the Tridentine Mass. He wrote to the Vatican arguing that such a relaxation was unnecessary because the provision of the traditional rite was adequate in England and Wales.

But later that year the pope published "Summorum Pontificum," which widened the use of the Tridentine Mass when groups of the faithful desire it and where a priest has been trained to celebrate it.

The pope said the Mass from the Roman Missal in use since 1970 remains the ordinary form of the Mass, while the celebration of the Tridentine rite is the extraordinary form.

Last year the Latin Mass Society invited Colombian Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, president of the Pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei," which works to help separated traditionalist Catholics return to the church, to celebrate a traditional Mass in Westminster Cathedral after the group's annual general meeting. None of the English or Welsh bishops attended.

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