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Vatican denies ëreform of reformí

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Karen Virginia gives Communion to Mary Ellen Rogers during a lay-led service at St. Frances X Cabrini Church in Scituate, Mass., June 28. (CNS/Jodi Hilton)

Some Italian media reports to the contrary, Vatican officials have denied that any new ?reform of the reform? in Catholic liturgy, such as curbing Communion in the hand or having priests face away from the people during Mass, is pending.

A Vatican source speaking on background told *NCR*, ?Especially in the English-speaking world, [Pope Benedict XVI] knows that now is not the time for more upheaval, since we already have the new Roman Missal on the way.?

The Roman Missal is the collection of prayers and other texts for the Mass. A new English translation employing language closer to the Latin original, such as ?And with your spirit? rather than ?And also with you? in response to ?The Lord be with you,? has been in the works for several years. The U.S. bishops are expected to vote on the last remaining components of the text this November.

Reports of a broader liturgical ?reform of the reform? first surfaced in the Italian newspaper *Il Giornale* Aug. 22, in a piece by respected Vatican writer Andrea Tornielli. The story indicated that the Congregation for Divine Worship, the Vatican?s office for liturgical policy, had decided in a mid-March plenary assembly to recommend a series of measures to Benedict, including that Communion on the tongue should be regarded as the ?normal? practice, with Communion in the hand seen as ?exceptional.?

Moreover, the report claimed that the congregation was considering recommending that priests celebrate Mass facing toward the East, hence with their back to the congregation, at least at the moment when the eucharistic host is consecrated. In addition, the report asserted that the congregation also recommended greater use of Latin in the liturgy, not just in the older Tridentine rite but also in the new rite commonly celebrated in parishes around the world.

Such changes informally have been dubbed a ?reform of the reform,? referring to a rollback of an earlier wave of progressive liturgical changes associated with the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), such as the priest

celebrating Mass facing the congregation and using vernacular languages rather than Latin.

On Aug. 24, a Vatican spokesperson effectively denied the *Il Giornale* report, saying, ?At the moment there are no institutional proposals regarding changes to the liturgical books currently in use.? Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican?s No. 2 official after the pope, dismissed the reports as ?fantasies? in an interview with the Vatican newspaper.

Officials with knowledge of the Congregation for Divine Worship?s recent plenary assembly confirmed those denials.

?I?ve seen the propositions,? one official told *NCR*. ?There?s nothing on Communion in the hand, nothing on the orientation of the priest at Mass.?

Instead, the official said, the propositions call for ?a look at the *prenotanda* in the various liturgical books,? referring to prefaces that lay out the basic rules for liturgical practice. The aim, the official said, is to ?eliminate some inappropriate adaptations? and to ?encourage greater reverence in the liturgy.?

On Aug. 29, Tornielli posted an entry on his blog saying that while the changes to which his story alluded may not be ?imminent,? nonetheless he stands by the claim that the Congregation for Divine Worship is moving in this direction, even if the work ?is only at the beginning.?

Vatican sources told *NCR* that while there?s little official indication to date of such moves, one ?wild card? in the equation may be the new prefect of the congregation, Spanish Cardinal Antonio Cañizares, appointed to the post last December.

So far, sources say, Cañizares has acquired a reputation for not always sharing the details of his thinking with staff and advisers. In part, that may be because his Italian is limited (as is his English), making it sometimes difficult to communicate subtleties.

Cañizares enjoys strong ties to Benedict, having been a member of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith since 1995, while then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was still the prefect. With a doctorate in theology, Cañizares was mentioned at one stage as a possible successor to Ratzinger at the doctrinal congregation.

It?s possible, sources say, that Cañizares might have a vision for additional liturgical reforms that has not yet been shared with staff or made its way into official documents. For the moment, however, sources describe a consensus that with a new translation of the missal set to appear, this is not a time for other dramatic changes.

In the meantime, the Committee on Divine Worship of the U.S. bishops? conference has established a Web site to help prepare for the new missal.

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Related Web site
Information on the Roman Missal from the U.S. bishops' Committee on Divine Worship
www.usccb.org/romanmissal

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