

Priest who ministered to Gibson is disciplined: Celebrated Latin mass for conservative splinter group

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A Toronto-area Catholic priest who served as spiritual adviser to Mel Gibson during filming of *The Passion of the Christ* has been suspended by Cardinal Aloysius Ambrozic, archbishop of Toronto, for celebrating the Latin mass for a conservative Catholic splinter group.

Stephen Somerville celebrated daily mass in Latin, with Gibson acting as his altar server, when the movie was filmed in Italy last year, reports the *Toronto Star*. Jim Caviezel, who played Jesus in the film, also attended the 7:30 a.m. services most days before filming.

News of the suspension came about the same time the home version of the box-office hit went on sale September 1, selling 4.1 million copies of the DVD in the first day.

Somerville, who was a priest in the Toronto archdiocese for 48 years and who has strongly defended the movie against charges that it and Gibson are anti-Semitic, was suspended by Ambrozic for celebrating mass in Toronto for the Society of St. Pius X, a group that the cardinal and the Vatican's ecclesiastical commission consider "not in full communion with Rome."

Some dioceses have given permission in recent decades for the Tridentine mass to be celebrated under limited conditions. But the Society of St. Pius X is one of several traditionalist Catholic groups that refuse to recognize certain changes ushered in by the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965.

"Your ongoing association with and celebration of the Tridentine mass for members of the Society of St. Pius X give external recognition to their illegitimate claims and their lack of submission to our Holy Father Pope John Paul II, to bishops appointed by him, and to the teachings of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. Your actions

are also a potential source of scandal to clergy and laity of the Archdiocese of Toronto,” Ambrozic said in a letter to Somerville. Somerville has appealed his suspension to Rome. Meanwhile, he may not celebrate mass anywhere in the world.
-*Religion News Service*