

Traditionalist bishop cites lack of progress in talks with Vatican

VATICAN CITY – The head of a group of traditionalist Catholics said reconciliation talks with the Vatican would soon be coming to an end, with little change in the views of either side.

In addition to disputes over the changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council, new problems have been created by plans for the beatification of Pope John Paul II and for an interreligious prayer meeting in Assisi, Italy, Bishop Bernard Fellay, superior general of the Society of St. Pius X, said in an interview published Feb. 21 on the society's website.

The talks were launched in late 2009 in an effort by Pope Benedict XVI to repair a 21-year break with the society. The pope said that full communion for the group's members would depend on "true recognition of the magisterium and the authority of the pope and of the Second Vatican Council."

But Bishop Fellay said his society went into the talks with a different purpose: to show the contradictions between the church's traditional teachings and its practices since Vatican II. That is "the only goal that we are pursuing," he said, and the dialogue with the Vatican is not a search for compromise but "a question of faith."

"Is Vatican II really a stumbling block? For us, no doubt whatsoever, yes!" he said. "Until now Vatican II was always considered as a taboo, which makes the cure of this sickness, which is the crisis in the church, almost impossible."

Bishop Fellay said the society has presented its doctrinal arguments in writing to the Vatican, followed up by theological discussion. "It is really a matter of making the Catholic faith understood in Rome," he said.

Asked whether the Vatican participants in the talks have changed their thinking in light of the talks, Bishop Fellay answered: "I don't think that you can say that."

He added that recent events at the Vatican have, in fact, dispelled any "illusions" of

progress.

"I am thinking about the announcement of the beatification of John Paul II or the announcement of a new Assisi event along the lines of the interreligious gatherings in 1986 and 2002," he said.

Bishop Fellay said the scheduled beatification of Pope John Paul II on May 1 poses "a serious problem, the problem of a pontificate that caused things to proceed by leaps and bounds in the wrong direction, along 'progressive' lines, toward everything that they call 'the spirit of Vatican II.'"

He said it was a "mystery" to him how Pope Benedict could convene another interreligious gathering next October in Assisi. The society was highly critical of the first such encounter 25 years ago.

"To ask people to perform religious acts during that gathering is absurd, because there is a radical lack of understanding among the various religions," Bishop Fellay said.

He said Pope Benedict seems to understand that it is "impossible" for followers of diverse religions to pray together, but he added: "I find that he splits hairs. He tries to justify Assisi." Bishop Fellay said the pope may be acting under pressure, or because he is alarmed at recent anti-Christian violence.

Asked what Catholics should do regarding the pope's announcement of the Assisi meeting, he said: "Pray that the good Lord intervenes in one way or another so that it doesn't take place, and in any case start making reparation now!"

Bishop Fellay praised Pope Benedict for his 2007 document that eased restrictions on use of the 1962 Roman Missal, the so-called Tridentine rite, which governed the liturgy before 1970. But Bishop Fellay said that so far the move has had practically no effect on the church's liturgical life because of "massive opposition by the bishops."

Pope Benedict cleared the way for reconciliation talks with the Society of St. Pius X in early 2009 when he lifted the excommunications of four society bishops ordained against papal orders in 1988. The Vatican said the dialogue was designed to restore

“full communion” with members of the society, which was founded by the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre.

The Vatican said the talks were to focus on the concept of tradition, liturgical reform, interpretation of the Second Vatican Council II in continuity with Catholic doctrinal tradition, church unity, ecumenism, the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions, and religious freedom.