

# **Traditionalist bishop says reconciliation with Vatican may not be easy**

ROME - The head of the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X said reconciliation with the Vatican on doctrinal issues may be difficult because of different perspectives on the Second Vatican Council.

Bishop Bernard Fellay, superior general of the Swiss-based society, said Pope Benedict XVI's recent lifting of the excommunications of himself and three other bishops was a positive step toward establishing full communion.

"We have already responded by affirming our desire to proceed with a positive spirit along the path of discussion indicated by the Holy Father," Bishop Fellay said in an interview Feb. 16 with the Swiss newspaper Le Nouvelliste.

"But we do not want to do this in haste. When one walks through a minefield, prudence and moderation are necessary," he said.

Asked whether he had hope of reaching a doctrinal consensus with the pope, Bishop Fellay responded: "That seems difficult. Certainly he seems close to us on the question of liturgy. On the other hand, he holds very deeply to the innovations of Vatican II."

In early February, the Vatican emphasized in a statement that the traditionalist society would have to recognize the teachings of Vatican II in order to be in full communion with the church.

Bishop Fellay said discussions on those issues could take a long time, since the society will insist on clarifying the council's teachings before an agreement can be reached. In doing so, he said, the society will be performing a service to the whole church.

"The texts are not clear, and there are a multitude of diverse interpretations that

have gained currency in the church. If one does not desire the collapse of the church, clarifications on this council – which was supposed to be pastoral and not dogmatic – are urgently needed,” he said.

He said the teachings of Vatican II were never intended to be infallible, and “will never be superdogma.”

He added that the society is not seeking a “strictly canonical agreement” with the Vatican, but “a solution that concerns the foundation of the problem, which is the doctrinal and moral crisis in the church.”

Bishop Fellay and three other bishops were ordained against papal orders in 1988 by the late French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, founder of the Society of St. Pius X. One of the four, British-born Bishop Richard Williamson, recently provoked widespread indignation by asserting that the Holocaust was exaggerated and that no Jews died in Nazi gas chambers.

The Vatican responded by saying that Bishop Williamson must disavow his positions on the Holocaust before he will be accepted into full communion with the church.

In the interview, Bishop Fellay said Bishop Williamson was “studying the matter” and would fulfill his responsibilities.

“But he must be given time, because he wants to study it seriously in order to give a sincere and true response,” he said.