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Vatican calls traditionalist ordinations 'completely illegitimate'

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NCR Today

When Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunication of four traditionalist Catholic bishops last January, it was intended as a gesture of reconciliation toward the Society of St. Pius X, a breakaway movement founded by the late French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. (The move generated global tumult when it turned out that one of those prelates, Bishop Richard Williamson, is a Holocaust denier.) The prospect of reconciliation may have taken a setback, however, with a recent announcement by the society that it intends to ordain new priests at the end of June, without papal permission, in three locations: its seminary at Zaitzkofen in Bavaria; its headquarters in Ecône, Switzerland; and at another seminary in Winona, Minnesota.

Today the Vatican released a statement calling those ordinations 'completely illegitimate.' The following is the full text of the Vatican statement, in an *NCR* translation from Italian.

COMMUNICATION OF THE PRESS OFFICE OF THE HOLY SEE REGARDING THE ORDINATIONS ANNOUNCED BY THE SOCIETY OF ST. PIUS X

In response to the frequent questions that have arrived in recent days regarding the priestly ordinations of the Society of St. Pius X scheduled for the end of June, there's nothing to do but to repeat what was affirmed by the Holy Father in his letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church last March 10: 'As long as the Society (of St. Pius X) does not have a canonical position in the church, its ministers likewise do not exercise legitimate ministries in the church ? as long as the questions concerning doctrine are not clarified, the Society does not have any canonical status in the church, and its ministers ? do not exercise in a legitimate way any ministry in the church.' The ordinations are therefore to be considered completely illegitimate.

In the same letter, the pope announced his intention to provide a new status for the 'Ecclesia Dei' Commission, in connection with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. There's reason to think that the definition of that new status will come shortly. It constitutes the premise for the opening of a dialogue with the leadership of the Society of St. Pius X, in view of a hoped-for clarification of doctrinal questions, and, consequently, also disciplinary questions, which for now remain open.

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