

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

October 11, 2011 at 10:25am

Schismatics discuss demands; future unclear

by Francis X. Rocca by Religion News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Leaders of an ultra-traditionalist group that's in schism with the Roman Catholic Church met to consider the Vatican's conditions for reconciliation, but failed to announce a decision or say when they would do so.

The Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) will respond to the Vatican's conditions "in a reasonable time," its leaders said, after they met on Friday (Oct. 7).

Bishop Bernard Fellay, the SSPX's superior general, received the "doctrinal preamble" at a meeting in Rome last month. The document's contents remain confidential, but the Vatican has indicated it includes a mandate to accept at least some of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the pope's teaching authority in the decades since.

Founded by the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, the SSPX is the largest and most vocal group of ultra-traditionalist Catholics who reject the modernizing reforms ushered in by Vatican II, including the council's teachings on religious freedom and subsequent changes to the Mass.

In a bid to restore relations, Pope Benedict XVI lifted restrictions on the so-called Traditional Latin Mass in 2007, and readmitted four excommunicated SSPX bishops in 2009. Jewish groups were outraged after one of the readmitted bishops, Richard Williamson, turned out to be a vocal denier of the Holocaust.

Despite these concessions, Fellay's top aide said last month that reaching an agreement would be "very, very difficult."

"The leadership of the church now as before is not ready to give up the false principles of Vatican II and their consequences," said the Rev. Niklaus Pfluger. "Any false or dangerous compromise must be ruled out."

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