

Pope makes final offer to breakaway SSPX group

Alessandro Speciale Religion News Service | Jun. 13, 2012

VATICAN CITY -- The leader of the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X met for more than two hours with officials from the Vatican's doctrinal office on Wednesday, as negotiations to end a decades-old split in the Roman Catholic Church draw to an end after almost three years of talks.

The breakaway group rejects the modernizing reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), including the acceptance of religious freedom and ecumenism.

According to the Vatican Insider website, Pope Benedict XVI reviewed a final draft of a reconciliation proposal aimed at bringing the SSPX back into "full communion" with the Vatican. The draft was then submitted to Bishop Bernard Fellay, the SSPX superior general, during Wednesday's meeting by American Cardinal William J. Levada, who heads the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

An SSPX spokesman, Fr. Alain Lorans, told *Agence France-Presse* that it will be "a few days" before Fellay decides whether or not to accept the Vatican's final offer. Its contents, he said, won't be made public "before the end of this week or the beginning of the next," adding that the Wednesday meeting was "just a step."

The Vatican's chief spokesman, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, struck a similar note describing the meeting as a "step in a process that is still ongoing."

Last September, the Vatican submitted to the SSPX a "doctrinal preamble" as a prerequisite for full reconciliation. The traditionalist group's first response, in January, was considered "not sufficient" by the Vatican and the pope, and Fellay delivered a second one in April, which has been reviewed by the Vatican's doctrinal office and then forwarded to Benedict.

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