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Vatican says it is willing to be patient with SSPX in reconciliation bid

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"Patience, serenity, perseverance and trust are needed" as the Vatican continues talks aimed at full reconciliation with the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X, said a statement from the Vatican commission overseeing the discussions.

The Pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei," in a statement released Saturday, said the leadership of the SSPX had requested "additional time for reflection and study" before responding to Pope Benedict XVI's latest efforts to reintegrate them into the church.

"A culminating point along this difficult path" was reached June 13 when the commission gave the SSPX a final "doctrinal declaration together with a proposal for the canonical normalization of its status within the Catholic Church," the statement said.

The Vatican initially presented what it described as a "doctrinal preamble" to SSPX leaders in September 2011. While it never released the text, the Vatican had said it outlined "some doctrinal principles and criteria for the interpretation of Catholic doctrine necessary to guarantee fidelity" to the formal teaching of the church, including the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

The SSPX gave the Vatican its response in April. The Vatican, in turn, gave the SSPX the doctrinal declaration to sign in June and also presented a proposal to establish for SSPX members a "personal prelature," which is a church jurisdiction without geographical boundaries. Currently, the church's only personal prelature is Opus Dei.

The Vatican said that "after 30 years of separation, it is understandable that time is needed to absorb the significance of these recent developments."

The statement called the efforts a "dramatic manifestation" of the pope's ministry "to foster and preserve the unity of the church by realizing the long hoped-for reconciliation."

Just three days before the Vatican statement was published, the SSPX announced it had ousted British Bishop Richard Williamson, one of the four bishops ordained by SSPX founder Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre without papal approval in 1988.

Williamson opposed the reconciliation talks with the Vatican and had caused great embarrassment for the German-born Pope Benedict. On the same day in 2009 that the Vatican announced Pope Benedict had lifted the excommunication of Williamson and three other of the society's bishops, a Swedish television station aired an interview with Williamson in which he denied the extent of the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews.

In a statement emailed to subscribers of his newsletter Saturday, Williamson said many people thought his presence in the SSPX was "the single biggest obstacle" to the SSPX's reconciliation with Rome.

While he said he didn't know if his expulsion was a condition set by the Vatican, "it certainly favors" the reconciliation talks.

"Archbishop Lefebvre founded the SSPX to resist the (Second Vatican) Council's destruction of the Catholic faith by its 16 documents, and of the practice of that faith by the new Mass above all," he wrote. "To undo a thing's nature is to undo the thing," he said, explaining why he opposed the talks with Rome.

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