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Calling Jews 'enemies' is 'unacceptable,' Vatican spokesman says

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | Jan. 7, 2013
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The Catholic Church remains committed to deepening its relations with Jews and finds it "absolutely unacceptable" to consider the Jewish people as enemies, the Vatican spokesman said.

"It is absolutely unacceptable, impossible, to define the Jews as enemies of the church," Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi said.

In an audio recording posted on YouTube Dec. 30, the head of the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X called the Jewish people "enemies of the church," saying Jewish leaders' support of the Second Vatican Council "shows that Vatican II is their thing, not the church's."

Bishop Bernard Fellay, superior general of the society, said those most opposed to the church granting canonical recognition to the traditionalist society have been "the enemies of the church: the Jews, the Masons, the modernists."

The remarks were made during a nearly two-hour talk Dec. 28 at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Academy in New Hamburg, Ontario.

While the society's Swiss headquarters did not respond to a Catholic News Service email request Jan. 4 for comment, the society's U.S. district published a press release on its website Jan. 5.

"The word 'enemies' used here by Bishop Fellay is of course a religious concept and refers to any group or religious sect which opposes the mission of the Catholic Church and her efforts to fulfill it: the salvation of souls," it said.

The group said, "this religious context" is based on Jesus telling the Pharisees in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."

"By referring to the Jews, Bishop Fellay's comment was aimed at the leaders of Jewish organizations, and not the Jewish people," the statement said, adding that any accusations of the society being anti-Semitic were false and an example of "hate speech made in an attempt to silence its message."

Father Lombardi told CNS that the Second Vatican Council document "Nostra Aetate," as well as many papal speeches and Vatican initiatives, reflected the church's continued, firm support "of dialogue and deepening relations" with the Jewish people. "Nostra Aetate" described Christians and Jews as having a common heritage and a profound spiritual bond, and denounced any form of contempt of the Jews.

Pope Benedict XVI's visits to the Western Wall in Jerusalem and synagogues in Cologne, New York and Rome also represent "very significant gestures of the church's good relations and dialogue with Jews," the spokesman said.

In his talk, Bishop Fellay spoke about the society's three years of discussions with the Vatican over the society's future and explained how he interpreted behind-the-scenes communications about the talks.

Apparently speaking without a text, the bishop said he has been receiving mixed messages from the Vatican for years over if and how the group might be brought back into full communion with the church.

He claimed that top Vatican officials told him not to be discouraged by official statements from the Vatican, because they did not reflect Pope Benedict's true feelings.

Pope Benedict launched a series of doctrinal discussions with the SSPX in 2009, lifting excommunications imposed on its four bishops, who were ordained in 1988 without papal approval, and expressing his hopes they would return to full communion with the church.

In 2011, the Vatican gave SSPX leaders a "doctrinal preamble" to sign that outlines principles and criteria necessary to guarantee fidelity to the church and its teaching; the Vatican said the SSPX leaders would have to sign it to move toward full reconciliation.

But Bishop Fellay said he repeatedly told the Vatican that the contents of the preamble -- particularly acceptance of the modern Mass and the council as expressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church -- were unacceptable.

He said the only reason he continued discussions with Vatican officials was because others "very close to the pope" had assured him that the pope was not in agreement with hard-line official pronouncements from the Vatican.

According to Bishop Fellay, retired Colombian Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, then-president of the Pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei," the office responsible for relations with traditionalist Catholics, had told him in March 2009 that the society would be formally recognized.

When the bishop asked how that could be possible when recognition hinged on accepting the teachings of Vatican II, he said the cardinal replied that such a requirement was only "political" and "administrative" and that, "by the way, that is not what the pope thinks."

Bishop Fellay said he continued to get similar messages from other Vatican officials, even as the formal talks continued. The verbal and written messages were very credible, he said, because they came from officials who saw the pope "every day or every two days."

He said he wouldn't give names, but he did claim "the secretary of the pope himself" was among those who told him not to worry too much about hard-line Vatican positions.

Even if the doctrinal congregation ruled against the society, he claimed the secretary told him, the pope "will overrule it in favor of the society."

"So, you see, I got all of these kinds of messages which were not fitting together," Bishop Fellay said.

The unofficial assurances were what kept him engaged in talks, he said, since the Vatican's official demands, which carried the pope's approval, "would mean the end of our relation with Rome."

Bishop Fellay said Pope Benedict wrote to him, emphasizing that full recognition required the society accept the magisterium as the judge of what is tradition, accept the council as an integral part of tradition and accept that the modern Mass is valid and licit.

Bishop Fellay said, "Even in the council there are some things we accept," as well as reject, however, the group wishes to be free to say, "there are errors in the council" and that "the new Mass is evil."

The group will not accept reconciliation if it means no longer being able to make such pronouncements, he said.

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