

Vatican gives conservative group an ultimatum

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Reconciliation between the pope and a schismatic group is impossible unless the group accepts the last half-century of modernizing reforms in the Roman Catholic Church, the Vatican said on Wednesday (Sept. 14).

The Vatican's statement followed a meeting between Bishop Bernard Fellay, superior general of the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX), and Vatican officials led by Cardinal William Levada, a former archbishop of San Francisco who now heads the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

At the meeting, Fellay received a document specifying the "doctrinal principles and criteria for the interpretation of Catholic doctrine" that the SSPX must accept as a condition of reconciliation.

The Vatican did not publish the document, but indicated that its contents related to "Vatican Council II and the later Magisterium," the latter a reference to the pope's teaching authority.

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 the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), including the council's teachings on religious freedom and subsequent changes to the Mass.

As concessions to the group, 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, told Swedish television that no more than 300,000 Jews "perished in Nazi

concentration camps ... not one of them by gassing in a gas chamber."

Wednesday's meeting was the culmination of a series of SSPX-Vatican talks, held between October 2009 and April 2011 in Rome. Last month, the SSPX leader told an interviewer that the talks had only underscored doctrinal differences.

"If their aim is still to force us to accept the Second Vatican Council," Fellay said, "the discussions have been clear enough in showing that we have no intention of doing any such thing."