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Interview with Bishop Bernard Fellay after his meeting with Cardinal William Levada



9-14-2011

At the conclusion of the [meeting that Bishop Bernard Fellay and his two General Assistants had at the Vatican with Cardinal William Levada](#), Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on September 14, 2011, at 10:00 a.m., the Superior General of the Society of St. Pius X answered our questions [for the readers of DICl].



Bishop Fellay (center) with his two Assistants: Frs. Pfluger (left) and Nely (right)

How did this meeting go?

The meeting was conducted with great courtesy and with equally great candor, because for the sake of honesty the Society of St. Pius X refuses to evade the problems that remain. Moreover the theological discussions that took place during these past two years were held in this same spirit.

When I stated on August 15 of this year that we were in agreement on the fact that we did not agree about the Second Vatican Council, I also made sure to explain that when it comes to dogmas, like the doctrine of the Trinity, we are quite obviously in agreement when we find them mentioned in Vatican II. One sentence must not be taken out of its context. It is to the great credit of our theological talks that they seriously examined and elucidated all these doctrinal problems.

The joint press release by the Vatican and the Society announced that a doctrinal document was delivered to you and that a canonical solution was proposed to you. Can you give us any particulars?

This document is entitled "Doctrinal Preamble"; it was handed over to us for in-depth study. Hence it is confidential, and you will understand why I say no more about it to you. However the term "preamble" does indicate that acceptance of it is a preliminary condition for any canonical recognition of the Society of St. Pius X on the part of the Holy See.



Cardinal Levada

On the subject of this doctrinal preamble, to the extent that this does not concern its confidentiality, can you confirm that it contains, as announced in the press release, a distinction between what is *de fide* [essential to the faith]—to which the Society fully adheres—and what is dependent on a pastoral council, as Vatican II itself claimed to be, and thus could be subjected to criticism without calling the faith into question?



Cardinal Castrillon-Hoyos

This new distinction was not only announced in the press release; I have personally heard it from various sources. As early as 2005, Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos told me, after I spent five hours explaining to him all the objections to Vatican II that the Society of St. Pius X had formulated: *"I cannot say that I agree with everything that you have said, but what you have said does not mean that you are outside the Church. Write to the pope therefore and ask him to lift the excommunication."*

Today, for the sake of objectivity, I must acknowledge that in the doctrinal preamble there is no clear-cut distinction between the inviolable dogmatic sphere and the pastoral sphere that is subject to discussion. The only thing that I can say, because it is part of the press release, is that this preamble contains *"certain doctrinal principles and criteria for the interpretation of Catholic doctrine, which are necessary to ensure faithfulness to the Church's Magisterium and to "sentire cum Ecclesia" [thinking with the Church]. At the same time, it leaves open to legitimate discussion the examination and theological explanation of individual expressions and formulations contained in the documents of Vatican Council II and of the later Magisterium."* There you have it; no more and no less.

As for the canonical status that is said to have been proposed to the Society of St. Pius X, on the condition that it adheres to the doctrinal preamble: there has been talk about a [personal] prelatore rather than an ordinariate; is this correct?



Msgr. Pozzo, Secretary of the Ecclesia Dei Commission

As you correctly note, this canonical status is conditional; only later on will we be able to see the exact modality of it; it still remains a subject for discussion.

When do you think you will give your answer to the proposal in the doctrinal preamble?

As soon as I have taken the time necessary to study this document, and to consult with those who are chiefly responsible for the Society of St. Pius X, because in such an important matter I have promised my confreres not to make a decision without consulting them first.

But I can assure you that our decision will be made for the good of the Church and of souls. Our Rosary Crusade, which continues for several more months, must be intensified so as to enable us to obtain, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, the graces of light and strength that we need more than ever. (DICl no. 240 dated September 14, 2011) [read on dici >](#)

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Original text: French | Translator: Michael J. Miller, M.A. Theol.