



The SSPX Falsely Accused:

Resistance to What?

On April 16, 2013, Fr. Daniel Themann was invited to give a conference (entitled “The SSPX Falsely Accused: Resistance to What?”) on the subject of some concerns occasioned by the recent talks between Rome and the SSPX. In the conference he spoke of accusations and alleged “facts” purported to prove that the Society has abandoned its original mission of transmitting unblemished the Faith received from the Catholic Church. Father’s clear exposition of the real facts shows, rather, that the SSPX has been found faithful.

In this issue is included a summary of Fr. Themann’s talk divided into three parts: 1) principles and exposition; 2) the timeline of events; 3) answers to some frequent accusations.

Ordained in 2009, Fr. Themann taught for three years at St. Mary’s Academy and College. Since August 2012 he has been professor of dogma and apologetics at St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary in Winona, Minnesota.

Fr. Themann begins by clearly explaining the concepts and distinctions necessary for an understanding of the question. Afterwards are indicated the principles that served as guidelines in the various exchanges between Rome and the Superiors General. Of particular interest is the comparison of Archbishop Lefebvre’s attitude during the 1987-1988 talks with the Holy See and Bishop Fellay’s dealings with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2012-2013.



Fr. Daniel Themann

Summary of Fr. Themann's Talk

- First Principle: The truth is always first.
- Key Point 1: We come to the truth by an accurate judgment of the reality in front of us.
- Key Point 2: Prudential judgments concern means, not ends.
- Key Point 3: Bishop Fellay has not stopped insisting on doctrine as a pre-condition to canonical regularization by the fact that he has stopped insisting on conversion as a pre-condition.

Some underlying principles are needed to properly understand the situation and thus the SSPX's response through Bishop Fellay during its discussions with Rome.

First Principle: The truth is always first.

What is truth?

- Truth is a relationship of correspondence between what is really there outside of our head and our mind's understanding of it, the result of the mind's conforming itself to what is really there.
- Respect for truth implies a docility to reality and a respect for nuance.
- Truth is not a romantic ideal and is often beautiful or ugly, sublime or mundane, satisfying or humiliating.
- People can wax poetic about "truth" and yet never make any serious effort to acquire it.

Key Point 1: We come to the truth by an accurate judgment of the reality in front of us.

We are handicapped in the process of making accurate judgments by:

- The wound of ignorance: it is with difficulty that the mind arrives at truth.
- Moral or emotional weaknesses which get in the way: e.g., pride, bitterness, scruples, fear, laziness, etc.
- Common practical pitfalls, such as:
 - Including evidence which is not relevant or excluding evidence which is relevant.
 - Giving an unreasonable credibility to evidence, either too much or too little (note, it is an error to be skeptical about everything).
 - Over-simplification, that is, failing to make a distinction.
 - Investigating too much or too little in proportion to the seriousness of the judgment.
 - Rash judgment: making a conclusion which does not necessarily follow from the evidence, confusing "it might be true" with "it certainly is true."

We must remember that:

- Truth occurs when we judge accurately the reality outside of us.
- Truth is serious and precious but not romantic.
- We face handicaps in our pursuit of truth; because of this, if we do not seriously commit ourselves to judging well, we will not.
- Furthermore, people who do not make serious efforts to judge accurately do not give

first importance to truth. They may get emotional about the word truth, but in actuality it is not the most important thing to them.

There are different kinds of judgments or truths:

Speculative Truths

These have to do with things that are the way they are and will always be the way they are (because of God's nature, the nature of creatures, or some choice of God).

Examples: God is Trinity, murder is a sin, the catholic church has seven sacraments.

Prudential Truths

These concern actions, that is, what is prudent in a given set of circumstances or what is the best way to achieve a good in a given set of circumstances. These truths depend on circumstances, and so what is prudentially true changes as circumstances change.

Example: it might be imprudent to begin a school in a parish until the number of students and commitment of the parents has reached a certain minimum.

Thus it is not a question of the priest not caring whether the children receive a catholic education or not, but rather how best that good can be achieved in a given set of circumstances.

There is no faster way to cause a fight between well-intentioned people than to confuse a question of principle with a question of prudence.

N.B.: The presence of risk does not automatically render an option imprudent.

Key Point 2: Prudential judgments concern means, not ends.

The end or the good to be achieved is presupposed and does not change with circumstances although the means often do.

There would seem to be five chief reasons for the confusion and doubts among our faithful:

- A lack of understanding of the principles by which the SSPX has always operated.
- A lack of detailed knowledge of the events which have transpired.
- There has been a change in the SSPX's prudential policy (which is interpreted as a change in principle).
- Misunderstanding Bishop Fellay's doctrinal declaration.
- The Archbishop, after the consecrations, said that it would be impossible to reach an agreement with the Vatican until Rome "converted."

1. A lack of understanding of the principles by which the SSPX has always operated.

Principles:

A. The SSPX is not sedevacantist, that is, the authorities in Rome and the diocesan authorities are the legitimate authorities in the church, even if they abuse their authority in

practice.

Without realizing it, some of our own faithful have adopted sedevacantist positions, such as, “To have anything to do with Modernist Rome is a compromise in principle.” contributing to this misconception has been an erroneous application of certain terms such as “conciliar church” and “Modernist Rome.”

- Again: Truth is the conformity of the mind to reality. Truth is not firstly a question of words but of the ideas for which the words stand.
- For example, the term “conciliar church” does not mean the same thing for the SSPX as it does for sedevacantists. For sedevacantists, the “conciliar church” is a different organization than the catholic church. But for the SSPX, it is a metaphor which refers to the clergy insofar as they hold modernist ideas.

Thus most sedevacantists do not recognize the pope and bishops as the true hierarchy of the Catholic Church, but as a counterfeit hierarchy of a different and false church.

But the SSPX recognizes them as the hierarchy of the one and only Catholic Church, so to have some dealings with the hierarchy is normal. of course, any current interaction will not be as complete as in normal times (and here the SSPX differs from the “Ecclesia Dei” groups), but it will never be completely absent (and here the SSPX differs from sedevacantist groups).

B. The crisis in the church is one of faith stemming from the ambiguity and errors of Vatican II and the new Mass, the expression and conveyor of a new (and erroneous) theology.

This distinguishes the SSPX from “Ecclesia Dei” groups (e.g., the Fraternity of St. Peter) that accept Vatican II and the new Mass, blaming the crisis on misinterpretations and abuses.

N.B.: while the crisis has been intensified by abuses in the liturgy which go beyond the official texts of the new Mass or by theological errors which go beyond the documents of Vatican II, these abuses are not the root of the problem.

The application of these principles:

Is accepting a canonical structure a question of principle or of prudence?

This is a question of prudence, for it is normal for religious congregations to have a legal framework.

The SSPX used to have one, and it lost it (officially at least) due to an act of injustice. The Society recognizes the authority of the people who would be recognizing the Society. Thus, the question of whether to accept a structure now would be a question of prudence.

However:

- if, to get a canonical structure, one must say that Vatican II is traditional or that the new Mass is legitimate, then accepting a canonical structure under those conditions would become a question of principle.
- if no such doctrinally problematic condition existed, the question of when to accept a structure would remain a question of prudence because there is no compromise involved in

being recognized by authorities which one recognizes as the true and legitimate authorities.

Another important point is that to be canonically recognized pertains to the pope's exercise of authority and not to his modernist views. A further confirmation that accepting a structure is a question of prudence rather than principle is how Archbishop Lefebvre acted in 1987-1988, the only other time that the SSPX came seriously close to a canonical structure.

2. A lack of detailed knowledge of the events which have transpired.

See the timeline on pages 12 - 16

3. There has been a change in the SSPX's prudential policy (which is interpreted as a change in principle).

Bishop Fellay, since 2011, has been accused of becoming obsessed with a practical agreement and therefore of being willing to put doctrinal questions in second place. This is not the case, but what has occurred is a change in prudential tactics.

The reasons for the shift in prudential tactics

A. January 2001. A decade before Bishop Fellay supposedly became focused on a canonical solution, he was willing to enter into discussions with the Holy See.

“Given that Rome initiated this effort, it is normal that the Society treat it with the seriousness that it deserves. If there were to be an agreement, it could only be seen in the perspective of giving back to Tradition its rights of citizenship, even if the final triumph would only be obtained gradually.”

B. September 2011, Rome again took the initiative, not the SSPX, and for a time it seemed as if there had been a real change (even if not “conversion”) in the pope's perspective on the authority of Vatican II.

- During the discussions, Bishop Fellay consistently insisted on the fact that Vatican II has errors and the new Mass is illegitimate, and the Society cannot relent on this point.
- These discussions terminated as soon as Bishop Fellay became certain that the pope is just as resolute in refusing the SSPX's right to say these things as the Society is resolute in affirming them.

Key Point 3: Bishop Fellay has not stopped insisting on doctrine as a pre-condition by the fact that he has stopped insisting on conversion as a pre-condition.

What has changed is that Bishop Fellay no longer requires as a pre-condition for accepting a canonical structure that Rome “convert” (i.e., that Rome acknowledge the errors of Vatican II and the evil nature of the new Mass).

This is not to say that Bishop Fellay thinks Rome does not need to “convert,” but merely that it not necessary as a pre-condition to a canonical structure—just as it obviously was not for

Archbishop Lefebvre in 1988.

Instead, as a pre-condition, it would be enough for Rome to grant the Society the right to state publicly that there are errors in Vatican II and that the new Mass is evil.

Therefore:

- This is a change in the prudential policy of Bishop Fellay.
- It is the only change in his policy.
- It is a change in prudential policy not a change in principle.

How does loosening the former pre-condition help the SSPX to fight against Modernism?

- Rome has always acted as if Vatican II and the new Mass were protected by infallibility. While they will not use this word, they will say that Vatican II and the new Mass cannot contain error since the Holy Spirit guides the church, etc.
- Short of a miracle, Rome will not admit the errors and evils of the reform until they first abandon their position that the reform is protected by infallibility.
- If it were granted that the SSPX had the right to teach publicly that Vatican II and its reforms are erroneous or evil instead of being infallible, Rome would abandon its position because it could not state that Catholics may refuse consent to infallible things.

Granting the Society this right would be an enormous tactical defeat for the reforms of Vatican II and a significant step toward getting Rome itself to admit these errors and evils. It would also foster these practical benefits:

- Persuasion of fence-sitters who think that Vatican II might have errors, but who hesitate to hold this position as long as Rome implies it is infallible.
- Providing cover for bishops, priests and theologians outside the SSPX to be more vocal in their attacks against Vatican II and the new Mass since they could no longer be condemned for this.

Furthermore, it is our duty to fight. We have a duty to fight the causes of the crisis and bring it to an end with whatever opportunities God places at our disposal. Of course, this must be done prudently (for instance, not thinking that the SSPX can reform the church by itself).

For those who believe that it is not a significant concession to grant the SSPX the right to criticize publicly the Vatican II reform, it must be pointed out that it is significant to Rome. Not only did the Holy See recognize the consequences of such critiques, but Pope Benedict XVI (despite his opposition to the most extreme post-conciliar ideas) also clung to the notion that the reform can be salvaged.

4. Misunderstanding Bishop Fellay's doctrinal declaration.

This document, a doctrinal declaration, was sent by Bishop Fellay on April 15th in response to the March 16th meeting, specifically as a countermeasure against the misconception that the Society rejects every single act of authority since 1962.

Because it was meant to drive home this point, this document approached the line of what is

acceptable. Bishop Fellay knew this, hence his insistence that if a single word in the document were changed it would be unacceptable.

This document has been recently leaked on the internet and widely criticized as proof of a doctrinal compromise. But in fact, the doctrinal declaration is worded very similarly to the May Protocol signed by Archbishop Lefebvre in 1988. Here are some of the major criticisms which certain people have leveled against this document.

Critique #1: the acceptance of paragraph 25 from *Lumen Gentium*:

“We declare that we accept the teachings of the Magisterium of the church in the substance of Faith and Morals, adhering to each doctrinal affirmation in the required degree, according to the doctrine contained in no. 25 of the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican council.”

Have the critics read *Lumen Gentium* §25?

The accusation is that paragraph 25 of *Lumen Gentium* is “terrible.” But it is not; it is very similar to any explanation you will find in a traditional textbook on theology. There have also been objections based on real modernist errors in the document *Lumen Gentium*, but none of these errors are to be found in paragraph 25.

Furthermore, the May Protocol of 1988 signed by Archbishop Lefebvre contained exactly the same phrase. Even when negotiations with Rome were breaking down, the Archbishop defended his acceptance of *Lumen Gentium* §25:

“When you read this paragraph, you understand that it condemns them, not us; they would have to sign it because it is not so badly written and it contains a whole paragraph stressing the immutability of doctrine, the immutability of the Faith, the immutability of the formulas. We agree with that. There are those who need to sign this. Thus there is no difficulty in accepting this paragraph which expresses traditional doctrine.”

Critique #2: The doctrinal declaration does not mention that Vatican II has errors, but only that it contains statements that are difficult to reconcile with Tradition.

Difficult to reconcile with Tradition

No doubt, this is a very diplomatic way of putting it, but it is exactly the phraseology contained in the May Protocol—except Archbishop Lefebvre also agreed to maintain a “positive attitude” toward these statements and to avoid “all polemics.” Imagine if Bishop Fellay had made that statement!

But, moreover, this doctrinal declaration was never meant to express all of the SSPX’s views on these questions anymore than the May Protocol of 1988.

Critique #3: The document states that the SSPX recognizes the validity of the new Mass “according to the rites indicated in the typical editions of the Roman Missal and the

sacramental rituals legitimately promulgated by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II.”

The accusation is that the SSPX has accepted that the new Mass is a “legitimate form of Mass.” But in the context in which this document was issued (i.e., the constant insistence that we will never accept the new Mass and the goal of correcting the misconception that we do not really recognize the authority of popes since Vatican II), this statement merely means that the Society recognizes that Paul VI and John Paul II had the right to promulgate liturgical rites. Hence, it is not a judgment on the *Novus Ordo* itself.

Critique #4: The declaration does not state explicitly that the SSPX rejects the laws that are in accord with the post-conciliar novelties:

“We promise to respect the common discipline of the church and the ecclesiastical laws, especially those which are contained in the *Code of Canon Law* promulgated by John Paul II (1983)....”

But this wording comes again directly from the May Protocol that Archbishop Lefebvre signed, except that in Bishop Fellay’s document, an additional phrase says that this statement must be interpreted in light of a previous one.

The previous statement cited declared that the SSPX does not accept any interpretation of post-Vatican II teaching which contradicts the church’s previous teaching. It also cites a canon which states that new legislation must be interpreted in a coherent manner with previous legislation.

Some argue that these references to interpreting the new in light of the old is Bishop Fellay’s backdoor approach to recognizing the hermeneutic of continuity. But how can this be a legitimate interpretation of these statements when during the conversations with Rome, Bishop Fellay was explicit in rejecting the hermeneutic of continuity?

Also, Rome certainly did not take this statement as a back-door approach to accepting the hermeneutic of continuity. How do we know? Because Rome changed the doctrinal declaration by re-inserting the explicitly modernist language. Otherwise, they would have left it as is.

One final point: When the SSPX defends this doctrinal declaration (and a few of its other recent actions) by pointing out that they are taken directly from the May Protocol which Archbishop Lefebvre himself signed, the critics’ response is: “He later realized that he had gone too far and repudiated the Protocol.”

However, this is not accurate. The letter that Archbishop Lefebvre wrote the next day to Cardinal Ratzinger (although it subsequently caused the negotiations to unravel), did not reject the May Protocol but simply added one more provision—a practical provision—that the pope guarantee permission for an episcopal consecration on June 30th. The Protocol as originally written contained no guarantee of a bishop at all, even though obtaining bishops for the Society had been the goal which had prompted the discussions in the first place. It is this shortcoming in the document which caused the Archbishop’s anxiety. So he wrote the next day to insist on this point and, thereby, to test Rome’s good faith. He never tore up the May Protocol (as some have erroneously claimed). Even his anxiety about it was not based on its doctrinal content. This is how the Archbishop described the Protocol afterward: “Good in itself, it is acceptable. If it were not, I would not have even signed it in the first place, that is sure.”

Even on the evening before the episcopal consecrations, he said that he would have postponed the consecrations until the date selected by Rome if permission for a consecration had arrived that day. (cf. *Archbishop Lefebvre and the Vatican* and *Marcel Lefebvre* [Bishop Tissier's biography] for more details.)

It is also worth pointing out that:

- Bishop Fellay was more explicit in his discussions that the SSPX be allowed to preach publicly against the errors of Vatican II than Archbishop Lefebvre was in 1988.
- The doctrinal declaration of April 15th is actually more explicitly traditional (packed with footnotes from Trent, anti-modernist encyclicals, the Anti-modernist oath, etc.) than the May Protocol.

Furthermore:

- It is bizarre that Bishop Fellay has been attacked precisely for these footnotes, as if this were an example of the modernist tactic of mixing true statements with false statements.
- Let us recall that it is one thing to mix true statements with false statements to create confusion, but quite another to place footnotes on diplomatically-worded statements precisely to limit their scope to prevent any modernist interpretation of them.

In fact, if we were to apply the critics' accusations, considering the context of 1988 (no Society bishops, no freedom for the Mass, no shift of momentum in the church, etc.), Archbishop Lefebvre was actually in a weaker position during his negotiations with Rome—and therefore should have been more explicit in these areas in the May Protocol.

5. Didn't Archbishop Lefebvre say after the 1988 consecrations that it would be impossible to reach an agreement with Rome until it "converted?"

It would be good to point out first of all that the "position of the Archbishop" to which they refer (even if it were true) is a prudential position taken at a moment in time—not a doctrinal position.

What is prudent can change with time.

A future superior living in circumstances not exactly the same as the circumstances immediately after the consecrations should be able to change prudential decisions without being labeled as a compromiser who wants an agreement with Rome at all costs (which is obviously untrue.)

Note that relations with Rome are, by the express will of Archbishop Lefebvre, exclusively under the authority of the Superior General:

- June 15, 1988, press conference: "The one who will have in principle the responsibility of relations with Rome when I will be gone will be the Superior General of the Society, Father Schmidberger, who still has six years of his term remaining. It is he who probably will have the contacts with Rome from now on in order to continue the discussions if the discussions continue or if the contact is maintained, which is unlikely for some time

since in *L'Osservatore Romano* there is going to be a headline, 'Schism of Archbishop Lefebvre, excommunication.' Therefore, for a few years, perhaps two or three years, i do not know, there will be the separation."

- Response of Bishop Tissier to a *Remnant* interview question in 2006: "So, as bishops, your primary role is..." Bishop Tissier: "To give confirmations and do ordinations, simply. That is the role that Archbishop Lefebvre gave us. So we do not have a 'leading role' in the Society per se, we simply submit to the Superior General."

Furthermore, it is at least very much debatable whether these quotes prove that the Archbishop really meant to make the "conversion of Rome" an absolute condition before even entertaining the possibility of agreeing to be recognized.

First: Because he made similar statements before he subsequently discussed (over a period of nine months) and finally signed the Protocol of May 5th.

- July 14, 1987 to cardinal ratzinger: "eminence, even if you give us everything—a bishop, some autonomy from the bishops, the 1962 liturgy, allow us to continue our seminaries—we cannot work together because we are going in different directions. you are working to dechristianize society and the church, and we are working to christianize them."
- Do not forget that he called the Vatican authorities antichrists before negotiating and signing the Protocol.

Second: Because even after 1988, Archbishop Lefebvre made other statements which indicate that conversion was not an absolute condition.

- Speaking in 1989, he discussed what could be a satisfactory accord and he mentions no preconditions. "I would have indeed signed a definitive accord after signing the Protocol if we had had the possibility of protecting ourselves effectively against the Modernism of Rome and of the bishops" (*Fideliter*, 68, March 1989, pp. 7-8).
- September 6, 1990, in an address to the priests at Ecône: "Someone was saying to me yesterday, 'But what if Rome accepted your bishops and then you were completely exempted from the other bishops' jurisdiction?' But firstly, they are a long way right now from accepting any such thing, and then, let them first make us such an offer! But i do not think they are anywhere near doing so. For what has been till now the difficulty is precisely their giving us a traditionalist bishop."

Third: Because placing conversion as an absolute condition would have been a radical change (at two levels) in the policy Archbishop Lefebvre had observed during his entire career. This is a key point.

- On the first level, it would have been a dramatic change in his practical policy. During his entire career, the Archbishop always went to Rome when he was called, and he never considered the conversion of Rome as the *sine qua non* of a canonical structure. He certainly wanted Rome to convert, but on the question of a canonical structure, he was always content if Rome allowed him permission (sincere permission, of course, which

is what was precisely lacking in 1988 and in 2012 as events proved) to perform the “experiment of Tradition.”

- Second, the Archbishop’s entire philosophy of life could be summed up in three words: principles, providence, and prudence; responding prudently to each providential situation in light of eternal principles. It goes completely against the spirit of the Archbishop to bind himself (and his successors) to a *priori* prudential judgments about circumstances the details of which could not be known ahead of time—which by definition, would not be prudential judgments at all.

We must also point out that if one carelessly quotes Archbishop Lefebvre, he can be cited to espouse notions from either the camp of the liberals or the sedevacantists, for example:

- He could be interpreted as a progressive for his openness to a permanent (although celibate) diaconate at the time of the council and for not forbidding the faithful, at first, from attending the new Mass.
- He could be interpreted (and often has been interpreted) as a closet sedevacantist for certain statements made at the time of Assisi in 1986.

But taking the Archbishop’s principles and spirit as well as his actions into consideration, it is much more reasonable to interpret the statements he made after 1988 as expressing his hesitancy to accept a canonical solution:

- So long as it was patterned after the shortsighted and incomplete “Ecclesia Dei” model of “liturgy only” without fighting for doctrine;
- So long as Rome did not appear sincere in allowing the “experiment of Tradition”

Timeline

The following timeline shows in chronological order events and information concerning the Holy See and the SSPX. This arrangement helps put in perspective the complex discussions in question. It also renders clearer the two fold guiding principle followed by our Superiors General: attachment to Rome and defense of the Faith. Clearly visible also are the expansion of Tradition in the last 25 years and the good fruits it has procured for the Church.

- July 14, 1987 To Cardinal Ratzinger: “Even if you give us everything... we cannot work together because we are going in different directions....”
- May 5, 1988 Nevertheless, the Archbishop spends the next nine months discussing a canonical structure with Cardinal Ratzinger concluding with the “May Protocol.” N.B.: Archbishop Lefebvre did not tear up the May Protocol the next day (as some are erroneously claiming). See Fr. Themann’s explanation of actual events and what led to the protocol’s ultimate rejection.
- Timeline of SSPX - Rome Discussions under Bishop Fellay**
- Summer 2000 SSPX pilgrimage to Rome stirs general interest in Curia. In August, Cardinal Castrillón Hoyos makes contact with the Society.
- December 2000 Meetings with Cardinal Castrillón Hoyos (and briefly with John Paul II) to discuss progress toward an eventual agreement between Rome and the SSPX.
- January 2001 The SSPX’s General Council meets to discuss the situation. Two conditions are formulated as prerequisites for resuming discussions: (1) liberty of traditional Mass and (2) admission that 1988 excommunications were null. Bishop Fellay states: “Given that Rome has initiated the effort, it is normal for the Society to take it with the seriousness that it deserves....If there were to be an agreement, it could only be seen in the perspective of giving back to Tradition its rights of citizenship even if the final triumph will only be obtained gradually” (Letter to Friends and Benefactors, January 22, 2001).

April 2, 2005	Death of Pope John Paul II .
April 19, 2005	Cardinal Ratzinger is elected Pope Benedict XVI.
August 29, 2005	Bishop Fellay has an audience with Benedict XVI.
July 7, 2007	The Motu Proprio Summorum Pontificum affirms that the Tridentine Mass has never been abrogated. Also, the Motu Proprio does not require recognition of the legitimacy of the New Mass as in the 1984 Indult. This stipulation is only mentioned in the accompanying letter to the bishops as a requirement for “full communion,” but not for the right to say the traditional Mass.
January 2009	Withdrawal of decree of excommunication of the four SSPX bishops in response to a petition sent to Rome a month before by the same four bishops.
October 2009 – April 2011	Doctrinal discussions occur. Note that the Commission members chosen by Bishop Fellay (Bishop de Galarreta, Frs. de Jorna, de la Rocque, and Gleize) were not people to choose if Bishop Fellay had intended to minimize the importance of doctrinal differences. Cardinal Levada invites Bishop Fellay to come to Rome in September to “make an assessment of these discussions and also to consider prospects for the future.”
Mid-August 2011	Bishop Fellay is told by sources close to the pope that Benedict XVI wants to recognize the SSPX unilaterally, i.e., without any concession on the side of the Society.
September 14, 2011	Bishop Fellay meets with Cardinal Levada, who gives him a Doctrinal Preamble and some basic information regarding a possible canonical recognition.
October 2011	SSPX’s major superiors meet in Albano, Italy, to discuss the Doctrinal Preamble.
November 30, 2011	Bishop Fellay responds to Cardinal Levada, rejecting the Preamble because it contains doctrinal positions which the SSPX has always rejected. Bishop Fellay specifically states that the doctrinal differences

revealed in doctrinal discussions cannot be glossed over with the hermeneutic of continuity argument, and that the proposed canonical structure needs revision as it does not provide sufficient safeguards to protect the SSPX's apostolate. The attack on the hermeneutic of continuity is the thrust of Bishop Fellay's response. He does not enter into detail precisely because he wants to attack the overall perspective.

January 2012

Bishop Fellay sends a longer explanation to Rome telling why the Doctrinal Preamble is not acceptable (upon urging by Msgr. Pozzo, secretary of the PCED¹) while specifying that the November 30th reply is the SSPX's official response.

Bishop Fellay explains within the response that while Rome and the SSPX agree in principle that there should be continuity in Church teachings, the problem is that the Society disagrees that Vatican II is completely in continuity with Tradition.

- During his conversations, Bishop Fellay insists that if the Society is recognized, it must be recognized "as we are," including (and especially) our preaching against the New Mass and the errors of Vatican II .
- The unofficial sources continue to assure him that, after recognition, the SSPX will be free to continue to attack as it does now.

March 16, 2012

Bishop Fellay meets with Cardinal Levada, who gives him a harsh letter (which he claims has been approved by the pope). The letter says that no one has the right to say that the Rome of today is in contradiction with the past. The letter contains the threat of schism unless the September 14th document is accepted. It gives Bishop Fellay one month to respond.

- At the same time, Bishop Fellay is told unofficially that this is not what the pope thinks and that he did not approve Cardinal Levada's letter.
- Also during this meeting, Bishop Fellay has the definite impression that Rome believes the SSPX does not recognize anything after 1962—i.e., it rejects every word of Vatican II , every canon of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, every ecclesiastical act of authority without exception.

April 15, 2012

Bishop Fellay submits a Doctrinal Declaration specifically designed to address this “nothing after 1962” misconception, which he sends directly to pope. Later Bishop Fellay is attacked as if this declaration was a compromise. It is not, but it was worded so as to correct the misconception of “nothing after 1962.” For this reason, the document walked a fine line, but the line was never crossed (which Rome clearly understood since they rejected it).

- Bishop Fellay does not mind being condemned for what the SSPX stands for, but he objects very much to being condemned for things that the Society does not stand for, e.g., that one cannot accept any act of Church authority since 1962.
- Unofficial feedback says that the pope accepts the declaration and tells him to now send it to the CDF², i.e., through the proper channels.

May 2012

Bishop Fellay wants to ensure that the SSPX will remain free to attack Vatican II , etc., and makes a trip to Rome to meet with the CDF to verify. Bishop Fellay is not satisfied with what he hears. It also becomes clear that the CDF wants to change the text of the declaration. Bishop Fellay writes to both the CDF and Pope Benedict and says: *If you change one word, this document will no longer be acceptable to us.*

June 8, 2012

Bishop Fellay (because he is not satisfied with assurances that he can attack Vatican II) grants an interview to DIC1 as a test of Roman openness to attacks against Vatican II and the New Mass. Upon hearing of this interview, a very dissatisfied Cardinal Levada schedules a long meeting with Pope Benedict XVI.

June 13, 2012

Cardinal Levada gives Bishop Fellay his response to the SSPX’s April 15th Doctrinal Declaration, the text of which had been changed! During this meeting:

- Cardinal Levada had the DIC1 interview in his hand and explicitly referred to it, saying that the SSPX does not have the right to claim that there are errors in the Council. Bishop Fellay rejects the text on the spot (for the third time now) and reiterates the SSPX’s objections to Vatican II and the New Mass.
- The only question remaining is whether Pope Benedict authorized the reintroduction of the objectionable material in the Doctrinal Declaration.

- Bishop Fellay writes to the pope and says (paraphrased): *You know that we do not accept the whole Council, and yet I have been told that you want to recognize us as we are. I therefore concluded that you were going to concede to us the right to attack the Council. Is this true or not?*

June 30, 2012

Bishop Fellay receives a letter from Benedict XVI personally confirming that he approved re-introduction of objectionable wording into the Doctrinal Declaration.

Pope Benedict specifies in this letter three conditions for a canonical solution.

- Accept that Rome has the authority to decide what is part of Tradition and what is not. (Some within the “Resistance” have attacked this condition as being Modernist, but actually this statement is true—it is the doctrine of the Church—when correctly understood. However, we know how the Vatican will use this against us in practice.)
- Vatican II is an integral part of Tradition.
- The New Mass is valid and licit.

July 2, 2012

Cardinal Levada retires; Archbishop Mueller succeeds him.

July 2012

The SSPX’s General Chapter evaluates the situation. Its statement specifies the Society’s rejection of Vatican II’s three major errors and explicitly states what Rome had forbidden: the contention that Vatican II contains errors.

October 27, 2012

L’Osservatore Romano publishes an unsigned article from the PCED claiming that the commission is still awaiting an answer to the June 13th doctrinal declaration—this despite Bishop Fellay’s having already answered three times that he could not sign it.

February 28, 2013

Pope Benedict XVI resigns as Supreme Pontiff.

March 13, 2013

Cardinal Bergoglio is elected Pope Francis.

1 Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei.

2 Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith.