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EUGENE J. FISHER

Now it's up to them

A former head of relations with Jews for the United States bishops' conference outlines the steps he believes the Society of St Pius X must take before the Lefebvrist group as a whole can be admitted back into full communion with the Church

Having revoked, amid unprecedented controversy, the excommunications of four Lefebvrist bishops, the Pope is now waiting for "a corresponding gesture from the four bishops expressing total adherence to the doctrine and discipline of the Church".

A "full recognition of the Second Vatican Council and the Magisterium of Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II and Benedict XVI himself" is an indispensable condition for any future recognition of the Society of St Pius X (SSPX), the Secretariat of State affirmed last week. In addition one of the four, the Holocaust-denying Bishop Richard Williamson, will have to distance himself in an "absolutely unequivocal and public way" from his positions regarding the Shoah.

The explanations of church leaders to date have noted that a lifting of excommunication does not mean admission to full communion, much less acceptance of the SSPX as a "Catholic" organisation. These clarifications, along with repeated condemnations by church authorities of anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial, have been helpful. But they represent only the beginning, not the resolution of the present crisis. More is needed to be affirmed, and not just by individuals within but by the SSPX as a whole.

These affirmations need to be specific, written, formal, public, and binding on all members of the Society, at the pain of expulsion from the Society by the Society itself. Only such absolutely clear action, required officially by the Holy See and accepted in every detail by

the Society and all its members, can begin to heal the very deep fissures in relations not only externally with the Jewish people worldwide, but internally, within a currently very confused Catholic people around the world.

This mandate is not something that can be fudged with ambiguous language that supposedly can be read one way by the world at large and another way by the SSPX. There can be no ambiguities when it comes to full communion within the Church or concerning what is the official teaching of the Church on Jews and Judaism. The situation has already unravelled well beyond the point when handy ambiguities can help rather than exacerbate the very real problems that have been caused for Catholics already and the potentially disastrous consequences that can occur if this matter is not dealt with definitively.

What are some of the specifics that I, as a long-time practitioner of Catholic-Jewish relations, would see as necessary to include in what I would envisage as a longish document that the Society and all its members would need to formally sign? This is not by any means the full list of what the document should include, since there are a number of elements involved in the Society's schismatic rejection of official Church teaching with which I am not fully familiar and which, as they say, lie outside my area of expertise. The minimum, as regards the single (albeit profoundly symbolic) issue of Catholic-Jewish relations, would be formal adherence to the authenticity and authority of the following:

- The Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, especially No. 16, which acknowledges the special relationship between the Church and the Jewish People, citing Romans 9: 4-5, and goes on to state that "this people, on account of their fathers, remain [note the present tense] most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues (cf. Rom. 11: 28-29)."

- The conciliar declaration, *Nostra Aetate* No.

4, which simply spells out the immediate implications of Lumen Gentium 16, and rejects fully any notion of collective guilt on the part of Jews “then or now” for the death of Jesus, in continuity with the Roman Catechism authorised by the Council of Trent, which notes that it was not so much the Jews, but primarily our sins as Christians, that are to blame for Jesus’ crucifixion.

As Article IV of the Catechism of the Council of Trent says: “This our guilt takes a deeper die of enormity when contrasted with that of the Jews: according to the testimony of the apostle, ‘if they had known it, they never would have crucified the Lord of Glory;’ whilst we, on the contrary, professing to know him, yet denying him by our actions, seem, to some sort, to lay violent hands on him.”

■ The subsequent official documents of the Holy See implementing and elaborating upon the council’s universally binding teachings, for example those of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, the 1974 Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing *Nostra Aetate* 4; the 1985 Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Catholic Teaching and Preaching; and the 1998 *We Remember: A Catholic Reflection on the Shoah*. I would include in this list also the 1992 statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (which reported to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and for which then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote the introduction), *The Jews and their Scriptures in the Catholic Bible*.

■ For members in various countries, the official statements of the local Conferences of Catholic Bishops designed to implement the above statements of the Church Universal and the Holy See, many of which are excellent, in further spelling out the inherent consequences of the conciliar vision for Catholic teaching on Jews and Judaism.

I believe that if the Society is formally and irrevocably required to and does acknowledge fully and without equivocation the authority

of the above statements, one will be able to see at least the beginnings of a healing in the serious rupture between Jews and the Catholic Church that is at the time of this writing tragically widening day by day, with a loss of trust by Jews in the commitment of the Church to what it has said not just to Jews in the dialogue, but to its members, and, indeed, to the world. To allow this heretofore deepening trust to erode for any reason, even one as admirable as the healing of a schism, would be a scandal to the faithful of untold proportions and have serious consequences for decades, perhaps centuries, to come.

■ Dr Eugene Fisher was in charge of Catholic-Jewish relations for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops from 1977 to 2007, and a Consultor to the Holy See.