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Post-Excommunication: Vatican Stance on the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX)

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ABSTRACT

The Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) poses a significant challenge to the unity of the Catholic Church by positioning itself as a proponent of "Traditional" Catholicism while rejecting the official teachings of the Second Vatican Council. This study evaluates the Holy See's responses to the SSPX's unauthorized episcopal consecrations in Écône in 1988 and 2026 through a structured, systematic review. The review analyzes mutual characterizations between the Holy See and the SSPX, as well as the SSPX's public justifications for its actions. Four principal conclusions are identified: first, excommunication pertains to the SSPX's relationship with Church authority rather than its belief in Jesus Christ; second, canonical penalties alone are inadequate to resolve doctrinal differences between the Church and the SSPX; third, the SSPX endures due to its distinctive liturgical identity and its competition with the Church; fourth, the Vatican may utilize both formal legal accountability and specific pastoral accommodations in addressing the SSPX. Additional complex issues, including the SSPX's ongoing sacramental administration, the status of its lay members, and its canonical appeals, warrant further examination. Therefore, the findings of this study remain provisional until the Church issues definitive rulings regarding the SSPX.

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INTRODUCTION

On July 1, 2026, in Écône, Switzerland, Bishops Alfonso de Galarreta and Bernard Fellay of the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) consecrated four SSPX priests as bishops. This action directly violated Pope Leo XIV's explicit opposition to unauthorized episcopal consecrations and the warnings issued by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF) regarding the consequences of violating Church law. The following day, the DDF declared that all six bishops involved in the consecration were automatically excommunicated for violating canon law.

Beyond its pastoral implications, the most recent rupture presents a practical challenge for the Holy See in determining how to engage with the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX) following renewed conflict over episcopal ordinations. Two central issues define this dispute. The first concerns Church authority: Catholic doctrine requires that bishops receive a papal mandate for consecration, and unauthorized consecrations represent a public defiance of the requirements of episcopal ministry and the Church's visible unity. The second issue involves the doctrinal and liturgical legacy of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). The SSPX asserts that post-conciliar teachings and practices, particularly those related to religious liberty, ecumenism, interfaith dialogue, and liturgical reform, diverge from traditional Catholic doctrine. In contrast, the Holy See maintains that the Council must be interpreted in continuity with Catholic tradition and the Church's teaching authority.

Accordingly, excommunication is deemed an appropriate measure by Vatican authorities. Pope Leo XIV issued this policy, which is considered a lesson for the SSPX when it is found to have violated

canonical discipline and relationships within the Church's communion. According to Canon 751 of the Catholic Code of Canon Law, the SSPX's actions are categorized as schism, defined as the refusal to submit to the Pope or to remain in communion with those subject to him, distinguishing it from heresy and apostasy.

The SSPX professes acceptance of Catholic dogma and generally acknowledges papal authority, presenting its opposition as a defense of the Church. Nevertheless, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) classified the 2026 consecrations as schismatic due to the absence of papal authorization and direct opposition to papal directives. Proper assessment of this situation requires distinguishing between professed beliefs and the canonical obligations necessary for full communion with the Church.

Several studies indicate that the SSPX's continued existence is attributable to factors beyond isolated acts of defiance. Pietras (2024) characterizes the SSPX as a "canonically irregular community operating within the Latin Church" (Abstract) and observes that it has established institutional structures based on the concept of supplied jurisdiction. These structures enable the SSPX to conduct pastoral and administrative activities without formal incorporation into the Church's canonical framework.

Bargo's (2017) ethnographic study of the SSPX's Tridentine Liturgy in Argentina demonstrates how these rituals foster a shared identity among participants and connect them to an authoritative historical tradition. Further analysis by Bargo (2024) associates this identity with national and gender affiliations in Argentina. Additionally, increased ecclesiastical sanctions do not necessarily undermine the social foundations of organizations that maintain regular worship, educational programs, clerical training, and strong familial networks.

Several additional factors account for why formal condemnation does not necessarily result in an organization's dissolution, as noted by Piano et al. (2025). Their examination of the SSPX within the context of the "market for religious services" reveals a strong correlation between the number of SSPX chapels in the United States and the availability of the Traditional Latin Mass (TLM), particularly on Sundays. Furthermore, Clements and Bullivant (2022) caution against simplistic generalizations regarding the religious commitment of young Catholics, suggesting that the presence of a highly committed subculture and selective participation more significantly influence commitment levels than broader trends toward conservatism. Numerous other studies contextualize the SSPX's role within contemporary Catholic identity. For example, Doyle (2021) analyzes the emergence of the Traditional Latin Mass movement following Vatican II and the measures taken by popes to preserve Church unity, highlighting the SSPX's disagreement with the Second Vatican Council.

Given the SSPX's divergence from the Vatican, Ponzo (2021) examined disagreements among Italian priests regarding the use of Latin and ritual changes, suggesting these disputes reflect fundamental differences concerning Catholic identity. Ménard and Su (2021) investigated the political and theological implications of contemporary Catholic Integralism and Religious Freedom, which may be connected to, or influenced by, the SSPX's political interests.

The existing scholarship exhibits three primary limitations. First, canonical studies focus on the validity or legality of actions, whereas social scientific research addresses identity, markets, and politics without considering legal consequences for clergy and laity. Second, most scholarship centers on the period from the lifting of the bishops' excommunications in 2009 to the beginning of Pope Francis's papacy, resulting in a significant gap regarding juridical issues arising from the July 2026 consecrations. Third, academic debates often present the SSPX's future as a binary between complete submission to Rome and permanent separation, despite evidence of alternative possibilities such as conditional recognition, formal theological debate, individual pastoral reconciliation, and protracted litigation.

Accordingly, this review aims to address these gaps by employing a comprehensive analytical framework that integrates brief explanations of canon law, ecclesiology, anthropology, and the sociology of religion. The central research question is supported by three subsidiary questions: What legal changes occurred between 1988 and 2026? Why does the SSPX persist socially and liturgically despite prolonged canonical irregularity? Which avenues for recognition or reconciliation are supported by empirical evidence, and which remain speculative? Rather than predicting Pope Francis's actions, this article outlines potential courses of action and the conditions under which they may arise.

RESEARCH METHODS

A systematic literature review was conducted to supplement the documentary legal-historical analysis. This approach was chosen due to the interdisciplinary nature of the study, which encompasses Canon Law, Sociology of Religion, Liturgy Studies, Religious History, Political Theology, and Research Methodology. Xiao and Watson (2019) and Page et al. (2021) both base their analyses on systematic literature reviews. Xiao and Watson (2019) define literature reviews as "the basis for all forms of scholarship" (p. 93), emphasizing the necessity of rigorous methods for identifying, evaluating, and integrating prior studies. Snyder (2019) further describes the literature review as a distinct research methodology capable of generating new insights, rather than merely summarizing existing literature. In line with these definitions, findings from multiple disciplines were integrated. The review was restricted to journal articles published between January 1, 2016, and October 27, 2026, to align with the study's timeframe and reflect the most recently verified official documentation. Literature searches were conducted using academic publisher platforms and digital bibliographic tools, including Google Scholar. Search terms included: Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX), Lefebvre, excommunication, schism, supplied jurisdiction, traditional Latin Mass, Vatican II, religious freedom, Catholic traditionalism, and systematic literature review. While most searches used English terms, several relevant Spanish and Polish journal articles were also included. Publisher databases, DOI registries, journal repositories, and institutional archives were accessed to verify each article's type and publication date. This methodology constitutes a targeted, limited search rather than a comprehensive review of all Web of Science or Scopus records.

Articles included in the review were published in peer-reviewed journals within the specified timeframe and made substantial contributions to the research questions. Priority was assigned to articles directly addressing the SSPX, while studies on related topics such as the unity of the Catholic Church, liturgical life, religious freedom, and traditionalist movements were also considered. Dissertations, conference proceedings, opinion magazines, and newspaper articles also served as secondary sources for identifying additional literature but were excluded from the final analytical corpus.

The reviewed literature employed a range of methodologies, including qualitative ethnographic studies, doctrinal-legal analyses, an econometric study, survey research, and interpretive theological scholarship. Given this methodological diversity, data from individual articles could not be synthesized into a single statistical estimate. Instead, data were organized by author, publication date, academic discipline, geographic focus, main argument, supporting evidence, and implications for future SSPX–Holy See relations. Findings were categorized into five themes: historical and legal status, authority and the Council, ritual and institutional persistence, pastoral consequences, and potential scenarios for future reconciliation. Divergent viewpoints among authors on specific issues were maintained rather than combined into an artificial consensus.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Historical Sequence of the SSPX's Excommunication

The Society of Saint Pius X was established in 1970 by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who sought to train candidates for the priesthood using both the traditional Roman liturgy and his interpretation of pre-Vatican II teachings. Tensions emerged between the Society and the Catholic Church hierarchy in the early 1970s. Following several years of increasing dissatisfaction, the Catholic Church revoked its recognition of the Society. Despite this, Archbishop Lefebvre continued to operate the Society as though no disciplinary measures had been imposed. Members of the Society came to believe that preserving traditional forms of worship required rejecting the reforms introduced by the Catholic Church after Vatican II, which they perceived as detrimental to the Church. Ambiguity persists regarding each side's perspective. While Society leaders have repeatedly affirmed support for the pope, they have consistently refused to comply with papal directives. This inconsistency has contributed to divergent interpretations of the situation.

Pope John Paul II declared that Archbishop Lefebvre's unauthorized consecration of four bishops on June 30, 1988, constituted a schismatic act and warned that Catholics who supported this schism by receiving the sacraments or attending liturgies would incur excommunication. However, this declaration did not assert that all Catholics who preferred the pre-Vatican II Roman liturgy were separated from the Catholic Church. The Holy See established procedures allowing Catholics who favored traditional liturgical forms to remain in full communion with the Church. The distinction between preferring traditional liturgy while remaining in communion and participating in unauthorized

episcopal consecrations remains relevant (2026). In January 2009, Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunications imposed on the four bishops consecrated by Archbishop Lefebvre in 1988. The Secretariat of State clarified that lifting the penalty relieved the bishops of disciplinary measures but did not confer canonical status on the SSPX or authorize its ministers to function as legitimate canonical authorities. In a March 2009 letter to the world's bishops, Pope Benedict XVI emphasized the difference between removing a disciplinary penalty and resolving doctrinal disagreements that prevent the SSPX from receiving formal recognition by the Catholic Church. He stated that reconciliation would require more than an act of mercy; it would necessitate formal dialogue regarding the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar magisterium. Therefore, the 2009 decision represented only a partial step toward reconciliation, not a definitive resolution of the differences between the Catholic Church and the SSPX.

Pope Francis' pastoral approach enabled SSPX priests to administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation during the Jubilee of Mercy. This faculty was extended by an Apostolic Letter in 2016, and in 2017 the Holy See issued guidelines permitting SSPX priests to officiate marriage ceremonies under specific circumstances. Pietras (2023) examines the impact of these faculties on the SSPX's canonical status and the Society's continued reliance on supplied or emergency jurisdiction. Although these pastoral measures do not constitute full recognition of the SSPX, they reflect the Church's willingness to provide pastoral care to its members despite the SSPX's irregular canonical status. Mauro (2024) situates Pope Francis' actions within a broader strategy to address resistance to his proposed Church reforms, thereby clarifying the rationale for these concessions. In 2026, the SSPX announced its intention to conduct a second round of episcopal consecrations. In response, the Holy See proposed theological discussions with the SSPX, contingent upon postponement of the consecrations. Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández expressed similar views in May, and Pope Leo XIV requested the cancellation of the ceremonies. Nevertheless, on July 1 at Écône, Bishop de Galarreta served as principal consecrator and Bishop Fellay as co-consecrator for Pascal Schreiber, Michael Goldade, Michel Poinsinet de Sivry, and Marc Hanappier.

On July 2, the DDF announced that all six individuals involved in the ceremony incurred the penalty of latae sententiae excommunication. The DDF referenced Canon 1387, which addresses episcopal consecration without papal authorization, and Canon 1364 § 1, concerning schism, as the legal basis for these penalties. Bishop Fellay received an additional sanction for his participation and was penalized for schism.

In addition to clarifying the implementation of this decision, the DDF stated that SSPX priests are in schism and therefore subject to excommunication. Lay individuals who formally participate in the schism may also incur penalties under a 1996 canonical interpretation. On July 2, 2026, the Holy See declared the SSPX's sacramental ministry illicit and deemed the Society's marriages and confessions invalid. Whether a layperson faces penalties for formal participation depends on whether they meet the criteria for being considered a formal supporter. Mere attendance at liturgical services or preference for certain cultural practices does not necessarily indicate a conscious decision to separate from Church communion. On July 11, 2026, the SSPX announced it had submitted an interim appeal against the decree. On October 13, 2026, the SSPX reported that Rome was still considering the appeal, which temporarily suspended the decree's effectiveness. The duration of this suspension remains uncertain, particularly regarding penalties that automatically apply to individuals who formally participated in the schism. As of October 27, 2026, no official decision has been made regarding the appeal, based on available public documents. Therefore, the current legal status of the SSPX is not a simple repetition of the 1988 situation. Rather, it is shaped by multiple factors, including the July declaration, prior pastoral concessions, individual responsibility, and ongoing administrative processes.

The Perspective of SSPX's Canonical Status

Four principal dimensions define how an individual or entity may be considered 'outside of the Church': validity, legality, canonical recognition, and communion with the Church. Validity concerns whether, for instance, a bishop's consecration was performed according to the required sacramental form; if so, the bishop is genuinely a bishop, even if the act contravened canon law due to insufficient authorization. Legality concerns whether a priest who has been validly ordained has the official authority to perform priestly functions. Canonical recognition refers to whether an organization, such as one that operates schools or seminaries, is officially recognized as Catholic. Communion with the Church relates to the extent to which individuals' public statements, actions, or formal affiliations with schismatic groups

affect their full communion. Therefore, categorizing all such cases as simply 'outside of the Church' oversimplifies the issue and does not account for the distinct canonical norms governing each situation. Pietras (2024) offers a relevant example in his canonical study of the SSPX's commission and other internally generated structures that emerged out of necessity. He found that the Society developed 'alternative power structures' (abstract), enabling members to obtain judicial or administrative decisions outside the traditional diocesan framework. Although these structures allow members to perceive the Society as a legitimate ecclesial entity, they also raise concerns for the Holy See regarding the exercise of authority through unrecognized channels.

The 2026 Note on Sacramental Questions (the Note) will assess the canonical status of SSPX faithful as of July 1, 2026. This distinction, which centers on the timing of entry into the SSPX, is crucial because the canonical effects on lay faithful do not necessarily derive from the actions of the consecrating bishops. Canon law differentiates between the objective nature of an act and the subjective factors of an individual's knowledge, intention, accountability, and concrete actions indicating formal membership in the SSPX. Given the use of the DDF's 1996 interpretive framework, it is appropriate to analyze the factual basis of each dispute individually and to provide both canonical and pastoral responses. No evidence in the record indicates that all individuals who have attended SSPX chapels have been excommunicated; such claims exceed the scope of the official Note. The publication of the 2026 Note on Sacramental Questions introduces a sense of urgency. The 2016 Confession Faculties and the 2017 Marriage Procedures initially provided practical alternatives to safeguard the faithful. However, when the DDF declared SSPX confessions and marriages invalid in July 2026, it shifted its stance on SSPX sacraments from a more open to a more restrictive position. The Society is currently contesting this policy change. This shift has created uncertainty among those seeking reconciliation with the Church, couples preparing for marriage, diocesan priests who must reintegrate individuals returning from the SSPX, and bishops responsible for specific cases. Although Pietras (2023, 2024) has published articles presenting differing perspectives on supplied jurisdiction, academic articles cannot definitively resolve the question of the endurance of SSPX identity despite sanctions.

The Society operates within a broader social context defined by ritual, institutional structures, and moral values. Bargo (2017) demonstrated that the Tridentine Mass represents more than a ritual; it establishes, for participants, what is perceived as an unbroken chain of Catholic history. Attendees of the Tridentine Mass articulate their theological perspectives on tradition through ritualized practices, specialized vocabulary, respect, family life, and participation in an established religious community. Building on this, Bargo (2024) examined how nationalism and gender shape the development of traditionalist Catholic identities in Argentina. Neither Bargo (2017) nor Bargo (2024) claims that all traditionalist Catholics are members of the SSPX; however, both studies illustrate how a clearly defined religious community can persist and expand despite ongoing challenges to its institutional legitimacy. Similar patterns are evident outside Latin America. Ponzo (2021) observes that Italian clergy interpret concepts such as "Catholic unity," "continuity," and "inclusivity" differently when addressing the use of Latin in religious services.

Thomas (2024) found that young adults attending the Tridentine Mass are drawn to its aesthetic, spiritual, and educational aspects. Conversely, Clements and Bullivant (2022) caution against attributing the increase in commitment among young Catholics solely to the departure of less-committed individuals or to the formation of strong organizational bonds. Together, these studies indicate that a preference for traditional worship is not inherently linked to a particular political ideology. Therefore, pastoral evaluations should examine the motivations for attending traditional services rather than presuming that individuals who prefer the Latin Mass necessarily oppose the Second Vatican Council. Piano et al. (2025) present evidence of economic influences, showing a positive correlation between the number of SSPX chapels in a region and the frequency of traditional Mass celebrations through diocesan channels. The authors specifically identify a strong and increasing geographic association between areas with SSPX chapels and locations where Sunday celebrations of the older liturgical form take place.

The authors do not claim that the SSPX is solely responsible for all developments in this area, nor do they suggest that all individuals who celebrate the older form adhere to SSPX theology. Rather, the study demonstrates that decisions about access to liturgical forms are shaped by comparisons with other institutional alternatives. When a diocese limits access to the older form, Catholics may choose to attend Mass elsewhere. Conversely, expanded access to the older form enables Catholics to express

their devotion to traditional liturgy within the official church structure. Beyond legal and cultural factors, the issue is further complicated by debates about the inheritance of liturgy. Kwasniewski et al. (2023) describe the traditional Latin Mass as a transnational, intangible cultural practice and advocate for its preservation. While this view affirms the cultural importance of ritual, it does not address the issue of authority over the ordination of bishops and administration of sacraments.

In contrast, Doyle (2021) examines ecclesial unity issues that led Pope Francis to restrict the celebration of the older Roman liturgy. Regan (2016) argues that liturgical practices gradually shape Christian understanding over time. Reducing these perspectives to binary "pro-tradition" or "anti-tradition" categories oversimplifies the complexities involved. The Holy See may acknowledge the educational value of the older rite while upholding the requirement of full communion with the church. Similarly, the SSPX may respect its heritage while accepting responsibility for its claims to authority.

Addressing the political aspects of this issue requires careful analysis. Ménard and Su (2021) examine the contemporary Catholic Integralist intellectual movement, which challenges liberal views on religious freedom. Caldeira et al. (2021) investigate conservative-traditionalist groups and their debates about Catholic legitimacy in Brazil. Guzek et al. (2023) show how anti-Francis cartoons have reflected radical dissent within traditional Catholicism. Although these studies clarify the ideological context surrounding the SSPX, there is no evidence of a unified political identity among its members. It is important to distinguish between making broad generalizations about the SSPX, which may impede reform, and presenting traditionalism positively while overlooking the effects of anti-conciliar teaching on pluralism and interfaith dialogue.

Doctrinal Barriers to Reconciliation

In 2009, Benedict XVI stated that the authority of the Second Vatican Council could not be addressed solely through disciplinary measures. He clarified that lifting the excommunications would not resolve the SSPX's theological status. This clarification remains relevant following the release of the 2026 decree. The teachings of the Second Vatican Council on religious freedom, the nature of the church, ecumenical relations, and other non-Christian religions are considered integral components of the papal magisterium rather than optional theological opinions. The SSPX argues that several conciliar statements contradict previously established authoritative teachings. Therefore, the central dispute concerns the criteria for demonstrating continuity in Catholic doctrine and the authority required to define them.

The 2026 decree indicates that various methodologies are available to assess the level of consensus necessary for conciliar documents. This finding suggests that doctrinal reconciliation does not require unanimous agreement with all prior Church decisions, but it does necessitate recognition of the Church's inherent teaching authority. A formal agreement will be ineffective without consensus on essential terms. Both parties must continue to assert their institutional rights. Pietras (2024) analyzes the internal judicial processes of the SSPX and concludes that normalization depends on resolving several critical issues, such as the selection of bishops, clergy assignments, tribunal operations, seminary oversight, disciplinary administration, and relationships with diocesan bishops. It is necessary to ensure that clergy and lay members have access to the sacraments and can function normally. Conversely, diocesan bishops must be assured that a newly normalized group will not function as an unaccountable parallel jurisdiction.

Vatican Initiatives Following the 2026 Decree

Vatican has established its legal sanction on the SSPX. That sanction could be a proper way for the Holy See to continue enforcing it until reconciliation is determined. This strategy has been regarded as a consistent decision since the Vatican’s last ethical sanction was issued in the July decree. The Vatican, in essence, has realized that the unauthorized ordinations threaten the stability of Catholic communion under the Vatican’s Roman Catholic Church tradition. This sanction, of course, will bring another consequence for individuals who join the schismatics, which also incur penalties. Concurrently, the Holy See emphasizes the importance of visible sacramental unity under the Pope.

Facing the last situation, the Vatican's decision will definitely present significant implementation challenges. According to Bargo (2017, 2024) and Piano et al. (2025), no guarantee that enforcing sanctions will lead to the dissolution of these institutions, diminish the need for continued ritual practices, or prevent the recruitment of new members. Therefore, while the continued enforcement

of sanctions may help preserve Rome's public image, it may also contribute to the long-term establishment of a distinct religious community. A second alternative involves engaging in conditional doctrinal dialogue while canonical sanctions remain in effect or are under appeal. This approach has set a negative precedent, as Rome engaged in dialogue with the SSPX before its regularization during the 2009-2026 period. For any new dialogue process, the Society (refers to SSPX) would be required to submit written statements on religious freedom, ecumenism, liturgical reform, and the scope of magisterial authority. Additionally, the Society must also formally acknowledge the Pope's authority to confirm bishops and reach agreement with Rome on the definition of reconciliation for the six bishops, clergy, and laity. Although such dialogue does not retroactively legitimize the consecrations, it provides opportunities to enforce discipline and advance the goal of uniting the two groups.

A third potential option involves implementing a pastoral separation. In this scenario, the Holy See would establish guidelines specifying when individuals may return to full communion with the Church and provide direction for resolving disputes concerning the administration of the sacraments. Both this and the previous approach are consistent with the DDF's July note, which indicated that such guidelines would be developed by the Holy See's representatives and local bishops. This strategy recognizes the legal status of each individual's formal relationship with the Church and avoids prematurely assuming that a worshipper intends to leave the Church. It would also enable bishops to support Catholics who wish to worship according to the traditional liturgy while remaining in communion with the Roman Pontiff. In this context, distinguishing between a preference for the traditional liturgy and schismatic behavior would have direct and practical pastoral implications. A fourth, and considerably more complex, option is the eventual regularization of the SSPX's canonical status. Achieving canonical regularization would require mutual agreement on doctrinal interpretations and a willingness to relinquish certain authorities.

Before the 2026 split, several institutional frameworks were considered, but no definitive decisions were reached. Any resolution of the conflict between Rome and the SSPX must be based on mutually agreed terms. Rome will not recognize an alternative source of episcopal jurisdiction. Simultaneously, the SSPX must find a way to preserve its spiritual and liturgical traditions and relinquish its right to contest papal decisions. Any credible agreement must include enforceable provisions and cannot rely solely on rhetoric or goodwill. Multiple scenarios exist regarding the potential evolution of the conflict. As of October 2026, the SSPX's public appeal remains under review, and its implications are under discussion. Possible outcomes include a competent authority issuing a decision on the appeal, the DDF clarifying the application of the July note, or initiating a new form of dialogue with the SSPX. Regardless of subsequent developments, the legal status of the next phase will be affected. Although historical precedents and scenarios are documented in the literature, it is not possible to predict with certainty the course of action Pope Leo XIV will take. Any resolution will likely require extensive doctrinal discussions, affirmation of papal authority, establishment of a clear legal framework for sacramental administration, and provision of individualized pastoral care. Given the shared foundation of faith in Jesus Christ, none of these elements can be overlooked.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies several promising avenues for future research. Canonists may examine the application of automatic penalties to SSPX members who continue to worship in SSPX chapels for extended periods following the July 2026 decree, the criteria for "formal" adherence to the decree, and the accountability of SSPX members for actions taken after its issuance. Researchers may also investigate whether the restrictions imposed after the July 2026 decree influence the number of SSPX members who transition from SSPX chapels to diocesan parishes. Addressing these questions will require access to reliable and longitudinal data.

Ethnographic studies also could provide valuable insights into how clergy and laity in various countries (such as France, Switzerland, Argentina, Brazil, and the United States) perceive and experience these conflicts. Comparative ecclesiology may further clarify how different Catholic organizations attempt to reconcile acceptance of Vatican II with the continuity of historical doctrine. A significant limitation of this study is the restricted scope of data analyzed. Although some reviewed journal articles represent diverse countries and disciplines, only a minority are reviewed and provide detailed accounts of the July 2026 events. Many official statements regarding these events are currently contested by the SSPX and remain under investigation. Additionally, this study did not include

interviews with SSPX members or diocesan personnel, examination of diocesan records, surveys of SSPX members, or independent canonical decisions. Therefore, this paper offers a future analysis based on an evidence-based, interdisciplinary assessment of the alternatives available to the Church and potential courses of action, rather than a definitive legal opinion or empirical prediction of individual behavior.

The Catholic Church's response to the SSPX in July 2026 was consistent with the core principles of Catholic governance. Specifically, conducting an Episcopal Consecration without a Papal Mandate, especially in defiance of a direct papal order, undermines the visible unity of the Episcopacy. As a result, the DDF excommunicated six SSPX Bishops and clarified the consequences for SSPX priests and laity officially deemed in schism. It is crucial to interpret these declarations accurately. They address issues of jurisdiction, authority, and communion, but do not claim that SSPX members have abandoned their faith in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, these declarations do not equate the use of traditional liturgy with schismatic behavior.

The enduring nature of the conflict is recognized across several academic disciplines. Canonical literature identifies divergent perspectives regarding authority and jurisdiction. Sociological and ethnographic studies reveal that both groups maintain a shared liturgical tradition, collective memories, familial relationships, and access to local religious services. Theological examinations of unresolved issues from the Second Vatican Council, including religious freedom and interfaith dialogue, further clarify the ongoing dispute. Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunication in 2009, while Pope Francis introduced specific pastoral accommodations, suggesting that sanctions may be accompanied by selective concessions.

Nevertheless, neither action has resolved the doctrinal differences between the two groups. It is therefore probable that the Vatican will implement a combination of strict canonical oversight, conditional theological dialogue, and focused pastoral care. For the SSPX to attain official recognition, consensus between the SSPX and the Vatican on magisterial authority and episcopal appointments is required. Until such consensus is achieved, procedures for addressing individual cases and unresolved sacramental matters will continue. As the SSPX's 2026 appeal remained unresolved at the conclusion of this research, future developments remain unpredictable. This case illustrates that reconciliation within the Church requires not only a unified governance structure and doctrinal agreement but also a shared Christian faith. Whether these elements will be integrated in a way that maintains Catholic unity and addresses the pastoral needs of all parties remains uncertain.

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