

Bishop Apologizes to Pope but Does Not Retract Holocaust Denial

By Francis X. Rocca

Religion News Service

Saturday, January 31, 2009; A10

VATICAN CITY, Jan. 30 -- A Holocaust-denying bishop who was readmitted to the Catholic Church apologized Friday to Pope Benedict XVI for the "unnecessary distress and problems" caused by his "imprudent remarks."

Bishop Richard Williamson, one of four leaders of the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X whose 1988 excommunications were lifted by the pope Jan. 21, posted the statement on his personal blog.

Jewish groups have voiced outrage that Williamson recently told Swedish television that "historical evidence is hugely against 6 million Jews having been deliberately gassed in gas chambers as a deliberate policy of Adolf Hitler." On Thursday, Israel's chief rabbinate, the country's highest Jewish body, severed ties with the Vatican.

In an apparent response to the controversy, Benedict on Wednesday condemned the Nazi genocide of "millions of Jews" and expressed his "full and indisputable solidarity" with the Jewish people.

The pope has not, however, explicitly condemned Williamson's remarks.

Williamson's apology came in the form of a letter, dated Jan. 28, to Cardinal Dario Castrillón Hoyos, head of the Vatican office that deals with the Society of St. Pius X and other traditionalist groups disaffected by church reforms stemming from the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

"Amidst this tremendous media storm stirred up by imprudent remarks of mine on Swedish television, I beg of you to accept . . . my sincere regrets for having caused to yourself and to the Holy Father so much unnecessary distress and problems," Williamson wrote.

The bishop also expressed gratitude for Benedict's cancellation of his excommunication and promised to "offer a Mass" for the pope and Castrillón.

In an introductory comment for readers of his blog, Williamson suggested that critics had exploited his remarks merely to attack Benedict.

"Last week's media uproar" was "surely aimed rather at the Holy Father than at a relatively insignificant bishop," he wrote.

Williamson also hinted that his apology was not a retraction of his inflammatory historical statements but a gesture of deference to the pope.

Introducing the letter to Castrillón, Williamson noted that the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, founder of the Society of St. Pius X, "gave his Society the example of never so cleaving to God's Truth as to abandon respect for the men holding God's Authority."

Also Friday, an Israeli government official said that the Jewish state maintains good relations with the Vatican despite the controversy over Williamson, the Associated Press reported.

Israel's ambassador to the Holy See, Mordechai Lewy, said that "the climate is good" and that there is "a lot of potential for cooperation" between the Vatican and Israel.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/30/AR2009013003431_pf.html