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Holocaust-denying bishop found guilty

Kevin Eckstrom Religion News Service | Apr. 20, 2010

The schismatic bishop who deeply angered Jews and embarrassed the Vatican by publicly denying the Holocaust was ordered to pay a $13,500 fine for violating a German law that makes it a crime to deny the Holocaust.

Judge Karin Frahm in the Bavarian city of Regensburg issued her ruling April 16, according to The Associated Press, after relying on written statements when Bishop Richard Williamson declined to appear in court.

Williamson, a member of the breakaway Society of St. Pius X (SSPX), had told Swedish television in a 2008 interview that ?no more than 300,000 Jews perished in Nazi concentration camps ... not one of them by gassing in a gas chamber.?

Pope Benedict XVI, before Williamson's comments surfaced early last year, lifted the 1988 excommunication of Williamson and three other bishops in a move aimed at forging reconciliation with the breakaway SSPX.

Benedict later said he did not know about Williamson's views on the Holocaust, but conceded that ?closely following the news available on the Internet would have made it possible to obtain knowledge of the problem in time.?

Last year, during a visit to Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, Benedict spoke out against Holocaust denial, saying the ?suffering? of the 6 million Jews who died in the Holocaust must ?never be denied, belittled or forgotten.?

Williamson had already been fined 12,000 euros last year, but his appeal triggered the trial in Frahm's courtroom. Frahm lowered the fine to 10,000 euros because at the time of the interview, Williamson did not know his remarks would be broadcast in Germany, according to the AP.

The SSPX was founded by founded by the late Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and is the largest and most vocal group of ultra-traditionalist Catholics who reject the modernizing reforms ushered in by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

Last year the Vatican launched ongoing talks with members of SSPX, even as members remain deeply resistant the liturgical and interfaith reforms of the council. One of the readmitted bishops, Alfonso de Galarreta, has said the two sides ?have several years of discussions ahead of us.?

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