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Holocaust-denying bishop apologizes to pope

by Dennis Coday

VATICAN CITY -- A Holocaust-denying bishop who was readmitted to the Catholic Church apologized Friday (Jan. 30) 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 (SSPX) whose 1988 excommunications were lifted by the pope on 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."

In an apparent response to the controversy, Benedict on Wednesday (Jan. 28) 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 Jan. 28 letter to Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, who heads a Vatican office that deals with SSPX and other traditionalist groups disaffected by church reforms rooted in 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 Cardinal Castrillon.

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 simply a gesture of deference to Benedict.

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

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