Anglican archbishop apologizes for comments about Irish abuse crisis

LONDON – The archbishop of Canterbury apologized April 3 for comments he made about the credibility of the Catholic Church in the wake of the clergy sexual abuse scandal in Ireland.

Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams, the leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion, told the BBC in an interview that he telephoned Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin to apologize for any hurt he had caused by his comments in an earlier interview.

In a prerecorded interview for BBC Radio 4's "Start the Week" program, Archbishop Williams that the Catholic Church in Ireland had "lost all credibility" because of the abuse scandal.

"I was speaking to an Irish friend recently who was saying that it's quite difficult in some parts of Ireland to go down the street wearing a clerical collar now. And an institution so deeply bound into the life of a society suddenly becoming, suddenly losing all credibility – that's not just a problem for the church, it is a problem for everybody in Ireland," Archbishop Williams said in the interview.

The archbishop's comments were publicized when the program was previewed by British media April 2.

Catholic Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin later told journalists he was "stunned" by the remarks which, he said, would be "immensely disheartening" for Irish Catholics and would "challenge their faith even further."

The Anglican archbishop drew sharp rebukes from within his own church as well as from Catholic leaders after the comments became public.

Archbishop Martin said he had "rarely felt personally so discouraged" as when he awoke to hear Archbishop Williams' comments.

Referring to Irish Catholics struggling to come to terms with the crisis, Archbishop Martin said, "Archbishop Williams' comments will be for them immensely disheartening and will challenge their faith even further.

"Those working for renewal in the Catholic Church in Ireland did not need this comment on this Easter weekend and do not deserve it," Archbishop Martin added.