

# **USCCB president calls bishop's Holocaust remarks 'offensive,' 'false'**

WASHINGTON - Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, labeled as "deeply offensive and utterly false" remarks denying the Holocaust made by a formerly schismatic bishop whose excommunication was lifted in January by Pope Benedict XVI.

"No Catholic, whether layperson, priest or bishop, can ever negate the memory of the Shoah, just as no Catholic should ever tolerate expressions of anti-Semitism and religious bigotry," Cardinal George said in a Feb. 3 statement.

British-born Bishop Richard Williamson, one of four bishops whose illicit ordination in 1988 by French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre prompted their automatic excommunication, provoked Jewish protests worldwide with assertions that the Holocaust was exaggerated and that no Jews died in Nazi gas chambers.

The assertions were made in a television interview recorded in November and aired the day the pope lifted the excommunications of all four bishops.

In calling the remarks "deeply offensive and utterly false," Cardinal George said, "Bishop Williamson has denied historical facts about the Shoah, in which 6 million Jews were cruelly annihilated, innocent victims of blind racial and religious hatred. These comments have evoked understandable outrage from within the Jewish community and also from among our own Catholic people."

Bishop Williamson later apologized for creating the controversy, but did not retract his assertions.

Pope Benedict condemned the Holocaust denials in remarks issued Jan. 30, but did not directly address Bishop Williamson's role in the controversy.

On Feb. 3 a Vatican spokesman said the pope, in past and recent statements, had

clearly distanced himself from comments by the bishop.

German Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews, said in a Jan. 26 interview with the Italian daily La Repubblica that Bishop Williamson's contentions were "foolish," adding, "Such gibberish is unacceptable."

Cardinal George called Pope Benedict's lifting of the excommunication incurred by Bishop Williamson and three other bishops of the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X "an act of mercy" on the pontiff's part.

But he added, "If these bishops are to exercise their ministry as true teachers and pastors of the Catholic Church, they, like all Catholic bishops, will have to give their assent to all that the church professes, including the teachings of the Second Vatican Council."

In the past, the Society of St. Pius X has not accepted the liturgical reforms of Vatican II and its concepts of religious freedom and ecumenism.