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Bishop loses appeal over Holocaust remarks

Niels Sorrells Religion News Service | Jul. 12, 2011

BERLIN -- A schismatic British bishop who said he didn?t believe the Holocaust claimed 6 million Jews faces a reduced fine of 6,500 euros ($9,110) for incitement, a German appeals court ruled Monday (July 11).

The fine levied against Bishop Richard Williamson is less than both the 12,000 euros prosecutors had demanded and the 10,000 euros he was fined in an initial 2010 court case.

Still, Monday?s failed appeal is nonetheless a blow for the defense team, who had insisted that Williamson, 71, should be spared because he did not know the comments he made in Germany to a Swedish film crew would be available in Germany, where Holocaust denial is a crime.

?The accused knew about the possible consequences,? stated Chief Judge Birgit Eisvogel of the Regensburg Provincial Court, noting that Williamson himself had noted during the interview that his statements were illegal in Germany and punishable, according to Spiegel magazine.

Williamson?s attendance in court was not required and he did not appear. His legal team immediately told reporters that they would file an appeal.

According to the German Press Agency dpa, there are two more German courts that could consider appeals before Williamson?s lawyers will have exhausted their legal options.

At issue is Williamson?s 2008 interview in Germany in which he stated that

?no more than 300,000 Jews perished in Nazi concentration camps ... not one of them by gassing in a gas chamber.?

A video of the Swedish interview eventually became viewable on German websites, and prosecutors quickly moved to charge Williamson with Holocaust denial.

The case is especially embarrassing for the Vatican after Pope Benedict XVI lifted the 1988 excommunication of Williamson and three other priests aligned with the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) just as the scandal broke. The Vatican has insisted that it was unaware of Williamson?s Holocaust views at the time.

SSPX generally rejects the modernizing reforms of the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s, and Benedict lifted the excommunications in a bid to normalize relations with the schismatic SSPX.

During the trial, Williamson?s defense team argued that the bishop could not be held responsible for what others had posted online. But his case was not helped when SSPX representatives told the court that the bishop had a history of being out of touch with reality.

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