

Controversial bishop threatened with ouster over neo-Nazi lawyer

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) A Holocaust-denying bishop whose readmission to the Roman Catholic Church provoked an international outcry last year now faces expulsion from his ultra-traditionalist group for hiring a lawyer with neo-Nazi ties.

Bishop Richard Williamson was one of four bishops in the Society of Saint Pius X whose 1988 excommunications were lifted by Pope Benedict XVI in January 2009, as part of the pope's effort to reconcile with the schismatic group.

Jewish organizations were outraged after Williamson told a television interviewer that no more than 300,000 Jews "perished in Nazi concentration camps ... not one of them by gassing in a gas chamber."

Benedict subsequently condemned Holocaust denial several times, most forcefully in remarks at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in May 2009. In a new book-length interview to be published on Wednesday (Nov. 24), the pope says he would not have lifted Williamson's excommunication had he known about his history of Holocaust denial.

Williamson is scheduled to appear in a German court next week to appeal a 10,000 euro fine for violating German laws against denying the Nazi genocide. According to a statement posted on a SSPX website, Williamson recently retained a lawyer who's linked to the German

neo-Nazi movement to represent him at the hearing.

SSPX leader Bishop Bernard Fellay has ordered Williamson to "rethink this decision and not allow himself to be exploited by political ideas totally foreign to the mission of a Catholic bishop," the statement said, noting that disobedience would lead to "exclusion" from the Society.