

Vatican crisis means popes can't 'rule as kings' say campaigner

By Luigi Sandri Rome, 13 March (ENI)--The governance structure of the Vatican needs to change as a result of weaknesses exposed by the controversy over the lifting of the excommunication of a prelate who had denied that Jews died in Nazi gas chambers, says a movement campaigning for reform in the Roman Catholic Church.

"The problem is not the person of the Pope, we have respect for him. The problem is the present structure of the papacy," Vittorio Bellavite, the spokesperson in Italy of the We are Church movement told Ecumenical News International on 13 March. **"If the popes - like Paul VI, John Paul II and now Benedict XVI - continue to rule the Roman church as 'kings', without any true collegiality, the troubles inside Catholicism will increase every day".**

Bellavite was speaking the day after the Vatican published a letter by Pope Benedict XVI in which the pontiff apologised for "mistakes" in the way the Vatican lifted the excommunication of four bishops from the Society of St Pius X (SSPX). The SSPX is a group which rejected church reforms introduced in the mid-1960s by the Second Vatican Council.

British-born Richard Williamson, one of the four bishops, had been shown in a Swedish television interview making his comments about the Holocaust shortly before the official publication by the Vatican of the announcement about the excommunications.

"The Second Vatican Council, 50 years ago, set out the main principles of episcopal collegiality, but until now the popes continue to rule the Church as absolute monarchs. And this is against the Gospel and against history," stated Bellavite.

In a 13 March editorial, the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano noted critically that the text of the papal letter acknowledging mistakes appeared to have been leaked from within the Vatican to Italian news outlets a day before its official publication.

The Rome-base newspaper La Repubblica newspaper portrayed the Vatican as in a state of crisis. Editorialising, it wrote, "There is a curia out of control, a pope shut in his palace and obliged to face a hurricane that L'Osservatore Romano describes as being without example in recent times ... Four years after his election, Benedict XVI is facing a crucial crisis in his pontificate."

It continued, "There is something that is faltering in the management of the Curia. Benedict is alone. In his solitary government the Pope does not practise consultation and does not pay attention to signals coming from outside."

Quoting an unnamed Vatican official, La Repubblica wrote: "Joseph Ratzinger [Pope Benedict]" is a theologian, not a man of government. He spends a half the day attending to the problems of the Church, and the other half concentrated on his second book dedicated to Jesus."

Another possible root of the current crisis, according to the newspaper, is that many people in the Roman Curia does not accept the work of Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone who, although having no experience of Vatican diplomacy, was chosen by the Pope in 2006 to be the Vatican's secretary of state. Bertone is a long-standing colleague of Pope Benedict, having been secretary of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the

Faith, from 1995 to 2002, when Cardinal Ratzinger was its head.

Il Messaggero, the largest circulation newspaper in Rome, questioned why the pontiff had not changed the Vatican prelates "so inefficient and inexperienced" who had made him appear to be a denier of the Holocaust by lifting the excommunication of Williamson.

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