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# Mormon church apologizes for posthumous baptism of Jews

By Mary Slosson

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LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - The Mormon church apologized on Tuesday for the posthumous baptism by its members of the parents of famed Nazi hunter and Holocaust survivor Simon Wiesenthal.

The posthumous baptisms were performed in Mormon churches in Utah, Arizona, and Idaho, according to the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish human rights organization named after the man who hunted down more than 1,000 Nazi war criminals including Adolf Eichmann in the years following the Holocaust.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, in its written apology, suggested that the action was the work of one member who they said has since been disciplined.

“We sincerely regret that the actions of an individual member of the Church led to the inappropriate submission of these names,” Michael Purdy, a spokesman for the Church, said in a statement e-mailed to Reuters.

“The policy of the Church is that members can request these baptisms only for their own ancestors. Proxy baptisms of Holocaust victims are strictly prohibited,” he added.

Wiesenthal’s mother Rosa died at the Belzec concentration camp in Poland in 1942. His father, Asher Wiesenthal, died during the First World War.

The apology by the Mormon church came on the same day that Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel called on Republican presidential candidate and prominent Mormon Mitt Romney to address the issue after Wiesel’s own Holocaust victim parents were similarly baptized by the Mormon church.

“A heartfelt apology is certainly appropriate, but it rings hollow if it keeps happening again and again,” Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Center told Reuters.

Cooper participated in high-level meetings between Jews and Mormon officials since 1995 in an effort to halt such posthumous baptisms.

Simon Wiesenthal died of natural causes in 1995. Cooper, who knew Wiesenthal for 30 years, said he would have been deeply hurt by the actions of the Mormon churches that the Church of Latter Day Saints seems unable to control.

“He revered his mother. She raised him. He was unsuccessful in saving her during the Second World War,” Cooper said. “If Simon Wiesenthal was alive today, he would be in deep pain.”

Cooper called the actions “unacceptable,” saying that people who lost everyone and everything and were murdered for being Jewish during the Holocaust should not have their souls hijacked by another religion.

Editing by Dan Whitcomb and Greg McCune

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