

Ambushing Pope Francis: The Accusations of Cardinal Viganò

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“Now that the corruption has reached the very top of the Church’s hierarchy, my conscience dictates that I reveal those truths.” – Cardinal Carlo Maria Viganò, Aug 25, 2018

It could be called the apology drive, a journey of institutional contrition. Pope Francis’ Ireland trip has seeped with remarks of forgiveness, seeking understanding from those who found themselves victims of child abuse within the Catholic Church.

“We apologise,” [he told](#) a church service attended by some hundred thousand at Dublin’s Phoenix Park, “for some members of the hierarchy who did not take care of these painful situations and kept silent.” He “wished to put these crimes before the mercy of the Lord and ask forgiveness for them.”

The Vatican, however, is sibilant with the calls of vipers, and the efforts being made within the organisation to out and implicate Pope Francis as a hypocrite in the business of targeting child abuse found form in Saturday’s note of condemnation by Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò. Viganò had cut his teeth as the Vatican’s ambassador to Washington, and has never warmed to Francis, an official [he accused](#) of nursing a “pro-gay ideology” receptive to homosexual clerics.

On Saturday, the [National Catholic Register](#), amongst other sites, ran news of testimony purportedly written by the aggrieved Cardinal. The flashpoint here was the case of former Cardinal and retired archbishop of Washington, D.C. Theodore McCarrick, who now stands as a gruesome personification of institutional climbing and abuse in authority.

In his strident note, Viganò alleges that the Vatican was made privy to sexual misconduct allegations of the then Archbishop McCarrick sometime back in 2000. Memoranda demanding action on conduct towards minors and seminarians were ignored; actions were delayed by Secretaries of State Cardinals Angelo Sodano and Tarcisio Bertone.

This is where Viganò places himself in the picture of concern and worry, claiming that he had been the emissary responsible for passing on the material to the Vatican, not to mention his own insistence that McCarrick be removed from the ministry. The unmistakable point he wishes to leave us is that of a thoughtful official who was ahead of the game. A cynical reading of this could be that some hand washing is taking place.

Consider the observation about efforts to keep the matter of abuse an internal affair, rather

than charging off to the fourth estate to spill the beans.

“I had always believed and hoped that the hierarchy of the Church would find within itself the spiritual resources and strength to tell the whole truth, to amend and to renew itself. That is why, even though I had repeatedly been asked to do so, I always avoided making statements to the media, even when it would have been my right to do so, in order to defend myself against the calumnies published about me, even by high-ranking prelates of the Roman Curia.”

A decade later, Pope Benedict XVI sanctioned the cardinal, leading Viganò to claim that the previous Pope had “imposed on Cardinal McCarrick sanctions similar to those now imposed on him by Pope Francis”. Church punishments, it would seem, can be recyclable.

The note, in a sense, seems to be an effort to outdo the Pope, a call to bring in, not merely brooms but a whole set of cleansing apparatuses.

“To restore beauty of holiness to the face of the Bride of Christ, which is terribly disfigured by so many abominable crimes, and if we truly want to free the Church from the fetid swamp into which she has fallen, we must have the courage to tear down the culture of secrecy and publicly confess the truth we have kept hidden.”

It is also an effort to catch Francis out, a bureaucrat’s trick to identify inaction and faulty paperwork.

“He knew from at least June 23, 2013 that McCarrick was a serial predator”. Despite such knowledge, “he covered for him to the bitter end” permitting him to become nothing less than a “kingmaker for appointments in the Curia and the United States, and the most listened to advisor in the Vatican for relations with the Obama administration.” Only when “forced by the report of abuse of a minor, again on the basis of media attention” did Francis take “action [regarding McCarrick] to save his image in the media.”

The Pope has been reticent and mild-mannered about the whole thing, though one senses that any effort to combat such remarks would be equivalent to taking a mop to sea.

“I read the statement this morning. I read it and I will say sincerely that I must say this, to you [the reporter] and all of you who are interested: read the document carefully and judge for yourselves.”

Viganò’s accusations are typical of a corporate conspiracy where the corrupt expose the corrupt, and the guilty attempt catharsis. While critical of the Pope’s own methods, he was very happy [to quash an inquiry](#) into claims made against Archbishop John Nienstedt, former head of the Archdiocese of Minneapolis-St. Paul, that he mishandled claims of sexual abuse. Nienstedt’s redeeming feature was his ardent advocacy against same-sex marriage.

No one is spared in the accusatory rounds (other than those he is sympathetic to and remain, therefore, unmentioned); there are no “angels”, and anyone in power and positions of accountability are marked by the scathing remarks of Viganò. Acknowledge your

mistakes, he demands of Francis, and abandon all hope for a proper reckoning in office; “set a good example to cardinals and bishops who covered by McCarrick’s abuses and resign along with them.”

Viganò has appropriated the very weapons he accuses Francis of using, but the Pope remains the institution amongst the faithful as much as the man. Behind the scenes, the factions continue to plot and sharpen what tools they have available. The call for “transparency and truth” delivered by the “good shepherds” one can trust is all well and good, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that officials in Viganò’s shoes are simply preparing for a change of man rather than a change of attitude.

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