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Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò in Washington, D.C., in 2016 (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)



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The Italian archbishop who alleged a widespread cover-up of allegations against now ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick claims the Vatican's fiery response to his accusations only proved their veracity.

In a new "testimony" released on his behalf by a right-wing Italian journalist Oct. 19, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò also reiterates his assertion that he informed Pope Francis about McCarrick in 2013, without providing any documentary evidence of such an encounter.

Viganò, who served as the Vatican's ambassador to the U.S. from 2011 to 2016, launches as well an extended diatribe against alleged homosexuality in the Catholic priesthood, calling it "the principle cause" of the clergy abuse crisis.

The former diplomat is responding to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, who in an Oct. 7 letter called Viganò's accusations nothing more than a "political frame job." Ouellet is the prefect of the Vatican's powerful Congregation for Bishops.

"Cardinal Ouellet admits the important assertions that I made and make, and contests assertions that I do not make and never made," states Viganò in his latest document, referencing Ouellet's revelation that McCarrick had been under Vatican instruction to refrain from public activity as early as 2011.

Viganò had alleged in his first document — released Aug. 26 as Pope Francis was visiting Ireland — that Pope Benedict XVI had imposed "sanctions" on McCarrick sometime in 2009 or 2010.

"Cardinal Ouellet contests that it is false to present the measures taken against McCarrick as 'sanctions' imposed by Pope Benedict and lifted by Pope Francis," Viganò states in the latest document.

"True," the archbishop says. "They were not technically 'sanctions,' they were precautionary measures, or 'conditions and restrictions.'

"Discussing if they were sanctions or precautionary measures or otherwise is pure legalism," he continues. "Under the pastoral profile, they are exactly the same thing."

McCarrick, aged 88, served as archbishop of Washington, D.C., from 2000 to 2006. The Vatican ordered him out of ministry in June after an allegation of sexual abuse was found "credible and substantiated." In July, he became the first U.S. prelate to resign from the College of Cardinals.

In his Oct. 7 response to Viganò, Ouellet said McCarrick had been told in 2011 to lead "a life of discretion, prayer and penitence" because of "rumors about his behavior in the past." Ouellet said the request did not rise to the level of a "mandated obligation" because "there was not then sufficient proof of [McCarrick's] alleged guilt."

In his new letter, Viganò disputes that claim, saying: "The Holy See knew of a multiplicity of concrete facts and was in possession of demonstrated documents, and, despite that, the persons responsible preferred not to intervene or were prevented from doing so."

The former ambassador does not provide any new evidence to indicate the Vatican knew of McCarrick's abuse of minors. He cites unspecified allegations he says were sent to Rome by victims in Newark and Metuchen, New Jersey, and also news reporting on a letter sent to the Vatican embassy in Washington by Fr. Boniface Ramsey in 2000.

Viganò met with Francis briefly June 21, 2013, on the sidelines of a meeting with dozens of papal diplomats.

In his letter, Ouellet expressed doubt that the ambassador would have had time during that quick exchange, a portion of which was filmed by the Vatican television service, to inform the pontiff about McCarrick.

But in his new document, Viganò restates a claim he made in his original Aug. 26 testimony that he had later had a private meeting with Francis on June 23, 2013.

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"I met Pope Francis in private audience in his apartment for some clarifications, and the pope asked me: 'How is Cardinal McCarrick?'" states Viganò, calling the question: "Words that I can only interpret as a false curiosity to discover if I was an ally of McCarrick.

"I told him the McCarrick had sexually corrupted generations of priests and seminarians, and that Pope Benedict had ordered him to dedicate himself wholly to a life of prayer and penance," Viganò states.

"McCarrick continued, however, to enjoy a special consideration on the part of Pope Francis," he claims.

Ouellet's response to Viganò was unusually forceful. The cardinal told the former ambassador at different times that his claims were "incredible and absurd," "aberrant," "a very painful wound" on the church, and "unjust and unjustified."

The cardinal also called on the archbishop to reconcile with the church, telling him to "come out of hiding, repent of your revolt and return to better feelings towards the Holy Father."

In his latest document, Viganò says Ouellet offered a "dramatic silence" on "the role of homosexuality in the corruption of the priesthood and of the hierarchy."

"This very grave crisis cannot be confronted and resolved correctly as long as we do not call things by their true names," states Viganò. "It is not an exaggeration to say that homosexuality has become a scourge in the clergy and that it can be annihilated only with spiritual weapons."

Several scientific studies have concluded that there is no link between homosexuality and clergy abuse. The 2011 John Jay Report, for example, cited instead a perversion of power and authority. The study was a deep investigation of the causes and context of clergy sex abuse and was commissioned by the U.S. bishops.

In a shift from his Aug. 26 document, Viganò does not again call for Francis' resignation from the papacy. He says he prays for Francis every day — "more than I ever did for other popes."

The former ambassador's document was released on the blog of Marco Tosatti, a right-wing Italian journalist who has boasted of his efforts in helping Viganò draft his original testimony. Its release came on the seventh anniversary of the Vatican's announcement of the diplomat's appointment to Washington.

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