Opinion
Vatican



Auxiliary Bishop Athanasius Schneider of Astana, Kazakhstan, second from left, and U.S. Cardinal Raymond Burke, second from right, and other clergy participate in the sixth annual March for Life in Rome May 8, 2016. (CNS/Paul Haring)



by Michael Sean Winters

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Next month will be the second anniversary of the infamous "testimony" of former nuncio Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, published first at the EWTN-owned National Catholic Register. It was obviously the work of a profoundly disturbed person, all the settling scores, spewing accusations hither and yon, demonstrating that he, and he alone, was virtuous. He even called upon Pope Francis to resign! The timing — at the end of Francis' visit to Ireland — was designed to gain maximum exposure.

At a press conference on the plane back to Rome, Francis chose not to engage the charges Viganò had leveled. "I will not say a single word on this," the pope said about Viganò's screed. "I think this statement speaks for itself, and you have the sufficient journalistic capacity to draw conclusions."



Screenshot of Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò on EWTN's "The World Over" (NCR screenshot)

Very oddly, given the fact that Viganò had violated canon law by revealing information he acquired under the pontifical secret and because, well, it is truly *brutta figura* to ask the pope to resign, several U.S. bishops came out with statements in the subsequent days in which they attested to Viganò's integrity, and not to that of Francis. There was schism in the air. I will let the readers draw their

own conclusions from the fact that when I Googled "bishops who support Viganò" the first item is found at CatholicVote.org, the organization working to reelect President Donald Trump, who famously received a letter from Viganò. Oliver Stone: Call your office!

In the intervening years, Viganò has issued more testimonies, each one further revealing his vengeful motives. This past April, he got going about the Third Secret of Fatima with predictably bonkers results. He began attacking Vatican II, prompting Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence, Rhode Island, who is no liberal, to tweet: "If Vatican II was so harmful, why did it take +Viganò 55 years to say so? He exercised his priestly and episcopal ministry, and crafted a rather prominent ecclesiastical career in the Vatican II Church without complaint."

Tweet from @ThomasJTobin1 July 15, 2020

We can now, two years later, render a verdict. Francis was right: Don't get into a pissing match with a skunk.

Now, at long last, most conservatives have come to view Viganò as a liability, not an asset, and they are throwing him under the bus. In his blog "Settimo Cielo," Sandro Magister, the conservative Vaticanista, took on Viganò last week over the archbishop's criticisms of the Second Vatican Council. Magister is not exactly friendly to Francis, but he saw Viganò's wholesale rejection of Vatican II as beyond the pale. "If this rejection by Viganò of the whole of Vatican Council II is not a schismatic act, it is undoubtedly on the brink," Magister wrote. "But who among the bishops and cardinals will want to follow him? Probably no one."

Actually, Bishop Athanasius Schneider, auxiliary bishop in Kazakhstan, might follow Viganò as Magister goes on to demonstrate. Schneider has also called for corrections in certain documents of Vatican II, specifically those that can be seen as the texts that corrected the Syllabus of Errors: *Dignitatis humanae* and *Nostra aetate*. These were the texts that caused Archbishop Michel Lefebvre to go into schism, and they continue to cause consternation for those who are dipping their toes into the schismatic waters. (For more on this issue, see my two-part review of Jesuit Fr. Jared Wicks' book *Investigating Vatican II* here and here.) Magister cites a letter written by Cardinal Walter Brandmüller — a church historian by training and one of the four cardinals who had signed the "dubia" challenging Francis on the issue of Communion for divorced and remarried Catholics — disputing Schneider and exposing his errors.

Magister also wonders why Cardinal Gerhard Müller, ex-prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has sat on the sidelines in the debate about Vatican II. When you are a conservative and one of the dubia cardinals criticizes you, it is time to recalibrate.

Advertisement



Screenshot of Robert Royal, Raymond Arroyo and Fr. Gerald Murray on EWTN's "The World Over" (NCR screenshot)

Schneider may be the only bishop to stick with Viganò publicly. And LifeSiteNews will forever see him as a hero. There will always be a fringe element in the church. What is worrisome is when someone tries to mainstream the fringe. Leave it to Raymond Arroyo of EWTN to continue to uncritically wave the Viganò flag. Just last Thursday, one of his guests, Robert Royal, referred to the fact that it has been almost two years since the "Viganò revelations about McCarrick" (See minute 21:25 in the video). The show's producers helpfully put a photo of the disgraced archbishop on the screen. Neither Arroyo nor his other guest, Fr. Gerald Murray, said anything to clarify that "Viganò's revelations" were fantastic lies and lying fantasies with barely a veneer of veracity. Even Oliver Stone knew he could not switch the location of JFK's assassination from Dallas to Denver.

It is an awful thing to look at another human being and speculate about whether they are mentally disturbed or simply evil, but Viganò's behavior has invited the question. It is time for those bishops who testified to his integrity to speak up now

and distance themselves from him, and to do so as publicly as they once attested to his character. "Not so, not so, Master Secretary. The maxim is 'Qui tacet consentire': The maxim of the law is 'Silence gives consent,' " Sir Thomas More says to Thomas Cromwell in the play "A Man for All Seasons." Who stands with Viganò still? And who with Pope Francis?

[Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.]

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