News
Vatican



Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas, and other U.S. bishops from Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas concelebrate Mass Jan. 21, 2020, at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. The bishops were making their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican to report on the status of their dioceses to the pope and Vatican officials. (CNS/Paul Haring)



by Christopher White

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The Catholic bishop of Tyler, Texas, a vocal opponent of Pope Francis, has invited the pontiff to fire him.

In a new interview, Bishop Joseph Strickland characterized the long delay of the release of the Vatican's report on former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick as "evil" and said that "if I get fired for saying that, for not being politically correct, go ahead and fire me."

Strickland also accused both the Vatican and the United States of having a "deep state," saying the papacy lacks clarity and Pope Francis' recent comments in support of civil unions for same sex-couples are "confusing and very dangerous."

"The church is weak. The church is not clear," he told radio host Cy Kellett on Oct. 21.

"We were relying on the papacy to be this beacon of clarity and stability, and it just doesn't feel clear and stable anymore," Kellet said to Strickland during a webinar on "Forming the Catholic Conscience in a World of Confusion," sponsored by the multimedia organization Catholic Answers.

"Sadly, I have to support that," Strickland replied.

His remarks came on the same day in which Francis reaffirmed his long-standing support for civil unions, which Strickland dismissed as mere opinion.

"A pope could have had opinions contrary to the deposit of faith 500 years ago," he said, suggesting that the widespread availability of new media and developed forms of communications has altered the way papal pronouncements are received around the world.

"What's getting broadcast around the world is Pope Francis' opinion on this, and I think that is confusing and very dangerous," adding "there are evil forces that would love to destroy the Catholic Church."

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Strickland, who is 61 years old and was made a bishop in 2012, is among the most vocally partisan members of the U.S. hierarchy. In September, he endorsed a viral video made by a Wisconsin priest who claimed "you cannot be Catholic and be a Democrat." In 2018, when the now disgraced former papal nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, accused Francis of mishandling abuse and called for his resignation, within 24 hours Strickland deemed Viganò's charges to be credible and asked that his statement be distributed at all Masses in his diocese.

During the hourlong webinar, he recalled meeting with Pope Francis this past January during his ad limina visits at the Vatican with other bishops from Texas, Arkansas and Oklahoma, which he described as "very pleasant, but I'd have to say too pleasant."

"The world is falling apart and Pope Francis was very cordial, very welcoming, but like I said, I mean, when a leg has been severed and we're bleeding out, I don't think we really need cordial and welcoming. We need something more," he said on Wednesday evening.

"I certainly don't put it all on Pope Francis. The machine of the Vatican, there is evil there. There is darkness in the Vatican. I mean, that's very clear," said the Texas bishop.



Pope Francis greets Bishop Joseph E. Strickland of Tyler, Texas, during a meeting with U.S. bishops from Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas during their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican Jan. 20, 2020. Bishop Strickland said he asked Pope Francis about the Vatican investigation into Theodore E. McCarrick and the release of a promised report on how the former cardinal managed to rise through the church ranks. (CNS/Vatican Media)

The bishop, who is well known for all-caps Twitter diatribes against the Democratic Party, the evils of abortion and against gay marriage, seemed to indicate that the evil that he believes has permeated much of the government also permeates the church.

"Ultimately, it's just documented fact that there is a deep state in the United States," he told the 2,000 registered viewers for the webinar. "There is a lot of manipulation of the truth by the media, by the government, by people with money. I think that's pretty well documented and sadly, it's the same with the church.

He also said that in the same way there are "cafeteria Catholics" who are "picking and choosing" elements of Catholic teaching to support, he said that many bishops are doing the same.

"There are bishops that are clearly teaching contrary to what Catholic teaching is," adding that they are "playing fast and loose with what God has revealed to us."

> "All this synodality is garbage as far as I'm concerned. It just is not living the truth."
> —Bishop Joseph Strickland

While Pope Francis has made strides to elevate the process of synodality, a longstanding church practice emphasizing the collaboration of local bishop conferences and local churches in communion with the global church, Strickland offered a stark criticism of it.

Strickland said that "very little good news" came from the Vatican's 2018 Synod of Bishops on young people and that "All this synodality is garbage as far as I'm concerned."

"It just is not living the truth," he said.

Strickland was especially critical of the current German "synodal path," in which the church has vowed to have an open discussion on matters related to women's ordination, gay marriage and more. Strickland revealed that he had written a letter to the archbishops in Germany warning that they must protect the "deposit of faith."

"They probably never even read my letter," he surmised, warning that the bishops are responsible for "confusion" and leading Catholics to believe that "same-sex marriage is fine, the gender issues are fine, all the agenda of LGBT are fine."

"Germany is in trouble as a church," warned the American bishop.

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