

# Archbishop calls on Pope to resign over cover-up of sexual abuse

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In a vitriolic 11-page letter released over the weekend, Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano alleged that Pope Francis was responsible for covering up allegations of sexual abuse by former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and issued an unprecedented call for the pope to resign. McCarrick was removed as archbishop of Washington D.C. in June over claims that he assaulted a teenage altar boy while a parish priest 40 years ago.

The explosive contents of Vigano's letter will only intensify the deep crisis in the Roman Catholic Church over the widespread sexual abuse of minors by priests over decades around the world and the ongoing systematic cover-up of these crimes by the church hierarchy. According to the letter, Pope Francis, who was installed in the top post in 2013 in a desperate bid to give the church a more compassionate and caring face, along with a long list of top church officials, was complicit in this criminal conspiracy.

Pope Francis has just completed a visit to Ireland where he performed what has become a standard, dishonest ritual: meeting privately with a select group of sexual abuse victims and asking for "forgiveness" as he presided over a mass on Sunday. On the same day, however, thousands of people protested against the papal visit in centre of Dublin with slogans such as "the Pope is protecting paedophiles" and "Hey Pope Francis you're outta chances."

The author and abuse victim Colm O'Gorman, who organised the protest, told reporters that the pope had apologised and met survivors but evaded Vatican responsibility for crimes and cover-ups. "I think [his visit] has made it worse," he said.

Under siege over allegations of sexual abuse by Catholic priests in a number of countries, Pope Francis wrote a papal letter to all Catholics last week asked

them all to help end "this culture of death" and vowing that there would be no more cover-ups. His response to Vigano's letter will only further undermine his standing and that of the Catholic Church. Speaking on his return flight from Dublin to Rome, he dismissed the document, declaring he would "not say a word" about its claims and simply telling reporters "judge it for yourselves."

Vigano's letter is certainly a bitter, subjective document that highlights the backbiting and intense factional feuding inside the Catholic Church that reaches to the very top of the hierarchy. Vigano, who served as papal nuncio or Vatican ambassador to the United States from 2011 to 2016, belongs to the so-called conservative wing that has been deeply critical of the "liberal" Pope Francis. He makes no attempt to conceal his homophobia and deep-seated hostility to any attempt to ease the church's reactionary injunctions against homosexuality.

The letter itself was clearly timed to embarrass Pope Francis while he was visiting Ireland and signalled the start of a public campaign to undermine and remove him. It was published simultaneously by Catholic conservative mouthpieces and was immediately followed by supportive statements from fellow conservatives. Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas declared that Vigano's allegations were credible and instructed that the statement be distributed at all church services and through social media.

There is absolutely nothing progressive in any of the factions of the Roman Catholic Church—a wealthy, powerful institution of the ruling classes that has been a bulwark of political reaction down through the centuries. Pope Francis, who postures as a friend of the poor and hypocritically comments on social inequality, was notorious as former Archbishop of Buenos Aires

Jorge Bergoglio for his collaboration with the murderous Argentinian military junta and its crimes between 1976 and 1983.

While Pope Francis continues to make empty gestures toward the many thousands of young victims of sexual abuse at the hands of priests and bishops, he has steadfastly refused to make any formal admission of responsibility on the part of the Catholic Church. Such a statement would open the way for legal suits and demands for sizeable compensation payments.

Vigano's posturing as the moral guardian of the Catholic Church is likewise riddled with hypocrisy. The letter is clearly targeted at Pope Francis and his "liberal" allies but in doing so Vigano traces a history of cover-up and deceit concerning allegations of sexual abuse that, by his account, stretches back until at least 2000. Vigano claims that his letters to Rome and those of two of his predecessors concerning "Archbishop McCarrick's gravely immoral behaviour" were ignored by the Vatican.

Vigano's chief accusation against Pope Francis was that he lifted the secret sanctions imposed on McCarrick by the previous Pope Benedict, which banned him from travel, celebrating mass and public meetings, and obligating him to follow "a life of prayer and penance." Vigano pointedly exonerates the conservative Benedict and apparently believes that it is legitimate to sweep allegations of sexual abuse under the carpet by issuing a secret papal injunction.

Nor does Vigano try to explain why, given that he has known about the accusations for more than a decade, he has remained silent and only chooses to make the allegations public now. In reality, the entire institution is responsible for the systematic cover-up in defence of the wealth and tattered prestige of the church. The pope's refusal to "say a word" about Vigano's accusations is symptomatic of the stance of the institution as a whole—stonewalling in the hope the repercussions of its crimes will simply go away.

The determination of the Catholic Church to cover-up wholesale crimes of sexual abuse is a warning that there is no line it will not cross. Pope Francis's collaboration with the Argentine junta and its murder of an estimated 30,000 workers, students, intellectuals and others is matched by the church's backing for Franco's fascist dictatorship in Spain and its cooperation with the Nazi regime in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s.

As the political establishment lurches towards authoritarian rule in country and after country around the world, the Catholic Church will not be found on the side of the poor and oppressed but rather backing the wealthy elites and their governments in the vicious suppression of working people.



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