

Ex-Vatican diplomat calls on 'sinful' Pope Francis to resign over sex abuse scandal



A protestor holds up a sign in reference to the sex abuse scandal within the Catholic Church as Pope Francis travels through the city in the Popemobile on Aug. 25, 2018, in Dublin, Ireland.

(Photo: Charles McQuillan, Getty Images)

Pope Francis should resign for his “sinful conduct” in covering up sexual abuse allegations against Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, a retired Vatican diplomat says.

Francis had recently become pope in 2013 when he asked Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò his thoughts on McCarrick, Viganò says in a damning, 11-page open letter published Sunday.

“I don’t know if you know Cardinal McCarrick, but there is a dossier this thick about him,” Viganò said he told the pope in 2013. “He corrupted generations of seminarians and priests.”

Viganò, who was serving as the Vatican’s ambassador to the U.S., told Francis that his predecessor, Pope Benedict, had ordered McCarrick to leave the seminary where he was living and withdraw to a life of prayer and penance.

Viganò, 77, was a hard-line conservative pillar at the Vatican before retiring in 2016. He said Francis dropped the sanctions against McCarrick, a well-known liberal by church standards, and “continued to cover for him.” McCarrick resigned last month amid claims of sexual abuse of an altar boy and seminarians.

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The Vatican had no immediate comment on Viganò’s claims but has said the pope acted quickly once he learned that McCarrick was facing credible claims. Francis addressed the global sexual abuse scandal Saturday in a speech in Ireland, where outrage over abuses there have overwhelmed coverage of the pope’s visit.

“The failure of ... bishops, religious superiors, priests and others to adequately address these repugnant crimes has rightly given rise to outrage and remains a source of pain and shame for the Catholic community,” the pope said. “I myself share these sentiments.”

John Thavis, a former Catholic News Service reporter and author of *The Vatican Diaries*, says Viganò’s letter doesn’t explain how McCarrick was able to continue

his high-profile work in the church at the end of Benedict's reign if he had truly been admonished by the former pope. He noted that Viganò's source on Benedict's actions against McCarrick were based on second-hand information.

Thavis also noted that Viganò "blindsided" Francis two years ago when, during the pope's U.S. visit, Viganò set up a controversial meeting between the pope and a court clerk in Kentucky who had refused to issue marriage licenses to gay couples.

"The tone of the letter and its content resemble a political hit piece on the pope," Thavis said. "Sadly, the sex abuse crisis is being used as political leverage by some factions in the church."

Father Jame Bretzke, a theology professor at Marquette University, noted that conservatives such as Viganò found their influence diminished when Francis became pope.

"While Viganò was not explicitly fired, he very clearly was 'replaced' and he has long been known as a fierce opponent of Pope Francis," Bretzke said.

That said, the letter calls for a detailed response from the pope, Thavis said.

"I know of no other instance in modern times where a (former) high-ranking church official has publicly called on the pope to resign," Thavis said.

Viganò wrote that too many people have been "deeply scandalized by the abominable and sacrilegious behavior of the former Archbishop of Washington, Theodore McCarrick; by the grave, disconcerting and sinful conduct of Pope Francis" and by many pastors who remained silent.

"Pope Francis must be the first to set a good example to cardinals and bishops who covered up McCarrick's abuses and resign along with all of them," Viganò wrote.

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