



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

7th October 2018

**OPEN LETTER FROM THE PREFECT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR
BISHOPS, CARDINAL MARC OUELLET, ON THE RECENT ACCUSATIONS
AGAINST THE HOLY SEE**

Dear brother Carlo Maria Viganò,

In your last message to the press, in which you make accusations against Pope Francis and against the Roman Curia, you invite me to tell the truth about certain facts that you interpret as signs of an endemic corruption that has infiltrated the hierarchy of the Church up to its highest levels. With pontifical permission, and in my capacity as Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, I offer my testimony about matters concerning the Archbishop emeritus of Washington, Theodore McCarrick, and his presumed links to Pope Francis, matters that are at the center of your public accusations and your demand that the Holy Father resign. I write my testimony based on my personal contacts and on documents in the archives of the Congregation, currently the object of study to clarify this sad case.

Out of consideration for the good, collaborative relation we had when you were Apostolic Nuncio in Washington, allow me to say, in all honesty, that I find your current attitude incomprehensible and extremely troubling, not only because of the confusion it sows among the People of God, but because your public accusations gravely harm the reputation of the bishops, successors of the Apostles. I recall a time when I enjoyed your esteem and your trust, but now I see that I have been stripped in your eyes of the respect that was accorded to me, for the only reason I have remained faithful to the Holy Father's guidance in exercising the service he has entrusted to me in the Church. Is not communion with the Successor of Peter an expression of our obedience to Christ who chose him and sustains him with his grace? My interpretation of *Amoris Laetitia*, which you criticize, is grounded in this fidelity to the living tradition, which Francis has given us another example of by recently modifying the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the question of the death penalty.

Let us address the facts. You said that on June 23, 2013, you provided Pope Francis with information about McCarrick in an audience he granted to you, as he also did for many pontifical representatives with whom he met for the first time that day. I can only imagine the amount of verbal and written information that was provided to the Holy Father on that occasion about so many persons and situations. I strongly doubt that the Pope had such interest in McCarrick, as you would like us to believe, given the fact that by then he was an 82-year-old Archbishop emeritus who had been without a role for seven years. Moreover, the written instructions given to you by the Congregation for Bishops at the beginning of your mission in 2001 did not say anything about McCarrick, except for what I mentioned to you verbally about his situation as Bishop emeritus and certain conditions and restrictions that he had to follow on account of some rumors about his past conduct.

From 30th June 2010, when I became Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, I never presented in audience the McCarrick case to Pope Benedict XVI or to Pope Francis – not until recently, after his dismissal from the College of Cardinals. The former Cardinal, retired in May of 2006, had been requested not to travel or to make public appearances, in order to avoid new rumors about him. It is false, therefore, to present those measures as “sanctions” formally imposed by Pope Benedict XVI and then invalidated by Pope Francis. After a review of the archives, I find that there are no documents signed by either Pope in this regard, and there are no audience notes from my predecessor, Cardinal Giovanni-Battista Re, imposing on the retired Archbishop the obligation to lead a quiet and private life with the weight normally reserved to canonical penalties. **The reason is that back then, unlike today, there was not sufficient proof of his alleged culpability.** Thus, the Congregation’s decision was inspired by prudence, and the letters from my predecessor and my own letters urged him, first through the Apostolic Nuncio Pietro Sambi and then through you, to lead a life of prayer and penance, for his own good and for the good of the Church. His case would have deserved new disciplinary measures if the Nunciature in Washington, or any other source, had provided us recent and definitive information about his behavior. I am of the opinion that, out of respect for the victims and given the need for justice, the inquiry currently underway in the United States and in the Roman Curia should provide a comprehensive and critical study of the procedures and the circumstances of this painful case in order to prevent something like it from ever happening in the future.

How is it possible that this man of the Church, whose incoherence has now been revealed, was promoted many times, and was nominated to such a high position as Archbishop of Washington and Cardinal? I am personally very surprised, and I recognize that there were failures in the selection procedures implemented in his case. However, and without entering here into details, **it must be understood that the decisions taken by the Supreme Pontiff are based on the information available to him at the time and that they are the object of a prudential judgment which is not infallible.** I think it is unjust to reach the conclusion that there is corruption on the part of the persons entrusted with this previous discernment process, even though in the particular case some of the concerns that were raised by testimonies should have been examined more closely. The Archbishop also knew how to cleverly defend himself from those concerns raised about him. Furthermore, the fact that there could be in the Vatican persons who practice or support sexual behavior that is contrary to the values of the Gospel, does not authorize us to make generalizations or to declare unworthy and complicit this or that individual, including the Holy Father himself. Should not ministers of the truth avoid above all calumny and defamation?

Dear pontifical representative emeritus, I tell you frankly that to accuse Pope Francis of having covered-up knowingly the case of an alleged sexual predator and, therefore, of being an accomplice to the corruption that afflicts the Church, to the point that he could no longer continue to carry out his reform as the first shepherd of the Church, appears to me from all viewpoints unbelievable and without any foundation. I cannot understand how could you have allowed yourself to be convinced of this monstrous and unsubstantiated accusation. Francis had nothing to do with McCarrick’s promotions to New York, Metuchen, Newark and Washington. He stripped him of his Cardinal’s dignity as soon as there was a credible accusation of abuse of a minor. For a Pope who does not hide the trust that he places in certain prelates, I never heard him refer to this so called great advisor for the pontificate for episcopal appointments in the United States. I can only surmise that some of those prelates are not of your preference or the preference of your friends who support your interpretation of matters. I think it is abhorrent, however, for you to use the clamorous sexual abuse scandal in the United States to inflict an unmerited and unheard of a blow to the moral authority of your superior, the Supreme Pontiff.

I have the privilege of having long meetings with Pope Francis every week to discuss the appointment of bishops and the problems that affect their governance. I know very well how he treats persons and problems: with great charity, mercy, attentiveness and seriousness, as you too have experienced. I think it is too sarcastic, even blasphemous, how you end your last message, purportedly appealing to spirituality while mocking the Holy Father and casting doubt about his faith. That cannot come from the Spirit of God.

Dear brother, how much I wish that I could help you return to communion with him who is the visible guarantor of communion in the Catholic Church. I understand that deceptions and sufferings have marked your path in the service to the Holy See, but you should not finish your priestly life involved in an open and scandalous rebellion that inflicts a very painful wound to the Bride of Christ, whom you pretend to serve better, while causing further division and confusion among the People of God. How could I answer your call except by saying: stop living clandestinely, repent of your rebelliousness, and come back to better feelings towards the Holy Father, instead of fostering hostility against him. How can you celebrate Mass and mention his name in the Eucharistic Prayer? How can you pray the Holy Rosary, or pray to Saint Michael the Archangel, or to the Mother of God, while condemning the one Our Lady protects and accompanies every day in his burdensome and courageous mission?

If the Pope was not a man of prayer; if he was attached to money; if he favored riches to the detriment of the poor; if he did not demonstrate a tireless energy to welcome all miseries and to address them through the generous comfort of his words and actions; if he did not seek to implement all possible means to announce and to communicate the joy of the Gospel to all in the Church and beyond her visible horizons; if he did not lend a hand to the families, to the abandoned elderly, to the sick in body and soul and, above all, to the youth in their search for happiness; one could prefer someone else, according to you, with a different political or diplomatic approach. But I cannot call into question his personal integrity, his consecration to the mission and, above all, the charisma and peace he enjoys through the grace of God and the strength of the Risen One.

Dear Viganò, in response to your unjust and unjustified attack, I can only conclude that the accusation is a political plot that lacks any real basis that could incriminate the Pope and that profoundly harms the communion of the Church. May God allow a prompt reparation of this flagrant injustice so that Pope Francis can continue to be recognized for who he is: a true shepherd, a resolute and compassionate father, a prophetic grace for the Church and for the world. May the Holy Father carry on, full of confidence and joy, the missionary reform he has begun, comforted by the prayers of the people of God and the renewed solidarity of the whole Church, together with Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary!

Marc Cardinal Ouellet
Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops,

Feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, October 7th 2018.
