



Pope Francis meets with Fr. Antonio Spadaro, SJ.

OPINION | CATHOLIC CHURCH Thu Aug 10, 2017 - 11:35 am EST

## Vatican hostility against faithful Catholics deepens our internal schism

August 10, 2017 (LifeSiteNews) – As a psychiatrist, the recent false accusations from Rome against faithful Catholics reminds me of couples preparing to divorce.

False accusations of hostility, divisiveness and hatred occur not infrequently in marriages with high levels of conflict and with impending separation or divorce. When of an extremely severe nature, such anger can lead to demonizing a spouse in an effort to undermine the trust of the children in that spouse and to obtain their loyalty instead. This pathological behavior is referred to as parental alienation and is clearly psychologically damaging to Catholic youth, spouses and families.

Spouses who make false accusations against a husband or wife frequently have serious lifelong psychological conflicts often with excessive anger, a compulsive need to control and intense selfishness with an inflated sense of self. The goal of the accusations is primarily to control the spouse and children, as well as to gain custody of the children through divorce litigation. The origins of these actions are often from unconsciously modeling their presence in a parent or from giving into the pull of selfishness in the culture.

I have specialized in treating excessive anger for over 40 years, and have co-authored two books on the topic for APA Books (see here). A challenging aspect of my professional life has been offering expert testimony in regard to allegations of excessive anger against a spouse in divorce litigation and in annulment procedures.

Given this experience, I was deeply concerned by two recent articles in publications approved by the Vatican that levelled accusations of hostility, hatred and divisiveness against faithful Catholics.

The first, by Fr. Antonio Spadaro and Marcelo Figuero in the Jesuit-edited journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*, focused on Americans. And the second, by Fr. Giulio Cirignano in the weekend edition of *L'Osservatore Romano*, focused on bishops and priests.

Spadaro and Figuero level numerous accusations against Americans including:

- “An ‘ecumenism of hate’ exists between American Catholics and Evangelicals for their defense of the unborn from the horrors of abortion and their defense of marriage”;
- Opposition to the legalization of abortion and gay marriage represents “the nostalgic dream of a theocratic type of state”
- Reference to efforts at Muslim immigration restriction in both America and Europe as a “narrative of fear.”

A week after the publication of the essay by Spadaro and Figuero, in the weekend edition of *L’Osservatore Romano*, Fr. Cirignano claimed in an essay, “Habit is Not Faithfulness: The Conversion asked for by Pope Francis,” that the Holy Father’s agenda for the Church is being put at risk because:

“The main obstacle that stands in the way of the conversion that Pope Francis wants to bring to the Church is constituted, in some measure, by the attitude of a good part of the clergy, at levels high and low ... an attitude, at times, of closure if not hostility,” and “The clergy is holding the people back, who should instead be accompanied in this extraordinary moment.

“When the priest is too marked by a religious mentality, and too little by a limpid faith, then everything becomes more complicated,” Cirignano wrote. “He risks remaining the victim of many things invented by man about God and his will. “God”, according to Cirignano, “doesn’t tolerate being enclosed in rigid schemes typical of the human mind.” Immediately after describing unenlightened priests, he wrote, “Deep down, the Sanhedrin was always faithful to itself, rich in devout obedience to the past, mistaken for faithfulness to tradition and poor in prophecy.”

As with such accusations in marriage, it is important to attempt to evaluate these extraordinarily unusual claims, which most Bishops, priests and laity have never seen before from the Vatican. Regarding their credibility, it essential to examine responses to the accusations. I will cite only several of the numerous reactions that allege the accusations are odd, false, unprecedented and even irrational.

Archbishop Charles Chaput responded:

So it’s an especially odd kind of surprise when believers are attacked by their co-religionists merely for fighting for what their Churches have always held to be true.

Robert Royal wrote:

Taking this as the heart of the Evangelical-Catholic alliance is so delusional that a Catholic must feel embarrassed that a journal supposedly reviewed and authorized by the Vatican would run such slanderous nonsense.

Austin Ruse wrote in *Crisis*, "The True Ecumenism Spadaro and Figueroa Missed":

Their essay can only be described as an attack against my friends and me and in my own pro-life and pro-family work at the UN, I work extremely closely with Evangelicals and other faiths, too, because we see a greater danger to ourselves than we see coming from each other. We see a war against God’s creation and all God’s children and must work together to protect his creation.

In *Catholic World Report*, Sam Gregg responded,

“Nevertheless, the development of such views should be informed by careful reflection, a command of detail, and an accurate understanding of the history and development of a country. Regrettably, these are lacking in the Spadaro-Figueroa article — and it shows. The greatest damage, however, is to the Holy See’s credibility as a serious contributor to international affairs. And that benefits no one, least of all Pope Francis.”

Ross Douthat in *The New York Times* on August 3, wrote:

... in his (Pope Francis) advisers' essay, in their evident paranoia about what the Americans are up to, you see a different spirit: a fear of novelty and disruption, and a desire for a church that's primarily a steward of social peace, a mild and ecumenical presence, a moderate pillar of the establishment in a stable and permanently liberal age.

Fr. Mark Pilon's response at The Catholic Thing to Cirigano's accusations against Bishops and priests in *L'Osservatore Romano* was:

In my lifetime, I've never witnessed this kind of hostility coming from the papal office toward those who are meant to be co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord. This has become a frequent refrain in the pope's own comments, i.e., that many clergy are rigid, closed, and hostile when it comes to his innovative teaching and practice. Only the manipulations of the Synod on the Family and its results made it possible for these innovations such as reception of communion by those divorced without annulments to make their way into the pope's exhortation."

The weight of the evidence indicates that the major accusations in these two recent articles against Americans and Bishops and priests are false.

In my professional opinion, the authors demonstrate no small degree of difficulty with excessive anger and a need to control and thereby in thinking that distorts their perception of reality and just judgment of other people whom they imagine as being inspired by ignorance or dark motives. Such accusations, as in Catholic marriage and family life, are profoundly harmful both psychologically and spiritually. Let us hope and pray that excessive anger from the Vatican diminishes, that respectful dialogue increases and that such accusations cease, for the good of the Church.

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