

BLOGS



Reflections on Archbishop Viganò's Courageous Third Letter

In thin-skinned times such as these, Archbishop Viganò's most recent

letter shines forth as a clarion call to Catholics everywhere.

By Msgr. Charles Pope – Posted 10/22/18 at 12:00 AM

As I finished reading [Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò's third letter](#), I had an immediate sense that I had just read something that is destined to be one of the great pastoral and literary moments of the Church's history. There was an air of greatness about it that I cannot fully describe. I was stunned at its soteriological quality — at its stirring and yet stark reminder of our own judgment day. In effect he reminded us that this is more than a quibble over terminology or who wins on this or that point, or who is respectful enough of whom. This is about the salvation of souls, including our own. We almost never hear bishops or priests speak like this today!

Others will write adequately on the canonical, ecclesial and political aspects of Archbishop Viganò latest and very concise summary of the case. As most of you know, I have fully affirmed elsewhere that I find his allegations credible and that they should be fully investigated. But in this post I want to explore further the priestly qualities manifest in this third letter, qualities that are too often missing in action today.

To begin with, he has in mind the moral condition of souls. The Archbishop warns in several places of the danger posed to the souls of the faithful by the silence and confusing actions of many bishops and priests and the Pope. He laments that this, along with the homosexual subculture in the Church, “continues to wreak great harm in the Church — harm to so many innocent souls, to young priestly vocations, and to the faithful at large.”

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, this was the first concern of most every priest: the

moral condition of souls, including his own. Today, many bishops and priests, as well as many parents and other leaders in the Church, seem far more concerned with the feelings, and emotional happiness of those under their care than with their actual moral condition. They worry more about political correctness and not upsetting those who engage in identity politics and base their whole identity on aberrant and sinful habits and disordered inclinations. That a person be pleased and affirmed today is seemingly more important than that they be summoned to repentance and healing or be made ready for their judgment day. Passing and apparent happiness eclipses true and eternal happiness. Further, silence in the face of horrible sin and deferring to and fawning over powerful Churchmen and cultural leaders of this world seems to outweigh any concern for the harm caused to the souls and lives of others.

Yes, too often, the only thing that really matters, the salvation of souls, is hardly considered. As others have rightly pointed out, this points to a loss of faith and a bland universalism wherein all, or the vast majority, attain to Heaven. Further, the possibility of Hell is all but dismissed — almost never preached, let alone considered a factor in how we should pastorally guide people.

In all of this, Archbishop Viganò still has that “old-time religion.” He takes seriously Jesus’ admonitions regarding Judgment Day, his many warnings about Hell and the absolute need to decide whom we will serve: God or the world, the Gospel or popular culture, the flesh or the spirit. Viganò’s final two paragraphs could not be clearer:

You can choose to withdraw from the battle, to prop up the conspiracy of silence and avert your eyes from the spreading of corruption. You can make excuses, compromises and justification that put off the day of reckoning. You can console yourselves with the falsehood and the delusion that it will be easier to tell the truth tomorrow, and then the following day, and so on.

On the other hand, you can choose to speak. You can trust Him who told us, “the truth will set you free.” I do not say it will be easy to decide between silence and speaking. I urge you to consider which choice — on your deathbed, and then before the just Judge — you will not regret having made.

This is powerful. I could be reading St. John Chrysostom, Pope St. Gregory the Great or St. Alphonsus Liguori. Honestly, I cannot recall many times I have heard a modern bishop or even priest speak like this. There are exceptions of course, such as the great Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, but clarity is rare. I hope too that some of the deacons, priests and bishops who might read this are saying, “I too am an exception. I often preach like this.”

But my general experience tells me, from many who write to me, that their priests and

bishops never mention mortal sin, hell or judgment. And if they do preach on sin they use abstractions and generalities, euphemisms and other safe terms such as “injustice” and “woundedness.”

In this letter Archbishop Viganò writes as if he never got the memo to obfuscate and speak in cloaked and guarded ways; to speak in such hazy terms that no one really has any idea what you are saying.

Instead the Archbishop comes right out and says,

[T]his very grave crisis cannot be properly addressed and resolved unless and until we call things by their true names. This is a crisis due to the scourge of homosexuality, in its agents, in its motives, in its resistance to reform. It is no exaggeration to say that homosexuality has become a plague in the clergy, and it can only be eradicated with spiritual weapons. It is an enormous hypocrisy to condemn the abuse, claim to weep for the victims, and yet refuse to denounce the root cause of so much sexual abuse: homosexuality. It is hypocrisy to refuse to acknowledge that this scourge is due to a serious crisis in the spiritual life of the clergy and to fail to take the steps necessary to remedy it. ... The evidence for homosexual collusion, with its deep roots that are so difficult to eradicate, is overwhelming. ... To claim the crisis itself to be clericalism is pure sophistry.

Here too there have been very few bishops or priest willing to speak so clearly and to depart from euphemisms. There are exceptions, but they are too few. And, for a bonus round, the good archbishop even reintroduces an older term that has fallen out of use:

Unquestionably there exist philandering clergy, and unquestionably they too damage their own souls, the souls of those whom they corrupt, and the Church at large.

A philanderer is a man who exploits women, a “womanizer.” He is one who, in an often-casual way, exploits a woman, but has little or no intention of marrying her. He will exploit her for his needs but not consider her as a person deserving of his ultimate respect and loyalty in marriage. Sadly this too exists in the priesthood, but on a far more limited basis. Whatever the number or percentage of philanderers — one is too many — the much larger number of homosexual offenses (80 percent) in clergy sexual delicts shouts for attention. But few, very few bishops or Vatican officials are willing to talk openly and clearly about it. This must change if any solutions are to be credible and trust is to be restored with God’s people. Excluding any reference to active homosexuality in the priesthood is like excluding any talk about cigarette smoking as a cause for lung cancer. It results in a pointless and laughable discussion that no one can take seriously. Will any other bishops follow the lead of Archbishop Viganò and a few others, such as Bishop Robert Morlino? It remains to be seen, but credibility remains in the balance.

Finally, Archbishop Viganò, in a Pauline sort of way, has taken up the necessary mantle of opposing Peter's (i.e., Pope Francis') behavior to his face and publicly. While some wonder why this is not done privately, the answer must surely be, "How could he approach Pope Francis privately?" Pope Francis has steadfastly refused to engage his questioners. He has taken up a policy of "weaponized ambiguity" and when legitimate questions are asked, they are greeted with silence. Far from answering his flock, he often refers to them as monsters, accusers, scandalmongers and worse when they press for clarity and seek for answers and accountability.

How rare it is that other bishops are willing to speak out so clearly of their concerns. Only four cardinals issued the dubia. Why is this? Where are the rest? Only in recent weeks has the Pope even hinted that there may be an allowable investigation of the Vatican Archives. One must still ask: When? How? And to what extent? It will take a courageous insistence on the part of the faithful and bishops to see this through.

In the end, I am deeply grateful for Archbishop Viganò's dose of "old-time religion." It is refreshing to hear an archbishop actually call sin by name; to show concern for the moral condition of souls, not just the emotional state; to warn of judgment and summon us all to decide — not just hide, obfuscate and fret about "getting along" while souls are being lost. It is hopeful that an archbishop of high reputation is willing to call the Pope and the Vatican to account. This sort of leadership is too little in evidence today among the hierarchy and priests.

Some will surely bristle at the Archbishop's "strong language." But I ask you, is it really so different from [the way the Lord Jesus spoke](#)? Perhaps the bristling is more emblematic of our dainty and thin-skinned times — times marked by identity politics, cries of victimization, and every form of shock and outrage over the slightest reproach.

In my estimation this letter of Archbishop Viganò will go down in history as one of the great moments of pastoral exhortation and integrity. It will shine forth as a clarion call in an age of timid silence from too many other prelates and priests. May the Archbishop's courage inspire many more to come forth and respectfully but clearly insist on answers and honesty. May his warning on our Judgement Day be salutary. May repentance, renewal and courage be growing realities in God's Church!

Old Time Religion - arr. by Moses Hogan



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