

DISSIDENTS TARGET BISHOP DEWANE

Dissident lay Catholics in Southwest Florida, along with some priests, have declared war on Bishop Frank Dewane. He is the Bishop of Venice and is by all accounts a loyal son of the Church. Which is why they are out to get him. The pattern is a familiar one—we've seen it played out across the nation, especially in the Midwest: Dewane is drawing the ire of Catholic malcontents, and ex-Catholics, because of his orthodoxy. His critics are largely drawn from the ranks of the elderly, and are overrepresented by ex-priests and ex-nuns.

Although the latest assault on Bishop Dewane is the most vicious, he first incurred the wrath of dissidents in 2010 when he temporarily removed a popular priest from ministry. Two years later, this same priest was found guilty of violating his "fiduciary responsibilities to the Parish, his priestly promise to celibacy, and his promise of obedience to his Ordinary." He was laicized in October 2012.

In 2011, after a Catholic high school teacher was fired, he filed a lawsuit claiming he was terminated after he blew the whistle on a priest who allegedly asked sexual questions of students during Confession. The case was properly thrown out by a judge.

The current war on Bishop Dewane started in January when ten priests wrote a letter to the Apostolic Nuncio accusing the bishop of governing by "intimidation, the use of fear, shaming, bullying and other non-Christian behaviors." The letter was made public in May when it was sent to the media.

Without knowing anything more, any neutral observer would conclude that the accusing priests are a disgrace. Why? Not

only will they not come forward and let the accused know of their identity, they never sent Dewane a copy of their letter (he learned of it through the media). To make matters worse, these cowardly priests did not provide a scintilla of evidence: no specific examples of Dewane's alleged "non-Christian" behavior were offered.

Enter Call to Action and Voice of the Faithful, two wholly discredited lay organizations. They have been agitating to censure Dewane. In a ruling that was upheld by the Vatican, members of the former organization were excommunicated in some dioceses; the latter group is a dissident entity that is unwelcomed in most dioceses.

This is a sick environment. Anonymous persons make unsubstantiated accusations in public without publicly identifying the content of their complaints, or privately confronting the accused, and are then embraced by vindictive activists who seek to upend the Catholic Church. Bishop Dewane must have the patience of a saint not to lash out at them.

Dewane subsequently released a statement saying that the priests' letter "lacks all credibility." Furthermore, he said that the accusations are "sweeping generalities and are simply false or unfounded." The statement concluded, "With the general nature of the unfounded complaints in the letter that was released, one has to wonder who is being bullied by whom?"

To answer the charges in the letter, Bishop Dewane convened a meeting of all the priests in the diocese. Most priests said that their complaining colleagues should have met with the bishop and handled this matter internally. That's what real men do.

Not surprisingly, Call to Action and Voice of the Faithful are so tarnished that their efforts to get Bishop Dewane have gone nowhere. Now, in a state of utter desperation, they are reaching out to Pope Francis, asking him to enter the fray.

Characteristically, they have done so in a manner that is completely dishonest.

The letter to the pope is replete with unsubstantiated accusations, and loaded with vitriol. Even more disgraceful, these signatories repair to canon law to assert their rights. Canon law?

These two groups—whose members are drawn from the same pool of yesterday's carping critics—are discounted by the bishops precisely because they are at war with canon law. For them to invoke it as a weapon to be used against Bishop Dewane is reminiscent of the origins of the term chutzpah: before being sentenced for killing his parents, the guilty son pleads with the judge for mercy, arguing how unfair it would be to punish an orphan.

Now Bishop Dewane is being sued by a sue-happy lawyer because a parish volunteer who molested a boy had previously molested another boy on church property; the parents say the diocese did nothing about it.

However, the current offense (a) did not take place on church property or in the diocese (b) neither the diocese nor the parish received a complaint about it (c) a public request for all alleged victims to come forward yielded no complainant against this man (d) the accused was no longer a volunteer when he was arrested, and (e) all volunteers must submit to a federal and state background check and fingerprinting, and nothing about the accused was discovered at that time.

Anyone who thinks this legal battle is unrelated to the other ones is living in a state of denial. Bishop Dewane is being defamed by some very malicious people. The Catholic League is happy to defend him and urges him to stand his ground.