

FLORIDA BISHOP RIPPED BY FOES; DISSIDENTS ON THE MARCH

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.

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. They are being aided and abetted by the media. This occasioned a strong response from us: we took on Fox 4 TV, which covers Fort Myers, Cape Coral, and Naples.

The 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, and unfolded in an unseemly manner this fall.

The accusing priests refuse to come forward and let the accused know of their identity. In fact, 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.

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, two wholly discredited groups, piled on. In a state of utter desperation, they reached out to Pope Francis, asking him to enter the fray. Their letter to him was replete with unsubstantiated accusations, and loaded with vitriol.

We contacted every parish in the diocese rebutting the charges against Bishop Dewane. Bill Donohue also wrote a detailed letter to Fox 4 TV challenging their professionalism. The station offered a lengthy reply. While it was unconvincing, it was far less partisan than its reporting. We trust they got the message.

As recent issues of *Catalyst* have disclosed, it is open season on the bishops. Unless they are defended by lay Catholics, the battles will never end.