Rebel cardinals accuse Pope Francis of stacking the Synod

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Delivered letter: Australian cardinal George Pell. Photo: James Alcock

**Vatican**: A gathering of world Catholic bishops has been thrown into confusion with the leak of a letter from conservative cardinals to Pope Francis bitterly complaining that the meeting is stacked against them.

Australian cardinal George Pell gave the Pope the letter accusing him of stacking the cards against conservatives in an ongoing battle over issues including the church's approach to gays and to divorced and remarried Catholics.

*L'Espresso newsweekly*, which published the English-language letter in full, said 13 cardinals signed the letter and one of them delivered it by hand to the Pope last week.
Pope Francis arrives for the afternoon session of the synod of bishops at the Vatican on Saturday. Photo: AP

It was published by the same Italian journalist whose press credentials were stripped by the Holy See last June after he ran a leaked copy of the Pope's major encyclical on the environment.

The gathering, or synod, of more than 300 bishops, delegates and observers, including some married couples, is discussing how the 1.2 billion-member church can confront challenges facing the modern family. The synod is due to finish on October 25.

The bishops are debating ways to defend the traditional family and make lifelong marriage more appealing to young people, and at the same time reach out to disaffected Catholics such as homosexuals, cohabiting couples and the divorced.
Pope Francis talks to a cardinal before the start of the afternoon session of the synod of bishops at the Vatican on Saturday. Photo: AP

The letter complained that the synod's working paper needed "reflection and reworking" and was inadequate as the basis for a final position paper the Pope may use to write his own document.

The published letter also complained that a change in which small group discussions have greater influence than speeches to the assembly "seems designed to facilitate predetermined results on important disputed questions".

A Vatican spokesman said letters to the Pope were private.

Four of the conservative cardinals cited by the magazine later disassociated themselves from the letter. Several said private letters should remain so and one said he signed a similar but different version.

The leak of the letter added a new layer of intrigue and confusion in the debate between conservatives and liberals on a host of sensitive issues. One topic is how to reach out to Catholics who have divorced and remarried in civil ceremonies.

They are considered by the church to be still married to their first spouse and living in a state of sin. Some bishops want a change to the rules that bar them from receiving sacraments such as communion.

Conservatives are trying to block change to the current teaching on divorced Catholics. They also oppose resolutions that could be interpreted as a weakening of the church's teaching against homosexual acts.

Since his election in 2013, Francis has given hope to progressives who want him to forge ahead with his vision of a more inclusive church that concentrates on mercy rather than the strict enforcement of rigid rules they see as antiquated.

Read more: http://www.smh.com.au/world/rebel-cardinals-accuse-pope-francis-of-stacking-20151014-gk8q8o.html#ixzz3oXSZeR7D
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