



**www.chiesa.espressonline.it**

## The Prelate of the Gay Lobby

Facts and personages of the scandalous past of the man whom Francis, unaware, delegated to represent him at the IOR. Here's how a parallel power lives and thrives at the Vatican, plotting to the harm of the pope

by Sandro Magister



ROME, July 18, 2013 – "In the curia there is talk of a 'gay lobby.' And it is true, it's there. Let's see what we can do," Francis said on June 6 to Latin American religious received in audience.

And again: "It is not easy. Here there are many of the pope's 'bosses' with great seniority of service," he confided a few days ago to his Argentine friend and former student Jorge Milia.

In effect, some of these 'bosses' have hatched against Jorge Mario Bergoglio the cruelest and most subtle deception since he was elected pope.

They kept in the dark important information that, if he had known it before, would have kept him from appointing Monsignor Battista Ricca "prelate" of the Institute for Works of Religion.

With this appointment, made public on June 15, Francis intended to place a trusted person in a key role within the IOR. With the power to access all of the proceedings and documents and to attend all of the meetings both of the cardinalate commission of oversight and of the supervisory board of the disastrous Vatican "bank." In short, with the task of cleaning house.

Ricca, 57, originally from the diocese of Brescia, comes from a diplomatic career. He served for fifteen years in the nunciatures of various countries before he was called back to the Vatican, to the secretariat of state. But he won Bergoglio's trust in another guise, initially as director of the residence on Via della Scrofa at which the archbishop of Buenos Aires stayed during his visits to Rome, and now also as director of the Domus Sanctæ Marthæ in which Francis has chosen to live as pope.

Before the appointment, Francis had been shown, as is customary, the personal file on Ricca, in which he had not found anything unseemly. He had also heard from various personalities of the curia, and none of them had raised objections.

Just one week after appointing the "prelate," however, during the same days in which he was meeting with the apostolic nuncios who had come to Rome from all over the world, the pope became aware, from multiple sources, of some episodes from Ricca's past previously unknown to him and such as to bring serious harm to the pope himself and to his intention of reform.

Sadness over having been kept in the dark with regard to such grave matters, and the intention to

remedy the appointment he had made, albeit not definitive but "ad interim": these were the sentiments expressed by Pope Francis once he was aware of those matters.

\*

The black hole in Ricca's personal history is the period he spent in Uruguay, in Montevideo, on the northern shore of the Rio de la Plata, across from Buenos Aires.

Ricca arrived at this nunciature in 1999, when the mandate of the nuncio Francesco De Nittis was coming to an end. Previously he had served at the diplomatic missions of Congo, Algeria, Colombia, and finally Switzerland.

Here, in Bern, he had met and become friends with a captain of the Swiss army, Patrick Haari. The two arrived in Uruguay together. And Ricca asked that his friend be given a role and a residence in the nunciature.

The nuncio rejected the request. But a few months later he retired and Ricca, having become the chargé d'affaires "ad interim" until the appointment of the new nuncio, assigned Haari a residence in the nunciature, with a regular position and salary.

At the Vatican they let it go. The substitute for general affairs in the secretariat of state at the time was Giovanni Battista Re, a future cardinal, he too originally from the diocese of Brescia.

The intimacy of the relations between Ricca and Haari was so open as to scandalize numerous bishops, priests, and laity of that little South American country, not last the sisters who attended to the nunciature.

The new nuncio, Janusz Bolonek of Poland, who arrived in Montevideo at the beginning of 2000, also found that "ménage" intolerable immediately, and informed the Vatican authorities about it, insisting repeatedly to Haari that he should leave. But to no use, given his connections with Ricca.

In early 2001 Ricca also got into a scrape over his reckless conduct. One day, having gone as on other occasions - in spite of the warnings he had received - to Bulevar Artigas, to a meeting place for homosexuals, he was beaten and had to call some priests to take him back to the nunciature, with his face swollen.

In August of 2001, another mishap. In the middle of the night the elevator of the nunciature got stuck and in the early morning the firemen had to come. They found trapped in the car, together with Monsignor Ricca, a young man who was identified by the police authorities.

Nuncio Bolonek asked that Ricca be sent away from the nunciature and Haari fired immediately. And he got the go-ahead from the secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano.

Ricca, dragging his heels, was transferred to the nunciature of Trinidad and Tobago, where he remained until 2004. There as well he butted heads with the nuncio. Finally to be called to the Vatican and removed from diplomatic service on the ground.

As for Haari, in the process of leaving the nunciature he demanded that some of his luggage be sent to the Vatican as diplomatic baggage, to the address of Monsignor Ricca. Nuncio Bolonek refused, and the luggage ended up in a building outside of the nunciature. Where it remained for a few years, until from Rome Ricca said that he didn't want to have anything to do with it anymore.

Once the luggage was opened to get rid of its contents - as decided by the nuncio Bolonek - a pistol was found in it, which was handed over to the Uruguayan authorities, and in addition to personal effects, an enormous quantity of condoms and pornographic material.

\*

In Uruguay, the facts reported above are known to dozens of persons: bishops, priests, sisters, laypeople. Without counting the civil authorities, from security forces to fire protection. Many of these persons have had direct experience of these facts, at various moments.

But at the Vatican as well there are those who know about them. The nuncio at the time, Bolonek, always expressed himself with severity with regard to Ricca, in reporting to Rome.

And yet a blanket of public silence has covered until today these past episodes of the monsignor.

In Uruguay there are some who respect the granting of silence out of scruples of conscience. Some for the duty of office. Some who are silent because they do not want to put the Church and the pope in a bad light.

But at the Vatican there are some who actively promoted this cover-up operation. By blocking the investigations from the time of the events until today. By concealing the reports from the nuncio. By keeping Ricca's personal file immaculate. In this way they facilitated a prestigious new career for Ricca.

After his return to Rome, the monsignor was integrated into the diplomatic personnel serving at the secretariat of state: initially, from 2005, in the first section, that of general affairs; then, from 2008, in the second section, that of relations with states; and then again, from 2012, in the first section, with a top-level position, that of nunciature advisor first class.

Among the tasks assigned to him was supervision of the spending of the nunciatures. And from this as well was born that reputation as an incorruptible moralizer which was assigned to him by the media all over the world, at the news of his appointment as "prelate" of the IOR.

Moreover, beginning in 2006, Monsignor Ricca was entrusted with the direction first of one, then of two, and finally of three residences for cardinals, bishops, and priests visiting Rome, including that of Saint Martha. And this allowed him to weave an intricate network of relationships with the highest levels of the Catholic hierarchy all over the world.

The appointment as "prelate" of the IOR was for Ricca the crowning of this second career of his.

But it was also the beginning of the end. Because of the many upright persons who knew about his scandalous past, the news of the promotion was a cause of extreme bitterness, all the more keen because it was seen as a presage of harm for the arduous enterprise that Pope Francis has in the works, of purification of the Church and of reform of the Roman curia.

Because of this some believed it to be their duty to tell the pope the truth. Certain that he would make the consequent decisions.

---

This article was published in "L'Espresso" no. 29 of 2013, on newsstands as of July 19:

### > **L'Espresso**

---

The conversation of Pope Francis with the Latin American religious in which he spoke of the "gay lobby" at the Vatican:

### > **Pope to Latin American Religious**

And that with his Argentine friend Jorge Milia with the quip about the "pope's many 'bosses'":

### > **"Mi ha telefonato il papa"**

---

English translation by **Matthew Sherry**, Ballwin, Missouri, U.S.A.

---

For more news and commentary, see the blog that Sandro Magister maintains, available only in Italian: