

"GOD COUNTRY FAMILY INC."

By Giorgio Mottola

Consultant Andrea Palladino

With the contribution of Norma Ferrara – Simona Peluso

Video by Davide Fonda – Tommaso Javidi

Editing and graphics by Giorgio Vallati

POPE FRANCIS - URBI ET ORBI BLESSING 27 MARCH 2020

Omnipotent and merciful God, behold our painful condition, comfort your children and open up our hearts to hope.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Under a gloomy sky covered by heavy rain clouds, for the first time in history a Pope spoke in front of a totally empty Saint Peter's square.

POPE FRANCIS - URBI ET ORBI BLESSING 27 MARCH 2020

We didn't listen to the cries of the poor and of our gravely ill planet. We continued undeterred, believing we would always remain healthy in a sick world.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

In the midst of the pandemic, the Pope granted plenary indulgence to the world's faithful. But in some Catholic circles, the Pope himself is seen as the very cause of Coronavirus.

JOHN-HENRY WESTEN - DIRECTOR, LIFESITENEWS

Is it possible to imagine that, at least in part, this epidemic is a consequence of the Pope's betrayal of our Lord?

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Basically, God would have used Coronavirus to punish mankind for the Pope's betrayal. So says the director of Lifesitenews, one of the world's most popular ultra-Catholic websites.

JOHN-HENRY WESTEN - DIRECTOR, LIFESITENEWS

The pontiff has authorised sacrilegious communions, granting the holy Eucharist to people who have divorced or remarried. Such a profanation of the holy communion has a direct link with divine punishment.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

This theory was promoted for weeks by dozens of ultra-Catholic websites and by several American internet preachers.

TAYLOR MARSHALL – YOUTUBE THEOLOGIAN

We have a Pope who, for the first time in history, introduced idolatry to the Vatican and signed a reckless agreement in China.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Accusations of idolatry began a few months ago, when, during the synod for the Amazon, the Pope welcomed into the Vatican the statues of Pachamama, an ancient Inca goddess which today symbolises Mother Earth for Amazonian peoples.

JOHN-HENRY WESTEN - DIRECTOR, LIFESITENEWS

Everyone knows that, shortly before the explosion of Coronavirus, the Pope allowed idolatry into the Vatican. The idolatry of Pachamama.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

For the ultra-conservative camp, Bergoglio's sacrilege couldn't go unpunished, so an Austrian ultra-Catholic by the name of Alexander Tschugguel filmed himself stealing the Pachamama statues from the church of Santa Maria in Traspontina, where they were on display, and throwing them into the Tiber river.

TAYLOR MARSHALL – YOUTUBE THEOLOGIAN

God is not happy with us and with the Papacy. You worship false gods? I'll show you who you really should be worshipping.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

But if Coronavirus is truly divine punishment for the Pope's betrayal, then God's wrath must have seriously missed the target. At the start of the pandemic, in fact, one of the first to test positive was precisely Alexander Tschugguel. The man who threw the Pachamama statues into the Tiber.

TAYLOR MARSHALL – YOUTUBE THEOLOGIAN

Alexander Tschugguel contracted Coronavirus and has been bedridden with high fever for a week. He's really very ill and asked me to pray for his recovery.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Virus-related anti-Bergoglio campaigns weren't born by chance, but rather stem from statements made by certain high-ranking figures in the Vatican, such as archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, the former apostolic nuncio to the US. In various interviews, he has described Coronavirus as divine punishment for sins like abortion, divorce and homosexuality.

A view shared by Ralph Drollinger, the White House's consultant on biblical studies, who, in an official document, has recently linked the pandemic with the global spread of homosexuality and lesbianism. The exact opposite of what the Pope had declared a few days earlier in an interview for Spanish TV.

POPE FRANCIS

God forgives always, we forgive sometimes. Nature never forgives. And nature is in crisis. Therefore, we must take care of nature.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

No reference to homosexuals, God's wrath or divine punishment for humankind's sins. And that was enough to send the American ultra-Catholic media into a frenzy.

JOHN-HENRY WESTEN - DIRECTOR, LIFESITENEWS

When I first heard Pope Francis say that Coronavirus represents a rebellion of nature, caused by our lack of care for the environment, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. He's already been wrong many times on matters of faith like contraception, domestic partnership, divorce, remarrying and homosexuality.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

American Cardinal Raymond Burke also took a clear stand in this debate. In an official document about Coronavirus, he writes: "There's no question that great evils such as this plague are caused by the original sin and by our current sins."

This – he explains – is how God fixes the chaos which sinfulness has brought into our lives and our world”. Burke’s words roused the most belligerent instincts of American ultra-Catholics, who quickly began spreading the Cardinal’s word online.

SIGFRIDO RANUCCI IN STUDIO

Certain Italian politicians also heeded the call. And some even happen to have received funds for it, as we’ll see later. We’ve heard many things, but we still hadn’t heard the theory that Bergoglio himself is the cause of the Coronavirus epidemic. But the list of personalities criticising Bergoglio is a long one. It includes Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, the former apostolic nuncio to the United States, who believes the proliferation of the virus is tied to sin, and that it’s a punishment for sins like abortion, divorce and homosexuality. An opinion shared by Ralph Drollinger, the White House consultant for biblical studies, who thinks the spread of the disease is linked the spread of homosexuality and lesbianism. But the leading figure of the ultra-conservative world that is attacking Bergoglio can be found much closer to the Vatican. And it’s Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke. Burke, who belongs to the College of Cardinals, is a patron of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, which has also welcomed in its ranks several important Italian politicians, and which behaves a bit like its own country: it issues documents, licenses, passports and even communicates with other countries as if it were an independent nation. Well, Pope Francis is not very fond of this order, having launched a commission to investigate it and having basically placed it under external administration. Burke, however, is the one who criticised the Pope most harshly, mainly for his openness to dialogue with other religions, for his views on welcoming immigrants, and especially for his lenient positions towards divorce. Burke has also accused the Pope of idolatry, and while discussing his explanation for the spread of the virus, he wrote: “We are witnessing, even within our Church, the rise of a paganism that worships nature. There are members of the Church who refer to the Earth as our mother, as if we came from the Earth...” His is truly a rather thinly-veiled accusation. And Burke is also president of a mostly unknown foundation, the Sciacca Foundation, which on the one hand engages in charity activities but on the other carries out significant networking operations. It’s been linked to intelligence services, banks and magistrates. Burke was also president of the Dignitatis Humanae Institute, the one connected to Trump’s strategist Steve Bannon, who founded Cambridge Analytica, the company that allegedly violated 50 million Facebook profiles and influenced the outcome of the US presidential and Brexit elections. Then, after clashing with Trump and being kicked out, he chose Italy to establish his international school of right wing populism. And where did he establish it? Inside the wonderful 13th century abbey in Trisulti. But as we reported at the time, the lease appears to have been granted following the submission of shady documentation, without paying one euro for rent or renovation. The man Bannon appointed to “hold down the fort” is, by now, almost a friend of ours: Benjamin Harnwell. Possibly the only person who can spend his entire quarantine in true, complete isolation. Our Giorgio Mottola brought him some food supplies.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Until a few months ago, Raymond Burke was president of Dignitatis Humanae, the association linked to Steve Bannon which leased the Abbey of Trisulti, in the Frosinone province. Here, in the solitude of the ancient abbey, where quarantine had no effect on day-to-day life, lives Benjamin Harnwell, the man appointed by Trump’s former chief strategist Steve Bannon to serve as guardian and tenant of the Certosa di Trisulti, with the goal of turning it into a political academy of sovereignism. Living in complete isolation, far from supermarkets and stores, the one condition Harnwell set in order to grant us this interview was that we bring him a small supply of food and cigars.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Bannon has abandoned you in quarantine, but *Report* is here for you. I brought you the stuff you asked for, and most importantly, the cigars you requested.

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE

Thanks, I need to put on gloves.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Due to the irregularities in the Certosa bidding process which *Report* has uncovered, last June the Ministry had assured us that Harnwell and Dignitatis Humanae would be evicted from the property within a few weeks.

FROM REPORT OF 6 JUNE 2019

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Will you evict Steve Bannon and Benjamin Harnwell from the Certosa?

GIANLUCA VACCA – UNDERSECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE

We will of course request that the Certosa be vacated. We'll try to figure out how to make the most of this wonderful abbey, this wonderful monument and the many treasures it houses.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

The last time we came, we were sure you'd be gone.

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE

Instead... we're still here.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

I see you're giving me a cunning smirk. So far, you've fooled us all.

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE

So far, we're still here.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

While he awaits yet another decision by the Regional Appeals Court, which has been delayed by the virus, Benjamin Harnwell continues to espouse his views on the Bergoglio papacy.

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE

The Pope says things that have no foundation in the history of the Church.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

You think that Bergoglio says un-Christian things.

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE

He says some things that are not Christian.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

That's a strong statement, that the Pope says un-Catholic and un-Christian things.

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE

Giorgio, I don't know why he does so. Maybe out of malice. Because he's an enemy of the Church.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

The theory of Bergoglio as an enemy of the Church was born and developed overseas. Its leading political exponent, ever since Trump's election, has been Steve Bannon, whom Harnwell says he still speaks with daily, despite being isolated inside the abbey.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

What does Steve Bannon think about the Pope?

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE

Steve thinks that in certain respects this Pope is inadequate.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

In this battle against the Pope, has Bannon found any allies within the Church itself?

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE

Absolutely.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

And one of them is Cardinal Burke.

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE

I'd rather not talk about that.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Was it Bannon that introduced you to Burke?

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE No, I introduced Steve Bannon to the Cardinal.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

So tell me the truth, would you have preferred to see Burke as the Pope instead of Bergoglio?

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE

Yes.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

That's your secret dream.

BENJAMIN HARNWELL – DIRECTOR, DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ INSTITUTE

In due time, who knows...

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

So we're waiting for the next conclave.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

A patron of the Order of Malta and a global leader of the ultra-conservative front, Cardinal Burke is one of the fiercest critics of Pope Francis within the Roman Curia. Even in official documents, he has long been voicing his disapproval of the Pope's stances on divorce, on the dialogue between religions and on the matter of migrants. More than

once, he has urged the Catholic faithful to fight against the changes which Bergoglio is trying to enact in the Vatican.

RAYMOND BURKE - CARDINAL AND PATRON OF THE ORDER OF MALTA

Clearly, at a time of great confusion and error in our culture and even in our Church, we truly are called to defend and fight for the true essence of faith.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Cardinal Burke has very close ties with members of the Trump administration, although his relationship with Steve Bannon has cooled significantly in recent months. In Italy, instead, Burke has never concealed his fondness for Matteo Salvini. When Salvini was interior minister, when NGO ships were stuck at sea, the Cardinal publicly defended him on various occasions.

REPORTER

Do you agree with the actions of Italy's interior minister?

RAYMOND BURKE - CARDINAL AND PATRON OF THE ORDER OF MALTA

Well, I think it's understandable. The nation must first of all take care of its own citizens and then closely analyse who these immigrants are, and whether they're really political refugees or merely people who emigrate to... well, to improve their living conditions.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

In Italy, Burke also heads the Sciacca Foundation, an ultra-conservative Catholic philanthropic organisation that signed agreement protocols with the Ministry of Justice and the Defence Industries Agency, the public entity in charge of supplying explosives and ammunition to the army. The foundation is totally unknown to almost everyone, except – apparently – to the people who really matter in Italy. Its executive ranks include the head of the secret services Gennaro Vecchione, army generals, judges from the Council of State and bankers like Ettore Gotti Tedeschi, the former director of the IOR (Institute for the Works of Religion). The soul of the organisation is a priest, Father Bruno Lima. He's famous in L'Aquila for officiating the mass in Latin every Sunday.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

My name is Giorgio Mottola, I'm a journalist for *Report*, Rai3.

FATHER BRUNO LIMA - ON THE PHONE

Ask me your question, I don't do phone interviews.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

I just wanted to ask: how did you manage to gather so many big names, like the head of the secret services...

FATHER BRUNO LIMA - ON THE PHONE

I'm not interested in your questions, good bye.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

But we're interested in knowing how you did it, Father Bruno.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

In 2018, Father Bruno scored another prestigious addition to his roster, as evidenced by this previously unseen video which *Report* has uncovered.

"GIUSEPPE SCIACCA" INTERNATIONAL PRIZE 27/10/2018

HOST

Presenting the award is Minister Matteo Salvini, president of the Sciacca Foundation's scientific committee. Hello Minister, we are pleased and honoured to have you this year in the Sciacca Prize family and as president of our scientific committee.

MATTEO SALVINI - FORMER MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR

I'm the one feeling honoured, and also a bit inadequate: I'm not really a good Christian. Indeed, when Father Bruno offered me this opportunity, I said: "Watch out, Father Bruno, I'm not one to bear witness, I'm one of those sinners..."

SIGFRIDO RANUCCI IN STUDIO

Who knows what the president of the scientific committee of a foundation like this one actually does? Anyway, the fact is that Salvini is a divorcé – which, let it be clear, we have no problem with – yet he is named president by an entity that opposes Bergoglio for his leniency on the matter of divorce. The Sciacca Foundation has indeed sponsored various charity initiatives, that must be said. But we wonder whether they are also a networking association. Their press office wrote us a message where they express their support of Cardinal Burke, claiming to be outraged that he's been likened to the so-called enemies of the Pope. "His Eminence", they state, "is a distinguished jurist and theologian famous around the world, who fulfils his institutional responsibilities in the service of the Holy See with a spirit of obedience to the Holy Father". They go on to accuse *Report* of spreading fake news – that seems to be a trend these days. A piece of real news, however, emerged from a wiretapped call by the DIA (Anti-mafia Investigative Body). Cardinal Burke was unknowingly intercepted – by chance, let it be clear that he is not under investigation – while someone was asking him to help a slightly controversial senator obtain a governmental position.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Last year we had shown you footage of Steve Bannon's Italian mission of 7 September 2018: during the ride towards the Viminale, he is seen speaking with a Lega envoy, Federico Arata, son of Paolo Arata, who according to the Palermo prosecutor's office is the silent partner of wind farm czar Vito Nicastrì, supposed to be a front man for Matteo Messina Denaro. Paolo Arata is accused of having paid a 30 thousand euro bribe to undersecretary Armando Siri of the Lega, in order to draft an amendment favouring wind power. And his son Federico is the one discussing electoral strategies with Steve Bannon.

FROM "THE BRINK" BY ALISON KLAYMAN

STEVE BANNON - FORMER WHITE HOUSE CHIEF STRATEGIST

We're looking to provide polling, data analytics, board room messaging.

FEDERICO ARATA

The idea is that with this we can become the number one party in Italy. And then you have to tell them we need to plan – "plan" being the key word – victory at the European elections.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

The footage you just saw is from Alison Klayman's documentary "The Brink", which *Report* is showing you for the first time in Italy. It seems to indicate that Arata is the true architect of the relations between Bannon and the Lega party.

MISCHAËL MODRIKAMEN - SPOKESPERSON FOR THE MOVEMENT

I'm Mischaël, from Belgium. I'm from The Movement.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

On behalf of whom is Federico Arata acting as an intermediary between Steve Bannon and the Lega? In the months following this meeting, Giancarlo Giorgetti hired Arata as an external consultant for Palazzo Chigi. In what capacity?

GIANCARLO GIORGETTI – UNDERSECRETARY FOR THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE (06/2018-09/2019)

His qualifications are well documented in a resume that I believe has been published on all newspapers and media, which demonstrates that, in addition to having three university degrees, this person has significant international experience.

GIULIANO MARRUCCI

And how do you justify the fact that Arata appears to have acted as the link between Bannon and Salvini?

GIANCARLO GIORGETTI – UNDERSECRETARY FOR THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE (06/2018-09/2019)

That I do not know – you should ask Bannon, not me.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Besides Bannon, perhaps we should also ask Cardinal Burke. In 2018, when ministerial appointments were due to be announced, Paolo Arata contacted the American prelate. As evidenced by phone calls intercepted by Trapani's DIA (Anti-mafia investigative body), Arata asked Burke to help put pressure on Giorgetti so that his son could obtain a governmental position.

INTERCEPTION OF 6 APRIL 2018

On 6 April 2018, Paolo Arata called Cardinal Burke. "By the way, may I just remind you about that thing we discussed about Giorgetti from the United States" – he says. And the Cardinal's reply is: "Yes, yes, when the moment is right, I'm ready. Tell me when, and I'll send it right away".

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Hello Monsignor, my name is Giorgio Mottola, I work for *Report*, Rai3. I wanted to ask a few questions about your phone calls with Paolo Arata.

RAYMOND BURKE – CARDINAL AND PATRON OF THE ORDER OF MALTA

No.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

But... Your Eminence? Your Eminence, who is the American you contacted to put in a good word for Paolo Arata's son? Just tell me that. How did you meet Paolo Arata?

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Spiritual matters take precedence, so we wait in religious silence and once the blessings are over, we try once again to discuss our prosaic earthly topics.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Your Eminence, excuse me, why did you help out Paolo Arata? OK. I was just asking a few questions...

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

According to the DIA, the "thing" about Giorgetti, which Paolo Arata was asking about, was aimed mainly at securing a ministry for a certain Lega senator: Armando Siri.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Are you very close with Cardinal Burke, Raymond Burke?

ARMANDO SIRI - SENATOR, LEGA SALVINI PREMIER

The Cardinal? No, I don't know him.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

That's odd because he seems to have worked very hard in support of your appointment as undersecretary.

ARMANDO SIRI - SENATOR, LEGA SALVINI PREMIER

I have no idea... I don't know him.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

But Federico Arata and Paolo Arata do know him well, and you asked Federico Arata to help you get the appointment...

ARMANDO SIRI - SENATOR, LEGA SALVINI PREMIER

Ah, you mean "Boork"!

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Yes, his name is Burke actually, he's American.

ARMANDO SIRI - SENATOR, LEGA SALVINI PREMIER

Ah, his name is "Burke".

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

You asked Federico Arata to pressure the American ambassador in order to secure the appointment as undersecretary.

ARMANDO SIRI - SENATOR, LEGA SALVINI PREMIER

Really... and what does the American ambassador have to do with an Italian undersecretary?

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

But here is the text of Federico Arata's call to his father: "Armando called me and asked if I could put in a few good words with the American ambassador". Burke, however, seemed to balk at the request, so the Aratas, father and son, mulled the idea of asking Bannon for help. And a few weeks after this phone call, Federico Arata was hired to work at Palazzo Chigi while Armando Siri was named the undersecretary for Infrastructure.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

How much of your appointment as undersecretary was influenced by Burke's mediation?

ARMANDO SIRI - SENATOR, LEGA SALVINI PREMIER

I think my appointment as undersecretary was influenced by Matteo Salvini, who's the leader of the Lega and decided that I should be undersecretary. It's extremely logical.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

But if it depended only on Salvini, why did you ask Federico Arata for help? Clearly you weren't so sure that Salvini would have appointed you as undersecretary...

ARMANDO SIRI - SENATOR, LEGA SALVINI PREMIER

No, absolutely not... I never asked anyone for any favours. You are the one saying these things.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

The phone calls seem to prove otherwise...

ARMANDO SIRI - SENATOR, LEGA SALVINI PREMIER

Well, you know... I wonder how many things you say on the phone...

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

I don't talk about becoming an undersecretary.

ARMANDO SIRI - SENATOR, LEGA SALVINI PREMIER

Well, maybe about something else...

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Definitely not becoming an undersecretary...

SIGFRIDO RANUCCI IN STUDIO

That's because Giorgio happens to be good at his job. The gist of the matter is that Paolo Arata, who acts as the Lega's expert consultant on energy policy, was being wiretapped by the Anti-mafia Investigation Body because he stands accused of corruption and, more importantly, of being the silent partner of Vito Nicastrì. Vito Nicastrì is in turn accused of bankrolling Matteo Messina Denaro, the head of Cosa Nostra. Now the judges are saying that Paolo Arata was leveraging his connections with the Lega, and specifically with Armando Siri, to enter into a "hidden" partnership with his silent partner. He and Siri are currently facing corruption charges for apparently trying to insert an amendment in the 2019 Budget Law which would have provided tax breaks for anyone who had opened wind farms in 2017. An ex post facto law that, of course, would have also benefited Arata and his partner. OK. So what did Arata do? He asked Cardinal Burke for help in getting Siri appointed... to a government position. Burke agreed and said "yes, when the time is right, I'm ready". Surely, Burke knew nothing of Arata's relationship with Vito Nicastrì, the man bankrolling the Mafia boss. However, Arata also asked for another favour. He asked Burke to help his son Federico obtain a position within the fledgling Lega-led government. Again, Burke seemed to be on board, although we don't know whether he actually interceded. What we do know is that when Steve Bannon arrived in Rome in 2018, it was Arata who greeted him, acting as a consultant of the Prime Minister's office. And they discussed electoral strategies as if he was a party leader. In what capacity was he speaking? It should also be noted that, based on emails we dug up from the OCCRP database, it appears that Federico Arata was developing his own relationships in the US already in 2017, in November 2017. In fact, he was presenting himself as the Lega's spin doctor, claiming that he wanted to elevate the party's international status, and organising a trip to the United States for Salvini and Giorgetti (which was eventually scrapped). He also communicated with Ted Malloch. Malloch is the wheeling-and-dealing consultant who was involved in Russiagate and also had a role in the Russian hacking of compromising Hillary Clinton emails. Anyway, that's the context. Malloch also contributed to Trump's electoral

campaign, and had contacts with the American far-right and the ultra-religious scene which has been launching these attacks against Bergoglio. This time, the criticism is related to the decision to close all churches to curb the spread of the virus.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Since the start of the lockdown, church doors have been shuttered and masses suspended. But in Rome, someone has found a way to still pray in public without violating the isolation guidelines.

SISTERS OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen. Oh, holy...

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Every day, exactly at noon, the Apostolic sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus go onto the roof of their convent and, for a few minutes, sing prayer hymns for the people looking out the windows.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Can you celebrate Easter while staying at home?

SISTER - SACRED HEART OF JESUS

Absolutely. I believe that we'll be able to experience it even more intensely this year.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

The ultra-Catholic American media seem to have a completely different opinion, and have launched an aggressive campaign against Pope Francis on the matter of church closures in Italy.

TAYLOR MARSHALL – YOUTUBE THEOLOGIAN

And our answer is to be quiet: let's close the doors of churches, suspend all sacraments, so by the grace of God everything just disappears...

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

The campaign to reopen churches targeting the government and the Holy See began on ultra-conservative American websites like Lifesitenews and Churchmilitant, later reaching news sites like Breitbart, the far-right media network founded by Steve Bannon. Those very same slogans and keywords then travelled across the ocean and took hold in Italy. The first to promote them on their social media accounts were the neo-fascists of Forza Nuova, led by Roberto Fiore.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Hello.

ROBERTO FIORE – PRESIDENT, FORZA NUOVA

Hello. Hello to everyone...

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

You seem very unconcerned: no mask, no gloves...

ROBERTO FIORE – PRESIDENT, FORZA NUOVA

I have faith.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Last year, Fiore launched a number of campaigns against the Pope, and during the Coronavirus epidemic his party promoted the anti-Catholic conspiracy theory with the support of certain influential Vatican figures.

ROBERTO FIORE – PRESIDENT, FORZA NUOVA

The Church was forced to bow down to international powers which demanded it shut down, suspend all masses and stop administering sacraments, which, as I've said, is something unheard of in our history. Only the communists had done that, but at least they were honest about it: we are materialist atheists and don't believe in this stuff, so you cannot do it or we'll lock you up.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

And now they're closing your churches with the excuse of a health emergency.

ROBERTO FIORE – PRESIDENT, FORZA NUOVA

With the excuse of a health emergency, exactly.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Do they want to close down churches forever in your opinion? Is that their goal?

ROBERTO FIORE – PRESIDENT, FORZA NUOVA

Oh Lord, well, this is definitely something which they – and by "they" I mean the WHO, which I believe is the heart of this operation – something they're looking at... it's fluid.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

In order to foil the anti-Christian conspiracy by the World Health Organization and the other powers that be, Forza Nuova launched a petition on CitizenGO, a fundamentalist Christian platform, which was backed by Vittorio Sgarbi, Carlo Taormina and the main figures in the Italian anti-Bergoglio front. Fiore and the other signatories ask for the immediate reopening of churches and the resumption of masses.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

And what about this vague counter-argument that by opening churches you could reignite the spread of the virus?

ROBERTO FIORE – PRESIDENT, FORZA NUOVA

That's craziness. The link between the physical world and the spiritual one shows us – and that's the first thing – that someone who's stronger spiritually is stronger at fighting off disease. So already from that standpoint, one should conclude it's all nonsense.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Since faith provides immunity against Coronavirus, a few days before Easter the social media accounts of Fiore's organisation begin displaying menacing posts like this one.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

You've announced that on Easter you will violate the quarantine rules.

ROBERTO FIORE – PRESIDENT, FORZA NUOVA

On Sunday, in a peaceful and Christian way, we will celebrate Easter. Our sacrifice – because in the end it will be a sacrifice of an economic nature, or whatever that may be – is something we are doing in the best interest of everyone.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

So you went from being fascist to gandhian.

ROBERTO FIORE - FORZA NUOVA

No, it's not gandhian. If the people don't respond forcefully, tomorrow these guys will think they can do anything to us. Instead we must show that the people won't stand for it.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

On Easter Sunday, our cameras were there to document the announced Forza Nuova procession in front of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore. But Fiore's sacrifice is nowhere to be seen. The militants who violated the quarantine are here without their leader.

DIGOS AGENT

Go home! If you have one!

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

In the end, the devout and neo-fascist militants are few and far between.

GIULIANO CASTELLINO - FORZA NUOVA EXECUTIVE

We wanted to have the freedom of remembering the Holy Easter, just because we said that this was the first liberty we intend to take back. I exhort all Romans and all Italians to pay attention, we are living in a dictatorship.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

After making sure the cameras got the speech, the Digos takes them away.

GIULIANO CASTELLINO - FORZA NUOVA EXECUTIVE

Long live liberty, long live Italy!

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Among the party leaders in parliament, only one appeared to support Forza Nuova's campaign, backing the petition for reopening churches on national TV.

MATTEO SALVINI - SKY TV INTERVIEW

I support the requests of those who say "let us go to Church in an orderly, cautious and safe way, even if it's just three, four or five of us, let us attend mass on Easter Sunday." I'm told you can go to the tobacconist, because you can't live without cigarettes. Well, some think that you must also take care of the soul, not just the body.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Salvini's words came as no surprise: in recent years, the Italian right started to consistently use religion as a political tool. Not even in the days of the old Christian Democrat party did we see national leaders, in the midst of an election campaign, brandishing religious symbols as political weapons.

MATTEO SALVINI

And I personally entrust Italy, my life and your lives to the immaculate heart of the Virgin Mary, and I am certain she will lead us to victory.

GIORGIA MELONI - PRESIDENT, FRATELLI D'ITALIA

I am Giorgia, I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian and I am Christian: you won't take that away from me.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

And we definitely would have never thought we'd see party leaders recite prayers live on national TV.

BARBARA D'URSO - LIVE NON È LA D'URSO

Every night I recite the rosary, I'm not ashamed of it, in fact I'm proud to say so. Eternal rest grant onto them, O Lord...

MATTEO SALVINI - LIVE NON È LA D'URSO

That makes two of us, Barbara.

BARBARA D'URSO - LIVE NON E' LA D'URSO

And let perpetual light shine upon them, may they rest in peace, amen.

MATTEO SALVINI - LIVE NON E' LA D'URSO

And let perpetual light shine on them, may they rest in peace.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

However, this fervently devout Catholic so far had nothing but harsh words for the Church's leader.

MATTEO SALVINI

The Pope is Benedict, his Pope is Benedict, my Pope is Benedict. Pope Benedict had very clear ideas on Islam and on the coexistence of peoples. I'm not a fan of those who invite Imams into churches.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

So when, exactly, did the Italian right suddenly rediscover its religious vocation, while at the same time cultivating such strong anti-Bergoglio sentiments?

POPE FRANCIS – TV2000

But xenophobia is a sickness. And often xenophobia goes hand-in-hand with so-called populism, you know? At times, in certain places, I hear speeches that remind me of those Hitler made in 1934. There's a common refrain.

DONALD TRUMP – PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

The Pope? Did you know the Pope was in Mexico? He said bad things about me. If and when the Vatican is attacked by ISIS, which as everyone knows is ISIS' ultimate trophy, I could promise you that the Pope would have only wished and prayed that Donald Trump was president.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

The election of Donald Trump was the watershed moment: *Report* analysed the budgets of the major foundations in the American religious right. And the results are staggering. Since Bergoglio became Pope, American ultra-Christian organisations sent over half a billion dollars to Europe.

PETER MONTGOMERY - SENIOR FELLOW, RIGHT WING WATCH

These are extremely rich fundamentalist Christian organisations, that want to ban abortion and repeal laws protecting homosexuals in America and around the world. One of their goals is to destabilise the European Union.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Some of the foundations that sent money to Europe belong to the World Congress of Families, the ultra-Christian organisation which was revived in 2013 thanks to Konstantin Malofeev, the Russian oligarch close to Putin whom Matteo Salvini tried to invite as the guest of honour for the convention held when he was elected party secretary for the first time.

FROM REPORT OF 21 JUNE 2019

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

When did you meet Salvini for the first time?

KONSTANTIN MALOFEEV - FOUNDER OF MARSHALL CAPITAL

Many years ago. I was supposed to go to the convention when he was elected.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Had you been invited?

KONSTANTIN MALOFEEV - FOUNDER OF MARSHALL CAPITAL

Yes, but I was unable to go, because I had other commitments.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

In the same year that Salvini was elected secretary, Malofeev travelled to the US and, as we managed to piece together through emails found in the OCCRP database, he met with Republican congressmen like Chris Smith, representatives from the Family Research Council, one of the leading American anti-abortion organisations, Nation for Marriage, which is led by World Congress for Families president Brian Brown, and representatives of the Heritage Foundation and the Leadership Institute, two of the most powerful Republican foundations.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

What was the subject of these meetings?

KONSTANTIN MALOFEEV - FOUNDER OF MARSHALL CAPITAL

We talked about how families can be shielded from the totalitarian sodomite agenda that is taking hold all around the world.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

So was that when the Holy Alliance was born?

KONSTANTIN MALOFEEV - FOUNDER OF MARSHALL CAPITAL

Yes, the idea was born there.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

This Holy Alliance also includes the foundations of the American religious right which sent the most money to Europe. These are associations funded by the same multi-billionaires who financed Donald Trump's electoral campaign. The Koch family, ultraconservative entrepreneurs who spent almost one billion euro on the latest US presidential campaign, and the Mercer family, founders of Cambridge Analytica and

publishers of Breitbart, the far-right publication which was once directed by Steve Bannon.

PETER MONTGOMERY - SENIOR FELLOW, RIGHT WING WATCH

America's right-wing religious organisations and the conservative multi-billionaires entered a pact years ago in order to control the Republican Party. And today, with Trump's presidency, they have reached their goal.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

In Europe, the foundations backed by the Koch and Mercer families didn't just fund religious associations. Scouring through the budget sheets of all parties in the European Parliament, we see that between 2016 and 2017 they sent 43 thousand euro to a parliamentary group known as the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists, which Fratelli d'Italia joined in 2019. Based on what *Report* has uncovered, the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists is the only EU party funded by Heritage Foundation and Atlas Network, the rich and powerful foundations linked to pro-Trump billionaires. But the relationship between the Trump world and Meloni's EU group seems to have intensified significantly in recent years.

This is the speech given by Steve Bannon, Trump's former chief strategist, at the 2018 national convention of Fratelli d'Italia.

STEVE BANNON – FORMER WHITE HOUSE CHIEF STRATEGIST

I can help you focus and win the upcoming European elections. We can help you prepare and administer surveys, big data analysis. Setting up control rooms. Everything that's required to win these elections. We'll help you for free.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

This, instead, is the most important conference of the American right. The main attraction is a speech by US president Donald Trump. And last year, there was also an Italian politician firing up the crowd.

GIORGIA MELONI – PRESIDENT, FRATELLI D'ITALIA

Ladies and gentlemen, thanks for inviting me.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Together with Brexit architect Nigel Farage, Giorgia Meloni was the only European politician invited to speak at the conference.

GIORGIA MELONI – PRESIDENT, FRATELLI D'ITALIA

The crisis of the European Union is a crisis of democracy and popular sovereignty. This supernatural and undemocratic entity has imposed onto European nations the choices of nihilistic globalist elites driven by international finance.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

We wonder if she was also referring to the financial elites fronting the bill for this conference. Like the gun-lobbying NRA, which appears on stage as the event's main sponsor, next to ultra-conservative insurance companies and Japanese cryptocurrencies.

For some time now, right-wing American foundations have been increasing their political activity in Europe. In early February, in one of Rome's most luxurious hotels, two American organisations – the Edmund Burke Foundation and the International Reagan-Thatcher Society – staged a massive political event that was inaugurated by Giorgia Meloni.

GIORGIA MELONI – PRESIDENT, FRATELLI D’ITALIA

I am extremely proud to be opening this event, which as you know is dedicated to the international conservative world. You all know that Fratelli d’Italia has worked hard in recent years to expand its network of international relations.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

The conference sponsored by the American foundations featured several big names of European conservatism. Like Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, the rising star of the French far-right, and especially Hungary’s prime minister Viktor Orban. Who recently, due to the Coronavirus emergency, gave himself full powers in his home country. The event’s name has a religious connotation: “God, Honor, Country”. And of course, the Bergoglio papacy is among the key topics.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

We could make it easier by...

PRESS OFFICER

Let's give the other reporters a chance to speak.

GIORGIA MELONI – PRESIDENT, FRATELLI D’ITALIA

No, he loves me. Go on, speak. Please. How do you want to make it easier?

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

There will also be other figures who are extremely critical of Bergoglio. Where do you stand? You’ve never publicly expressed your views on Bergoglio.

GIORGIA MELONI – PRESIDENT, FRATELLI D’ITALIA

I’m in no place to express views on Bergoglio because I’m a politician, I’m not a cardinal. I believe the Pope should take care of... should do his job. And politicians have a different job.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

And yet, the subject of the opening round table is precisely the Vatican. And the views on Bergoglio are expressed in an extremely clear manner.

ROBERTO DE MATTEI – PRESIDENT, LEPANTO FOUNDATION

If we compare the two leaders of our time, Pope Francis and president Donald Trump, we find that we are faced with an inversion of roles: Pope Francis has renounced being a spiritual leader, subordinating moral values such as life and family to political and social issues. This way, Pope Francis has become the political leader of the international left. On the other hand, Donald Trump is heading towards his re-election by attaching an ever greater moral dimension to his political mandate.

SIGFRIDO RANUCCI IN STUDIO

Pope Francis is identified as the leader of the international left. Perhaps, without overthinking it, the reason for these attacks against Pope Bergoglio are to be found in these words which our Giorgio Mottola recorded, by a speaker at this convention which featured Giorgia Meloni as a guest. In the void left by those parties which embodied values such as acceptance, socialism, ending inequality and preserving our ransacked environment, even a Pope who embraces Franciscan ideals can become the target of the far right. We’ve also seen who’s funding this target practice. We heard it from the words of Malofeev, the ultra-nationalist oligarch close to Putin. He openly admitted that

he's had relations with Salvini's Lega since 2013, and that he travelled to the US where he met with congressmen and others from American far-right circles, the world of the most conservative foundations. With the goal of defending families from the attack of the sodomites. And during this trip, he also met with foundations like Heritage and Atlas Network. As *Report* has uncovered, between 2016 and 2017 they provided 50 thousand euro in funding, either directly or indirectly, to the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists. It's the EU group which Giorgia Meloni joined in 2019. You could say it's Trump's trojan horse within the EU. It's pennies, but we shouldn't forget that, as we uncovered a few months ago, since Bergoglio was named the new Pope, the world of conservative American foundations has channelled an ocean of cash into Europe, about one billion dollars, to fund far-right and ultra-religious movements with the dual goal of bringing down the EU and destabilising the Bergoglio papacy. And precisely since she joined this EU coalition, and also since she started cultivating ties with Bannon, Giorgia Meloni began getting invited to the most important Republican events. Last February she took part in the prestigious National Prayer Breakfast, the annual Washington event dedicated to politics and prayer, organised by the powerful and controversial Fellowship Foundation, where president Trump also spoke. The honourable Giorgia Meloni was one of the few European politicians there. In this kind of soil, seeds of anti-Bergoglio sentiment could easily sprout in different places. But there is a thread that links them, which starts inside a prestigious research institute where people mention the smoke of Satan and ends in the headquarters of web-based news station Gloria TV, whose celestial name conjures images of prayer, but which is instead a three-headed entity that's especially active in attacking the Pope. It has one head in Switzerland, one in Moldova, and one not in heaven but rather in a tax haven.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

The Italian headquarters of the American anti-Bergoglio front is here in Rome, behind the ancient basilica of Santa Balbina. Passing through the inner courtyard, we arrive at the offices of the Lepanto Foundation, chaired by professor Roberto De Mattei, a Roman aristocrat who, in 2008, despite opposition from the academic world, was appointed by Berlusconi as vice-president of the CNR (National Research Council).

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

I gather that you oppose the theory of evolution?

ROBERTO DE MATTEI – PRESIDENT, LEPANTO FOUNDATION

Absolutely. Evolutionism is a myth, a fairy tale.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

How is it a fairy tale?

ROBERTO DE MATTEI – PRESIDENT, LEPANTO FOUNDATION

It's a pure lie. All humans on this Earth descend from Adam and Eve.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

You also have an interesting theory on the fall of the Roman Empire. You believe it was punishment for the rampant spread of homosexuality, correct?

PRESIDENT, LEPANTO FOUNDATION

Homosexuality is certainly a grave sin, condemned by God. And it can determine the end of a civilisation.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Since last year, the Lepanto Foundation has been staging protest prayers in the streets against Bergoglio's administration of the Church. They call themselves *Acies Ordinata*, the organised battle-line. The most crowded protest took place last September in Rome, in front of Castel Sant'Angelo. Representatives from the most influential American associations were in attendance, as were the directors of Lifesitenews and Churchmilitant, the websites which labelled the pandemic a divine punishment against Bergoglio.

ROBERTO DE MATTEI – PRESIDENT, LEPANTO FOUNDATION

Pope Francis is definitely contributing to spread confusion within the Church.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

You wrote: the smoke of Satan is enveloping the battlefield.

ROBERTO DE MATTEI – PRESIDENT, LEPANTO FOUNDATION

Historically, during the times of confusion which the Church encountered over the centuries, Popes were always the solution to the problem. Today, for the first time in history, we have a situation where a Pope is not the solution to the problem but the cause of the problem. Because unfortunately, tragically, Pope Francis himself is contributing to the self-destruction of the Church, and therefore helping to spread the smoke of Satan within the Church.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

The anti-Bergoglio propaganda is growing and spreading mostly online. There are single-issue webpages that have dozens of writers and unlimited budgets, Facebook pages attacking the Pope, and online platforms like Gloria TV, which runs a daily newscast that often peddles fake news about Bergoglio.

GLORIA TV NEWSCAST

The problem with Pope Francis are his ambiguous and equivocal words, his disloyal and cunning reticence, his opportunistic negligence. And the fact that he appears to approve of homosexual behaviours. This way, Pope Francis is seriously compromising his pastoral duty.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Gloria TV is one of the most violent and viral sites in the anti-Bergoglio online galaxy. It's structured like a social media site and every day it posts cartoons against Bergoglio, like this one where he's depicted as a clown, or this one where he's taking a selfie with the devil. Or even this one, where Bergoglio runs away from Christianity and into the arms of Satan.

ALEX ORLOWSKI – EXPERT OF ONLINE PROPAGANDA

There's a common element here. It's this yellow duck, which most people won't even notice, but experts in online communication know that the yellow duck is the symbol of anti-Putin dissent. So it basically symbolises the fact that Bergoglio opposes Putin. He's an enemy of the Russian nation, an enemy of Putin, which tells you exactly what side Gloria TV is on.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

The main office of Gloria TV is in a small town in the German-speaking area of Switzerland, at the ground floor of this building. There's a sign outside, but inside the room seems empty.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Is anyone here from Gloria TV?

WOMAN

No, there's nobody. Try ringing the bell.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

How long since you've seen anyone?

WOMAN

About one year.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

We're not the only ones who can't reach the Gloria TV people. In Italy, a number of law suits have been filed against them, but their servers are based in Moldova.

ALEX ORLOWSKI – EXPERT OF ONLINE PROPAGANDA

What's interesting is that here we're in the Italian page, but if we just go to the languages...

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

They have every language in the world.

ALEX ORLOWSKI – EXPERT OF ONLINE PROPAGANDA

Every language in the world. And anyone who knows how the web works will understand how expensive it is to manage so much content in all these languages, with a social media-style platform... we're talking about hundreds of thousands of euro.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

But it's impossible to figure out where the money is coming from. Indeed, all we know is that their domain belongs to Church Social Media, a totally anonymous company headquartered in the American tax haven of Delaware. And to think that, officially, the founder and administrator of the site is this simple village priest, Reto Nay, a supporter of the traditional Latin mass, dismissed from the Church for his extremist views.

RETO NAY - FOUNDER, GLORIA TV

The important thing is not doing good, doing good is an absolutely secondary matter! So stop it with all this socialist and communist talk, this chatter about poor people. The first poor person in your life is you!

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

While standing in front of the Gloria TV headquarters, we notice a man who stops by to pick up the mail. He looks incredibly similar to one of the latest known pictures of Reto Nay.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Are you Father Reto Nay?

TWIN OF RETO NAY

No, no.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

But it is you, you're him.

TWIN OF RETO NAY

No, I'm not him.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

You sure look like him!

TWIN OF RETO NAY

It's just an impression. We're brothers.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

You're identical.

TWIN OF RETO NAY

We are, how do you say... *zwilling*.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

I wanted to ask him who funds Gloria TV.

TWIN OF RETO NAY

Ah, no, no. I don't know. I don't care, go away!

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Why is the company based in Delaware?

TWIN OF RETO NAY

I don't care. Goodbye.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

And why are the servers housed in Moldova?

TWIN OF RETO NAY

Go away! Fuck off! I don't care.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Excuse me, don't tell me to fuck off.

TWIN OF RETO NAY

Goodbye! Ciao!

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Don't push me like that!

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

From the web to politics it's a tiny step, and since 2016 the anti-Bergoglio front in Europe has its own official party. It's called Coalition pour la vie et la famille and it was founded by Alain Escada of Belgium, a right-wing extremist known for his anti-Semitic views.

ALAIN ESCADA – PRESIDENT, COALITION POUR LA VIE ET LA FAMILLE

The Pope's goal is to overthrow the Church. This certainty is shared by numerous cardinals, bishops, Catholic heads of state, party leaders, as well as presidents of Catholic associations and groups around the world. Everyone has figured out that this

Pope is a subversive. So we must act in order to remove him from the papal throne. We must get rid of Bergoglio as soon as possible.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Dethroning the Pope is no small goal. That's why the Coalition, which is active in eight European countries, requested money from the European Parliament, which in 2017 allocated almost 500 thousand euro for Escada's party and its connected foundation. Escada, however, claims the money never actually arrived. In spite of this, the anti-Bergoglio propaganda machine has never stopped.

ALAIN ESCADA – PRESIDENT, COALITION POUR LA VIE ET LA FAMILLE

We cannot exclude that this Pope is controlled by occult forces.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

What do you mean by occult forces?

ALAIN ESCADA – PRESIDENT, COALITION POUR LA VIE ET LA FAMILLE

I mean Judaic-Masonic organisations that operate in the shadows to counter the influence of the Catholic Church.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

So Pope Francis is the expression of a Judaic-Masonic plan in Europe?

ALAIN ESCADA – PRESIDENT, COALITION POUR LA VIE ET LA FAMILLE

Today, Pope Francis is participating and contributing to the plan of the New World Order.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

The co-founder and secretary of the Coalition pour la vie et la famille is an Italian named Stefano Pistilli.

STEFANO PISTILLI – CEO, ARKUS NETWORK

Hello, my name is Stefano Pistilli, I'm the CEO of Arkus Network, the sole administrator of Amanda Tours.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA VOICEOVER

Last year, through the companies which he chairs, Pistilli was among the investors who acquired the Palermo football club, failing however to save it from bankruptcy. So what does a corporate manager and would-be sports exec like Pistilli have to do with the most vehement anti-Bergoglio European party, whose message is so steeped in neo-nazi rhetoric?

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

How did you meet Stefano Pistilli?

ALAIN ESCADA – PRESIDENT, COALITION POUR LA VIE ET LA FAMILLE

Through someone you might know, Roberto Fiore.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

We know him very well.

ALAIN ESCADA – PRESIDENT, COALITION POUR LA VIE ET LA FAMILLE

He introduced me to many people.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

And within the coalition, does he represent Fiore?

ALAIN ESCADA – PRESIDENT, COALITION POUR LA VIE ET LA FAMILLE

Yes, of course. But I also have ties with many people in the Lega.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Which members of the Lega are you in contact with?

ALAIN ESCADA – PRESIDENT, COALITION POUR LA VIE ET LA FAMILLE

Many Lega MEPs who put me in contact with the former minister for Family, Lorenzo Fontana.

GIORGIO MOTTOLA

Do you also have ties with Fratelli d'Italia? Giorgia Meloni?

ALAIN ESCADA – PRESIDENT, COALITION POUR LA VIE ET LA FAMILLE

Of course! I deeply admire Ms Meloni, a true champion of the traditional family.

SIGFRIDO RANUCCI IN STUDIO

So it all comes back to them! Who are the people attacking Pope Francis in the name of Christian fundamentalism? We have the far-right French extremist Alain Escada, who founded the party or movement known as "coalition for life and family". And the co-founder is an Italian, Stefano Pistilli, the one who acquired Palermo's football club before its bankruptcy. He's also the CEO of Arkus, a network connected to entrepreneur Salvatore Tuttolomondo, who's been involved in several bankruptcies, including the Fiscom case. Fiscom was the financial company tied to Enrico Nicoletti, thought to be the banker of the Banda della Magliana. We also find Pistilli in a trust fund with Roberto Fiore's daughter. A London-based trust fund. So that's the scene. Then there's Gloria TV, an online news station that reveals a fondness for Putin, churns out fake news, constantly attacks Bergoglio, and is legally based in Delaware. Among the values it preaches, transparency seems to be missing. The only one to show his face was the anchorman's identical twin, who didn't hesitate to flip us off when pressed for explanations. At least in these cases, it seems that religious fundamentalism is a cover for political fundamentalism. Then of course there are those who rigorously observe the Catholic doctrine like Cardinal Raymond Burke, but he too is very elusive when you ask him about an embarrassing wire tap, where he is heard promising political favours for Siri and Paolo Arata's son. Of course, if you look closely at anyone's life, even the saints among us, you're bound to find some blemishes. We prefer to stay away from strictly theological matters – complex issues that are not our area of expertise. Nevertheless, we can't help but note that criticism of Bergoglio is mainly tied to the ultra-nationalist scene close to Putin and the ultra-religious right wing close to Trump. In Italy, it resonates throughout neo-fascist and nazi-fascist circles. Indeed, rather than a topic of theological debate, Bergoglio seems to be a target within a cold war dynamic. And this happens at a time when the Church needs to be – and to appear – united. Because when we get through this virus, there'll be a wrecked humanity in need of help. And as Pope Francis says, we mustn't forget that true power is service: it is taking care of the weak, the elderly, and those who inhabit the outskirts of our heart. Next, we'll take a look through the lens of photographer Tony Gentile, who observed the lives of other people from his window, while he waited out his quarantine. He was the photographer of the two Popes, but is best known for capturing the iconic shot of Falcone and Borsellino, which became a symbol of the fight against the Mafia.