



In this Feb. 9, 2017 file photo, then-Msgr. Giovanni Angelo Becciu presides over an eucharistic liturgy, at the St. John in Latheran Basilica, in Rome. The powerful head of the Vatican's saint-making office, Cardinal Angelo Becciu, has resigned from the post and renounced his rights as a cardinal amid a financial scandal that has reportedly implicated him indirectly. (AP File/Gregorio Borgia)

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After celebrating Mass on the first Sunday in Advent in the company of 11 of his new crop of 13 cardinals, Pope Francis made a phone call to Cardinal Angelo Becciu, according to Italian media reports. The call came two months after Francis met with the disgraced and scandal-plagued cleric and accepted his resignation.

At that Sept. 24 meeting, where Francis also stripped Becciu of the privileges of his rank, the two reportedly discussed the financial scandals whirling around the Vatican, many of which concern decisions made by Becciu. The meeting left the cardinal feeling, he told the press a few days later, "as if the world weighed on his shoulders."

Hearing from the pope on Nov. 29, Becciu told reporters, was "comforting" and "a ray of light."

But the cardinal seems to have no intention of going quietly. On Nov. 16, Becciu filed charges against the Italian magazine L'Espresso, which broke most of the news about his financial dealings and his forced resignation. In the writ of summons, which was obtained by Religion News Service, he has asked for a payment of more than \$12 million, which he said will be donated to charity.

The complaint also expresses annoyance with the reports suggesting that Becciu's move from the Vatican's powerful Secretariat of State to the agency overseeing the making of saints was a form of sanctioning him. He also laments the use of the term "ex-cardinal" to describe his position — while Becciu has been stripped of his rights as cardinal, he still maintains his title.

In the Vatican, the writ also says, Becciu leads "an isolated life."

But if the bulk of Becciu's filing blames the media for misunderstandings, it also alleges that his demotion will result in lost professional opportunities and problems for the church.

For one thing, Becciu will no longer be able to attend the conclave that elects popes, and in a chapter of the legal document titled "On losing a chance," Becciu's lawyers suggest that their client, "given his prestigious curriculum," could have been a likely candidate for pope at the next conclave.



Cardinal Angelo Becciu speaks during a press conference on Sept. 25, 2020, in Vatican City. (RNS/Claire Giangravé)

His exclusion from the conclave, his legal team also alleged, "could lead to contesting the validity of the election of the Holy Father, with all the doctrinal implications that could derive from it," the document states, adding that this might contribute to increasing "divisions in the church."

Becciu's writ denies accusations that he transferred Vatican funds to the control of his brothers Antonino, Francesco and Mario. According to media reports, a beer company owned by Mario Becciu has received money originating from the Vatican Secretariat of State and the Catholic charitable network Caritas.

Becciu also faces criticism for his role in the investment of more than \$200 million in Vatican funds into a real estate project in London. Five Vatican employees, including

Becciu's personal secretary Fabrizio Tirabassi, were fired in October after a raid apparently related to an investigation into their ties to the investment.

In his writ, Becciu laid any responsibility for overseeing the London deal on Tirabassi and Monsignor Alberto Perlasca, a former department head at the Secretariat of State whose office has also been raided by Vatican authorities.

Some reports in Italian media have said that Becciu is being investigated by Vatican and Italian authorities, but the cardinal denied receiving any notification that he was under investigation. Becciu's lawyers say that *l'Espresso*, which it accuses of "mediatic homicide," "did not comply with either the criterion of truth or that of continence."

The document also denies Becciu's involvement in the criminal case against Cardinal George Pell, who was charged and later acquitted of sexually abusing minors in his native country of Australia. Pell, who previous to his trial spearheaded the Vatican's financial reform, had been at odds with Becciu over the management of Vatican money and departments. Some reports have suggested that Becciu played a role in Pell being called to Australia.

At Mass with the new cardinals on Sunday, Becciu was the elephant in the room as Francis reflected in his homily on the many times Jesus' disciples failed to remain awake and gave in to slumber at the time their teacher needed them most.

"We are not living in broad daylight, but awaiting the dawn, amid darkness and weariness," the pope said, dismissing ephemeral "early concerns" such as "money, fame, success."

While the Vatican did not respond to questions about what the pope told Becciu over the phone, Vatican observers debate whether it was a courtesy call or a wake up call.

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