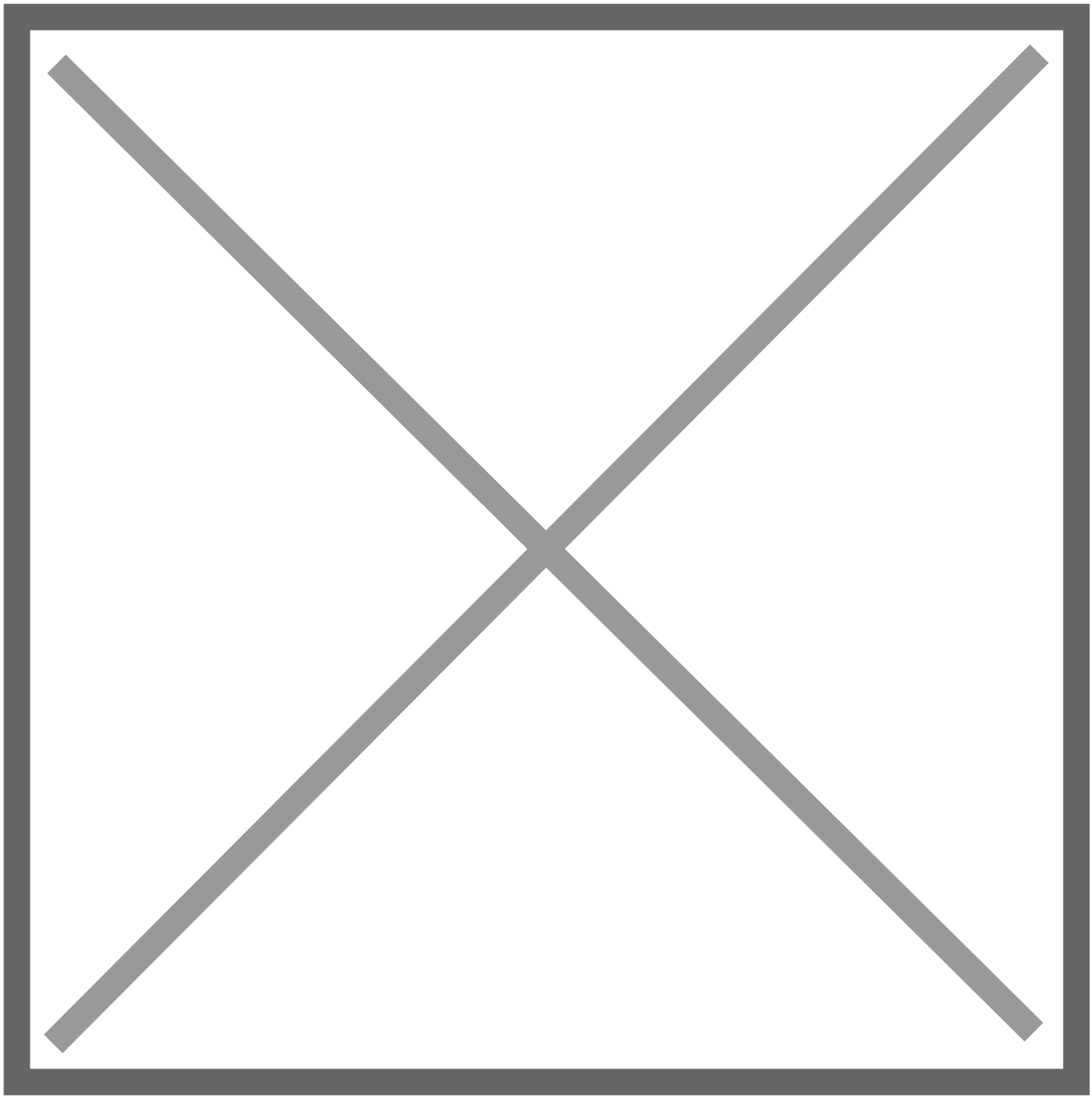
News
Vatican



Jesuit Fr. Juan Antonio Guerrero, prefect of the Vatican Secretariat for the Economy, is pictured in an undated photo. (CNS/Courtesy of Society of Jesus)



by Joshua J. McElwee

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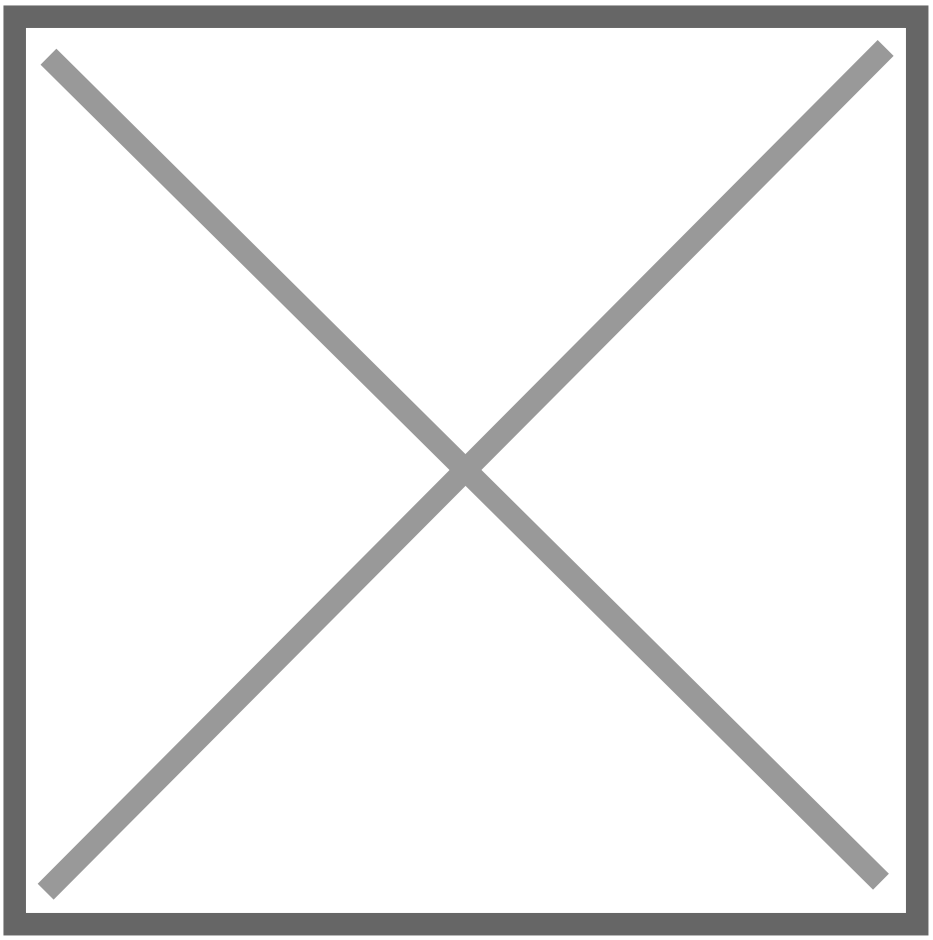
The Vatican's chief financial official admitted Oct. 1 that the city-state may have been "swindled" by previous investment advisers, as part of the Vatican's first public release of a detailed budget document in more than five years.

The admission by Jesuit Fr. Juan Antonio Guerrero Alves, head of the Vatican's Secretariat for the Economy, comes exactly a week after Pope Francis effectively fired one of the highest-ranking cardinals of the Catholic Church on Sept. 24 over apparent concerns of alleged financial corruption.

Speaking to the in-house outlet Vatican News upon the release of a 12-page 2019 budget document, the first published by the Vatican since 2015, Guerrero said it was "possible that in some cases the Holy See has been more than poorly advised, but also swindled."

The Jesuit, whose role is somewhat akin to finance minister, promised that he and Francis are dedicated to reforming the Vatican's financial structures and providing transparency over its investments.

"The faithful have a right to know how we use the resources of the Holy See," said Guerrero, adding that the Vatican "must be a house of glass."



Jesuit Fr. Juan Antonio Guerrero, prefect of the Vatican Secretariat for the Economy, is pictured in an undated photo. (CNS/Courtesy of Society of Jesus)

The new budget document primarily concerns the financial resources of the Roman Curia, or the about 60 bureaucratic entities that support the pope in guiding the universal church, which include the Vatican's congregations and pontifical councils.

The budget shows that in 2019 the curia had net income of 307 million euro ($360 million) and net expenses of 318 million euro ($373 million), meaning there was a deficit of 11 million euro ($13 million).

It appears the deficit would have been worse if not for contributions to the curia's budget by the other entities of the Vatican city-state, including the so-called Vatican Bank. Guerrero said those contributions totaled 43 million euro ($50 million).

Guerrero also gave an estimate on the value of the Vatican's total assets, including the budgets of the curia and the city-state, as equaling about 4 billion euro ($4.7

billion).

The Vatican's finances have been under intense scrutiny in recent weeks, with the release of a series of reports in Italian media focused on alleged misdealing by Italian Cardinal Angelo Becciu, who had been the head of the Vatican's sainthood office when he was fired by Francis last week.

The Vatican has not communicated any information about the specific allegations being made against Becciu, but he is known to have been involved in a controversial deal in which the Vatican invested hundreds of millions in a development project in London.

Vatican police have been investigating the deal for months. In October 2019 they conducted a highly unusual raid of the Secretariat of State's offices, collecting documents and electronic devices suspected to be connected to the deal.

Some outlets have alleged that the deal involved taking money out of Peter's Pence, a Vatican fund meant to support the pope's philanthropic aims. In his interview, Guerrero did not address the details of the purchase of the property, but said the "losses" on the deal were not covered by Peter's Pence but "other reserve funds of the Secretariat of State."

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Becciu has previously denied any allegations of impropriety in the London property deal, which has been described by Italian media as an opportunity to make a profit on upgrading office spaces into luxury apartments.

The cardinal told reporters Sept. 25 that Francis had accused him of embezzlement, nepotism and financial malpractice during their Sept. 24 meeting together, when the cardinal submitted his resignation. The cardinal has denied any wrongdoing.

Although it is not known who specifically Guerrero meant when he said advisers had "swindled" the Vatican, one Italian investor is facing Vatican charges on extortion and money laundering over the London deal.

Gianluigi Torzi was arrested June 5 and released provisionally ten days later. It is unclear if he is still facing charges, but his lawyer has called the situation a "gross

misunderstanding."

In terms of the line-by-line items in the Vatican's new budget, the document lists the curia's three biggest sources of income as: real estate management ($116 million); financial investments ($76 million); and external donations ($66 million).

The three biggest expenses: the Dicastery for Communication ($54 million); Vatican embassies ($51 million); and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples ($26 million).

This breaking news story is being updated.

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