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Vatican
Cardinal Angelo Becciu speaks with journalists during a news conference in Rome Sept. 25, 2

Cardinal Angelo Becciu speaks with journalists during a news conference in Rome Sept. 25, 2020, after he was asked by Pope Francis to resign as prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes. (CNS/Reuters/Guglielmo Mangiapane)



by Joshua J. McElwee

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Pope Francis is removing the ability of the Vatican's Secretariat of State to administer its own financial portfolio, in a major shake-up of authority among Vatican offices after a series of financial scandals that included the unusual resignation of a cardinal in September.

In an Aug. 25 letter, made public by the Vatican Nov. 5, Francis informed Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the prefect of the secretariat, that he shall transfer management and administration of all its funds to the office in charge of administering properties owned by the Vatican.

That office, known as the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See (APSA), is also directed to disinvest "as soon as possible" from the Vatican's controversial part in a development project in London.

The Secretariat of State, long considered the Vatican's most prestigious and powerful office, had previously maintained a budget and investment funds separate from the rest of the Vatican.

Francis also informed Parolin that the secretariat's funds will now be incorporated into the consolidated budget of the Holy See, and the secretariat "shall operate through an approved budget."

Vatican police have been investigating the London 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.

Bishop Nunzio Galantino, the president of APSA, estimated last week that the Vatican had incurred losses between $85 million and $194 million on the deal.

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Cardinal Angelo Becciu, who unexpectedly left his position as head of office responsible for overseeing Catholic sainthood causes and renounced "the rights connected to the cardinalate" on Sept. 24, is rumored to have been part of the deal.

Becciu, who had served as one of the secretariat's top officials until 2018, has also been accused in Italian media of inappropriately directing some of the office's funds towards a charity run by his brother.

Becciu has acknowledged sending funds to the charity but said they were sent for legitimate purposes.

The Vatican press office released the pope's Aug. 25 letter to Parolin along with a brief statement, which said the pope met Nov. 4 with Parolin, Galantino and other Vatican officials to discuss the transfer of financial authority away from the Secretariat of State.

The statement said the pope created a new commission, tasked with completing the transfer within the next three months.

The commission has three members: Galantino; Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, a top official at the Secretariat of State; and Jesuit Fr. Juan Guerrero Alves, the prefect of the Vatican's Secretariat for the Economy.

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