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Cardinal Angelo Becciu talks to journalists during a press conference in Rome, Sept. 25, 2020. (AP/Gregorio Borgia, file)

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Vatican City — April 30, 2025
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After being presented with documents signed by Pope Francis, disgraced Cardinal Angelo Becciu announced that he will not be attending the conclave to elect the next pontiff, he said in a statement provided by his lawyer on Tuesday (April 29).

"Having at heart the good of the Church, which I have served and will continue to serve with fidelity and love, as well as to contribute to the communion and serenity of the Conclave, I have decided to obey as I have always done the will of Pope Francis not to enter the Conclave while remaining convinced of my innocence," the statement read.

In 2021 Francis stripped Becciu of his rights as cardinal, but not of his title, after allegations the cardinal had mismanaged Catholic funds. He was later tried, along with nine other defendants, by a Vatican criminal court for his involvement in a controversial investment using Peter's Pence, the pope's charitable fund, that put the Catholic institution more than $150 million in the red.

The trial ended in a conviction for Becciu for embezzlement and fraud. He was sentenced to more than five years in prison. The cardinal has continued to maintain his innocence and his appeal is scheduled to start in September.

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Vatican experts voiced their concern that Becciu's irregular status — deprived of his rights but remaining a cardinal in name — could threaten the validity of the conclave.

To complicate matters, the Vatican prosecutors who successfully tried Becciu have come under suspicion of witness tampering. Text messages leaked to Italian media suggest that the prosecutors' star witness, Becciu's former secretary, Monsignor Alberto Perlasca, was instructed on how to testify by former Vatican financial adviser

Francesca Chaouqui, under direction by Vatican law enforcement.

With the issue of Becciu out of the way, the 133 cardinals who will elect a successor to Francis are free to attend to what they are looking for in a new pope and the future of the church.

This story appears in the **Who will be the next pope?** feature series. View the full series.