



As an inquiry into its murky finances looked poised to widen, the Vatican swiftly went on the defensive on Thursday, saying that the seizure of \$30 million from a Vatican bank account and the judicial investigation of the bank's two top officials were the result of a "misunderstanding."

On Tuesday, Italian officials announced an inquiry into the Vatican bank's top officials for having failed to explain adequately the origins of \$30 million transferred from one of its accounts in a Rome bank. Magistrates opened the investigation based on an alert from the Bank of Italy, the nation's central bank.

The authorities here said they had seized the \$30 million "preventatively" but have not pressed charges against the Vatican bank's chairman, Ettore Gotti Tedeschi, or its director general, Paolo Cipriani.

Like the clerical sexual abuse crisis that has troubled the Roman Catholic Church in recent months, the financial inquiry appeared to open another front in a quiet war between church and state in Europe — or perhaps signaled the further waning of an era in which the Vatican was seen as untouchable.

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