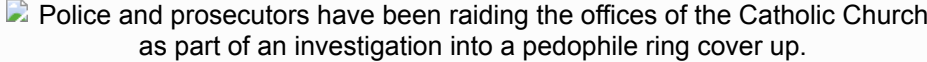


Police Seize Vatican Laptops In Largest Ever Pedophile Ring Bust, Vatican's gonna Vaticate

Baxter Dmitry News, World 3

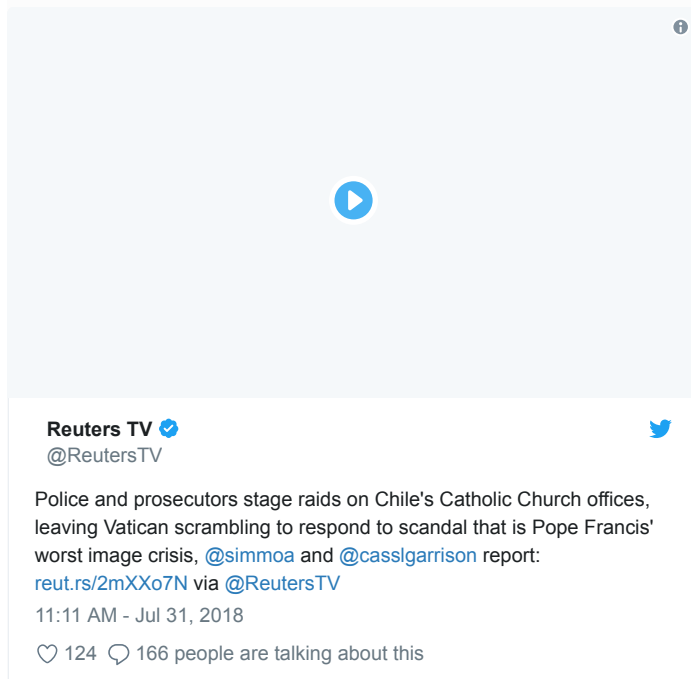




Police have been raiding the offices of the Catholic Church since June, seizing laptops and files belonging to Church officials and the Vatican, after prosecutors became frustrated with the Catholic Church's ongoing protection of pedophile priests.

According to Pope Francis and the Vatican, the Catholic Church is under no obligation to divulge information about pedophile priests, claiming that details of sexual crimes committed by Catholic officials are protected under canon law as '**Pontifical secrets**'

However, according to a report by *Reuters*, beginning since mid-June, there have been six raids on the offices belonging to the Catholic Church. Authorities have reportedly seized documents, files, computers, laptops and tablets belonging to Church officials and the Vatican.



The raids are a part of ongoing investigations into allegations of rampant child sexual abuse committed by Catholic priests all over the world. The raids have been staged as surprise sweeps, and are being regarded as the most aggressive ever undertaken by a judicial authority against the Roman Catholic Church.

Reuters reports: Two special envoys sent by Pope Francis to investigate a child sex abuse scandal in Chile were meeting priests and Church workers at a university in the Chilean capital last month when

aides rushed into the room with an alarming development: *police and prosecutors were about to start raiding Church offices.*

The envoys were 90 minutes into a seminar on how to investigate allegations of sex abuse committed by fellow clergy following revelations that hundreds of children might have been molested. For decades, the Roman Catholic Church in Chile quietly investigated such allegations without alerting police, but it now stands accused, even by Pope Francis himself, of a cover-up that allowed abusers to operate with impunity.

One of the clergymen listening to the envoys was Jaime Ortiz de Lazcano, the legal adviser to Santiago's archbishop. The aides rushed to his side and told him, "Father, go to the (Church offices) because there's going to be a raid'," Ortiz later recounted.

Police and prosecutors were staging simultaneous raids on Church offices less than a mile away from the university and outside the capital, looking for evidence of sex crimes the Church had not reported to police.

The surprise sweeps, ordered by Emiliano Arias, a provincial prosecutor, marked the start of what experts who track sex crimes in the Roman Catholic Church say is one of the most aggressive investigations ever undertaken by a judicial authority anywhere in the world.

Cardinal George Pell, the third most powerful man in the Vatican, is currently facing trial on child sex offenses.

Since that cold June afternoon there have been five more raids on Church offices to seize documents, phones, tablets and computers, leaving the Vatican scrambling to respond to a rapidly unfolding scandal that is the worst image crisis of Francis' papacy, now in its sixth year.

Leading the charge against the Church is Arias, 45, who is experienced in fighting organized crime and has a showman's fondness for taking television news crews on the raids.

Arias told Reuters in an exclusive interview that documents seized by his team contained 30 cases of alleged abuse dating back to 2007 that the Church had not reported to the police. While Reuters was allowed to film his investigators poring through seized documents, he declined to give details from the files because he said they named victims of abuse.

He also alleged that some local Church officials had tried to destroy documents but that his team – made up of two prosecutors, three lawyers and a unit of specialist sex crime police – had salvaged them. He declined to say who had tried to destroy them or how they had tried to get rid of them.

Pope Francis is under fire for protecting pedophile priests, often “punishing” them with a “prayers-not-prison” scheme that has enraged victims who are calling for the church to allow the priests to serve jail time for their crimes against children.

Arias says he wants to arrest both those who perpetrated the abuse and those who he says helped to cover it up. He arrested Oscar Munoz, a top aide to Santiago’s archbishop, Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati, after seizing church documents in which Munoz confessed to sex crimes. Munoz’s lawyer has acknowledged that some of the accusations in the documents are true but says he will challenge some others.

Arias last week named Ezzati, the most senior Roman Catholic in Chile, as a suspect, accusing him of covering up his aide’s alleged abuses. Ezzati has denied any wrongdoing and promised to cooperate.

Arias said he launched the raids after Church officials in Rancagua, the capital of O’Higgins region, told him he would have to make a formal petition to the Vatican to obtain information he was seeking because it was protected by ‘pontifical secret.’

The Roman Catholic Church says the ‘pontifical secret’ provision in canon law is intended to protect the privacy of all involved in sex abuse claims. Critics say bishops have historically used it as a shield to block inquiries from civil authorities.

“We are not talking about a fraud, or a theft, we are talking about crimes against children,” Arias said in an interview in his office in Rancagua, explaining his decision not to submit the request to the Vatican and instead get a judge to approve the raids.