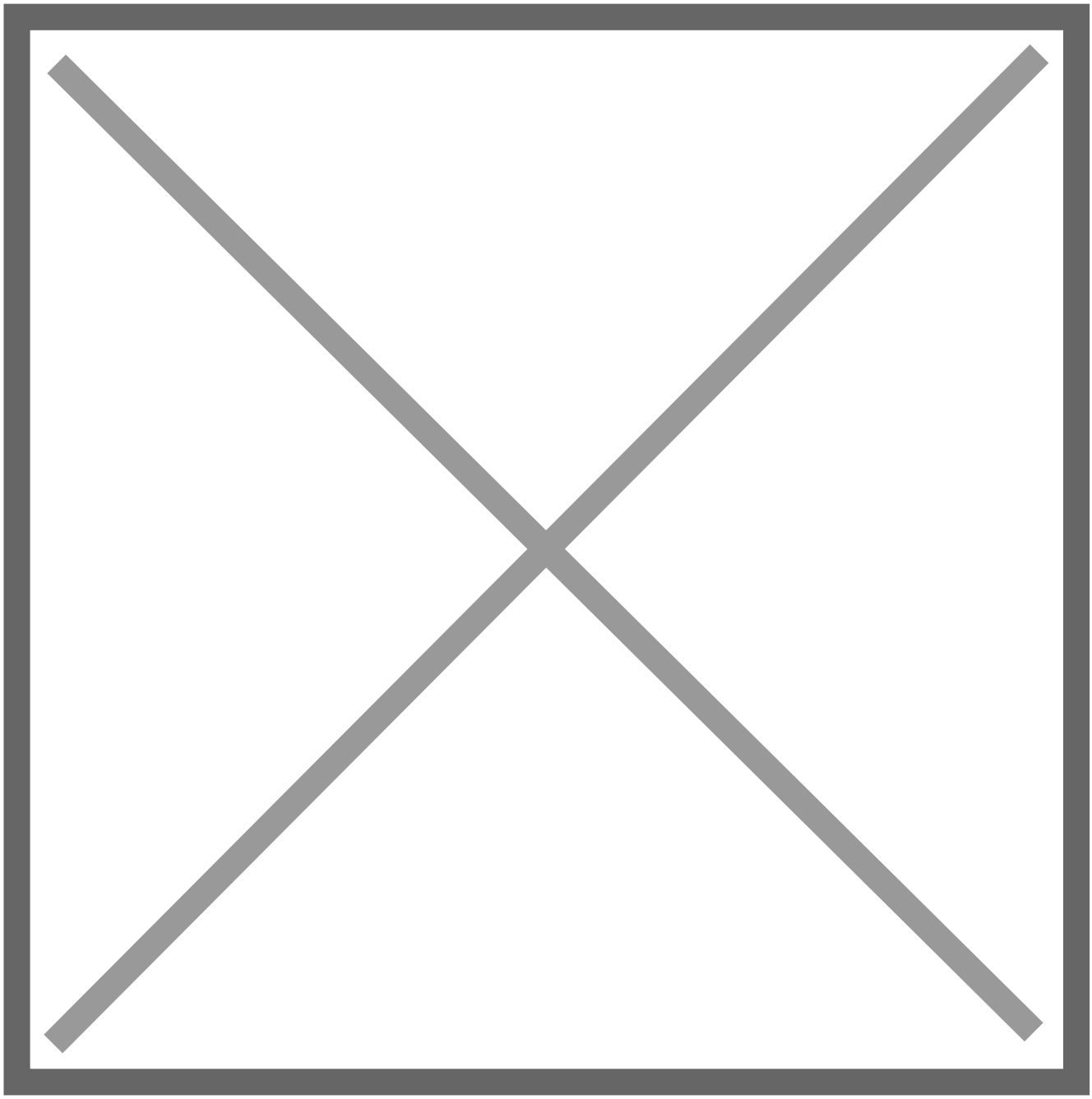
News
Vatican



This Oct. 14, 2020, file photo shows the Vatican City State criminal court during the opening of the trial of Fr. Gabriele Martinelli and Msgr. Enrico Radice. At a Vatican trial Feb. 24, former students of the St. Pius X Pre-Seminary told the court that there was an "unhealthy" environment at the seminary and that they endured psychological pressure and witnessed inappropriate touching by Martinelli, who is accused of abusing a younger student. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Vatican City — February 24, 2021
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Several former students told a Vatican court that they experienced an "unhealthy" environment at a minor seminary inside the Vatican.

The young men, who had studied at the St. Pius X Pre-Seminary, operated by the Diocese of Como inside the Vatican, took the stand Feb. 24 at the trial in the Vatican City State criminal court against Fr. Gabriele Martinelli, who is accused of sexually abusing a fellow student at the seminary.

Martinelli, 28, is accused of abusing a younger student, known as L.G., from 2007 to 2012. Although he and his alleged victim were under the age of 18 when the abuse allegedly began, the court accused him of continuing to abuse the younger student when Martinelli was already 20.

Msgr. Enrico Radice, the former rector of the seminary, also is standing trial and is accused of hindering the investigation into the abuse allegations, including by lying to Vatican investigators in 2018 when he affirmed with absolute certainty that he had no knowledge of sexual acts ever taking place at the seminary while he was rector.

The seminary and the Opera Don Folci, the religious institution that runs the minor seminary, are accused of failing to protect the young students.

Andrea Spinato, who attended seminary from 2000 to 2008, told the court that Martinelli had a "dominant" character and exerted his authority over "young and fragile boys."

Spinato testified that although he did not witness Father Martinelli's alleged abuse of a student identified as L.G., he did see him engage in inappropriate behavior and touching.

Another student, Christian Gilles Donghi, who attended the minor seminary for one month in 2009, told the court he left because of the "unsuitable environment," which was rife with gossip and ridiculing of other students.

He also said retired Bishop Diego Coletti of Como and Fr. Andrea Stabellini, then-vicar general, wanted to remove Radice as rector after hearing rumors of inappropriate behavior at the seminary.

However, Donghi said Cardinal Angelo Comastri, then-vicar for Vatican City State, was against the idea and dismissed reports of alleged abuse happening under Radice's watch as "falsehoods and slander."

He also echoed Spinato's claim regarding Martinelli's authoritative demeanor, adding that he viewed the priest as "arrogant and mentally disturbed."

Despite claiming that he never contacted Martinelli, Donghi was shown a message he sent to the priest in 2017 via Facebook Messenger after an exposé was published in the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera.

"I am reading the Corriere. I am close in prayer to those in the institution who have been slandered. In union through prayer," Donghi wrote to Martinelli.

When asked why he sent the message, the former student said he didn't remember and only "wanted a light to be shed on this matter."

Alessandro Flaminio Ottaviani, a student from 2010 to 2011, told the court the "unhealthy environment" at the minor seminary included inappropriate jokes and using female nicknames for priests, bishops and cardinals who were suspected of being gay.

Ottaviani also said he saw Martinelli inappropriately touching another student "as an implicit request for sexual intercourse." Nevertheless, Ottaviani added, Radice

"turned a deaf ear" and refused to act when made aware about Martinelli's alleged abuse.

The trial is set to resume Feb. 25 and Bishop Oscar Cantoni of Como is expected to testify.

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