News
Vatican
This Oct. 14, 2020, file photo shows the Vatican City State criminal court during the opening c

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. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Junno Arocho Esteves

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

July 15, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

A Vatican prosecutor requested that Fr. Gabriele Martinelli, who is accused of sexually abusing a younger student at the St. Pius X Pre-Seminary, be sentenced to six years in prison if convicted.

At the 11th session of the Vatican criminal trial July 15, Roberto Zanotti, the prosecutor, explained that the recommended sentence for the crimes of aggravated rape and aggravated lewd acts was reduced to exclude acts allegedly committed before Martinelli, then a student, turned 16 in August 2008. The abuse was said to have occurred between 2007 and 2012.

Zanotti also recommended that Msgr. Enrico Radice, the former rector of the minor seminary and Martinelli's mentor, be sentenced to four years in prison for "aiding

and abetting sexual violence."

Radice is accused of hindering the investigation into the abuse allegations. The seminary, which is operated by the Diocese of Como, and the Opera Don Folci, the religious institution that runs the minor seminary, also are accused of failing to protect the young students.

Although Martinelli and L.G., the victim, both were under the age of 18 when the abuse was said to have begun, the court accused the priest of continuing to abuse the younger student when Martinelli, not yet a priest, was already 20.

Advertisement

The court heard the testimony of two witnesses, Fr. Andrea Stabellini, a former judicial vicar for the Diocese of Como who was involved in the diocese's initial investigation in 2013, and Domenico Parrella, a former student at the minor seminary, who addressed the court briefly.

In his testimony, Stabellini said that despite his recommendations, retired Bishop Diego Coletti of Como did not launch a formal investigation into the accusations and simply brought Stabellini with him to Rome to visit the minor seminary.

However, he was asked to remain outside when the bishop spoke with Msgr. Radice, Cardinal Angelo Comastri, former archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica, and Fr. Angelo Magistrelli, the current rector of the St. Pius X Pre-Seminary and superior of the Opera Don Folci, Stabellini told the court.

After the meeting, the priest said, Coletti "told me to draft a memorandum and that everything had to be closed."

He also said Radice sent letters to him and Coletti requesting "that the matter be closed because it was '*fumus persecutionis*,' " a Latin phrase indicating a suspicion that a person is being persecuted.

The former judicial vicar said that shortly after drafting the memorandum, he resigned from his position. Stabellini also said the file of the investigation, which he reviewed with the current bishop of the diocese, Bishop Oscar Cantoni, "was very poor" and that "some acts were no longer there."

During closing arguments, Dario Imparato, the victim's lawyer, addressed the court for nearly an hour reconstructing the events of the alleged abuse and criticizing the investigation for focusing on the defendant's sexual orientation.

Martinelli's homosexuality is not the point, he said, but rather "the violent actions of a powerful and overbearing subject who, before satisfying his libido, wanted to satisfy his thirst for power," which came from "an unhealthy relationship" with the former rector, Radice.

"This case speaks of the failure of small, closed communities that are impervious to the outside world," which fosters abuse of power, he said.

Urging the court to convict the defendants, Imparato said he hoped that Martinelli would not be given the chance to "boast the medal of acquittal for deeds the defense considers grave."

"Often to try a system, you have to try an individual," he said.

The court will hear closing arguments July 16 from lawyers representing Martinelli and Opera Don Folci. A verdict is expected after the court's summer recess ends in late September.