News
Vatican



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

Nicole Winfield

View Author Profile

Associated Press

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

May 19, 2022

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

**VATICAN CITY — ** A Vatican cardinal testified Wednesday that Pope Francis himself ordered the ouster of the Holy See's auditor-general, turning the tables on a scandal that had sparked questions about the Vatican's commitment to financial transparency and accountability.

Cardinal Angelo Becciu opened a second day of questioning in the Vatican's big financial fraud trial by saying Francis had recently authorized him to reveal the details of Libero Milone's 2017 departure as the Vatican's first auditor-general. He did so to clarify his previous testimony, during which he declined to respond to questions about Milone "out of love for the Holy Father."

The Vatican announced June 20, 2017 that Milone had resigned two years into his mandate, without providing details. His ouster, as well as the removal of PriceWaterHouseCoopers as Vatican auditors, had long been cited by Cardinal George Pell, the Vatican's former financial czar, and others as evidence of possible shady dealings by Becciu and the secretariat of state and a step back in the Vatican's efforts at financial transparency and reform.

Advertisement

Three months after he left, Milone claimed in media interviews that he had been forced out after he uncovered evidence of possible illegal activity in the Vatican.

Becciu made clear Wednesday that it was Francis who ordered Milone out, because Milone had hired an outside investigative firm to spy on Vatican hierarchs like himself. He said Francis summoned him June 7, 2017 and asked him to tell Milone "that as of today he no longer had the trust of the Holy Father" and to ask him to submit his resignation.

"I have no responsibility concerning the resignation of Dr. Milone," Becciu said. "I merely followed an order received by the Holy Father, that was taken in full autonomy without any involvement."

It was the latest incidence in the Vatican's sprawling financial trial of defendants asserting that Francis had approved every major undertaking related to the Vatican's financial decisions and the scandal concerning the secretariat of state's

350-million-euro ($367 million) investment in a London property, which is at the center of the trial.

Prosecutors accuse Italian brokers, Vatican officials and others of fleecing the Holy See of tens of millions of dollars in fees and commissions, and of extorting the Vatican of 15 million euros to get full ownership of the London building. Becciu is accused of abuse of office, embezzlement and witness tampering, charges he denies.

Becciu underwent a full day of cross-examination by Prosecutor Angelo Diddi, much of it concerning the investments made by the secretariat of state while he was the No. 2, or substitute, and signed off on fund opportunities proposed to him by technical experts in the administration office.