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Pope's brother to daily: I'd testify in boy's choir sex abuse scandal but I know nothing

ROME (AP) The brother of Pope Benedict XVI has told a newspaper he is willing to testify in the sex scandal rocking Germany's Catholic Church, even though he says he knows nothing about the alleged abuse of boys in a choir he later led.

The Rev. Georg Ratzinger, in an interview published Sunday, also was quoted as saying by the Rome daily La Repubblica that there was "discipline and rigor" but no terror during his 30 years as head of the Regensburger Domspatzen choir in Germany.

The Regensburg Diocese said last week that a former singer came forward with allegations of sexual abuse in the early 1960s. The German newsweekly Der Spiegel has reported that therapists in the region are treating several alleged victims from the choir.

Ratzinger led the choir from 1964 till 1994.

The diocese has said it is hiring a lawyer to help it carry out a "systematic" clarification of abuse allegations.

A man who lived in the choir-linked boarding school until 1967 has contended that "a sophisticated system of sadistic punishments in connection with sexual lust" had been installed there. Der Spiegel quoted the man, Franz Wittenbrink, as saying it would be inexplicable that the pope's brother didn't know anything about it.

But Ratzinger says he knew nothing about any alleged abuse.

If German justice officials "ask me to give testimony, obviously I'd be very ready to do so, but I am not able to provide any information on any deed that could be punished, because I don't have any, I never knew anything about it," the former choir leader told La Repubblica.

"We're talking about another generation, of another generation than that of my years, and respect to the generation that leads the foundation and chorus now," the pope's brother told the paper.

Asked why cases of alleged abuse were "covered by silence" for so long, Ratzinger replied: "'I insist, I wasn't around in that situation, I wasn't at the choir when the cases they're talking about happened."

"I hope my chorus isn't damaged by this situation, but it's in my interest that light is shed on it," he added.

Asked by La Repubblica about victims' claims of a "climate of terror at the choir," Ratzinger was quoted as saying: "In my years, thus after those deeds, there was a climate of discipline and rigor, that was obvious, too _ we were aiming for a high musical, artistic level."

He said there was a "a climate of human comprehension, almost like a family."

The pope's brother also wondered what was behind the recent allegations.

"I want to note that I sense a certain animosity toward the church" behind the scandal, Ratzinger was quoted as saying.

Also Sunday, a prominent German Catholic activist group called on the pope to explain what he knew about abuses. Christian Weisner, the spokesman for We Are the Church, told the Associated Press on Sunday that Benedict must address whether there was abuse during his time as bishop of Munich and Freising between 1977 and 1981.

The Vatican said Saturday it backed the diocese's efforts to look into the "painful question in a decisive and open way."

Benedict has made no public comment on the choir scandal in his homeland, where the church has been jolted by abuse allegations from more than 170 former students who studied at some of the country's most prominent Catholic schools.

Ratzinger was asked by another Italian newspaper, Corriere della Sera, which interviewed him in his Regensburg home, if he had spoken to his brother about the abuse allegations.

"Not about this. It's the press that wants to know about these things," Ratzinger was quoted as replying.

Associated Press writer Juergen Baetz contributed to this story from Berlin.
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