

INTERVIEW / **FABRIZIA RAGUSO**

“Father Rupnik abused me, now I want to save other women”

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There couldn't have been a more inept manoeuvre than this one. The fantastical statement by the Vicariate of Rome which paints the Aletti Center as an idyllic place and sows doubts about the way in which the then Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

had arrived at the decision to excommunicate Rupnik, promptly overturned by Pope Francis, increasingly discredits Cardinal De Donatis, who from the beginning defended Rupnik to the bitter end, causing the rift with Mons. Bibbiari. And it discredits the Pope himself. Moreover, the visitor, Don Giacomo Incitti, investigated a crime reserved for the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, not the Vicariate; and even took the liberty to make insinuations about the latter's actions. Probably, it was this statement that drove the ex-Prefect, Cardinal Ladaria, to withdraw his participation at the next Synod. Meanwhile, some of the victims of Don Rupnik and Sister Ivanka have decided to publicly express their shock. *The Daily Compass* contacted the first signatory of the [Open Letter](#), Fabrizia Raguso, Associate Professor of Psychology at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, CR Braga.

Professor Raguso, can you briefly tell us about your story in relation to Don Marko Rupnik and Sr. Ivanka Hosta?

I met Rupnik in 1990, when I was invited to the youth sector national Catholic Action conference in Rome. At the time, I already had a degree in psychology, so I was continuing my training in family psychotherapy. I had been very involved in my diocese (Taranto) in the Catholic action youth sector. Between life in the Diocese and passion for my (future) profession, I had been wondering, for some years now, how to live my life more fully. After the Congress, to which Rupnik had been invited by Maria Campatelli to talk about the experience of "reconciliation" that he was carrying out at the Stella Matutina Pastoral Center in Gorizia, she continued to maintain contact with him. And months later, during the summer, I and some collaborators from the youth sector were invited to attend the first week of the Ignatian spiritual exercises. There Rupnik immediately began "advertising" the community still in formation, the future Loyola Community. A few months later, both Campatelli and I had already met Ivanka and some other sisters; we decided to enter the community. By August '91 I had left my job and was in Slovenia to start the novitiate.

Why did you decide to write this open letter?

I personally cannot stand defenceless and wait for everything to be decided behind our backs, without being informed of anything and without being allowed to participate in our destiny. Although, I have already asked for and received the indult and therefore am completely free of the community, I nevertheless feel a civil as well as ecclesial responsibility, to ensure that what has happened in these thirty years comes to light and justice is done. Many of the sisters are still suffering and have never received any help, either material or psychological. The others who signed with me, in some way, with certainly personal nuances, feel the same way.

In addition to the past, have you also thought about the present and the future?

Yes. We feel a responsibility for all the other people who may still be caught in Rupnik's and Ivanka's web, especially if they are young. In addition to Rupnik's sly way of inserting himself into civil, cultural and ecclesial life, Ivanka has also always continued to look for "vocations"; she was distressed that the community not only was not growing, but that many had left over time. They are truly dangerous; they must be stopped, definitively. Now, faced with this inept but also arrogant attempt to rehabilitate Rupnik and the Aletti Centre, we felt that expecting truth and justice from the ecclesial authorities was a waste of time. We had to take a decisive step: writing an open letter signed with our names and academic titles was a way to give a face and a name to the victims and counter the preconception that victims are "vulnerable" because they are naive or poorly educated.

Another easy way to discredit the accusations is to assume that the women have psychological problems. You are a psychologist and you know them personally: what can you tell us?

We are people who have developed psychological difficulties after abuse; and some during their stay in the community, due to excessive psychological pressure, due to the non-sense of many decisions and impositions. As is always the case. Ultimately, the psychological impact of these experiences is very similar both in the context of religious life and in that of family abuse or intimate relationships. Because what is abused is trust, the confident "abandonment" to your superior, or, in our case, to a friend: this is how we considered Ivanka, as we, pioneers of the Community, were almost all of the same age. And to a friend with whom we had wanted to have a strong, new spiritual experience, of which we were convinced. In the spiritual life, abuse destroys the abused person's relationship with God; it is an aspect that frequently returns in the testimonies of victims of spiritual abuse. I am trying to theoretically delve deeper into the relational and psychosocial contexts that can facilitate psychologically abusive relationships, in

religious life as in other existentially important relationships. Because what opens the way to sexual abuse is above all psychological abuse which also uses the control of spiritual life.

Suppose you have never read anything in the press. Based on your direct experience and the confidences you have received, what can you say about Rupnik and Ivanka?

I would say that they are two people who, for different reasons, which I honestly don't know, have developed almost a "mystical" delirium of omnipotence. Mystical not in the sense of "visions", but of feeling invested with a mission, with a charisma, which in reality was just a personal project. I have always seen Rupnik as truly narcissistic and very driven to assert himself, to gain fame and power; very choleric when opposed. Ivanka gives the impression that she in turn has suffered violence or some form of abuse, and that subsequently she built "a parallel story": in addition to the authoritarianism with which she led the community after the separation from Rupnik, she has created a myth about his family as if it were perfect and the society of Slovenian Catholics as if they were the only truly believers. Therefore they were imposed as absolute models, especially for us Italians.

There's a common element in their two cases, for both the administrative path was chosen instead of the canonical process. What do you think about this?

It was an unwise and very open to manipulation course of action to take. There are those who say, among canonists, that it is a common way of proceeding, starting from the assumption that "punishment" serves conversion. But in this case, since neither of the two have ever faced a confrontation either with the Church or with the victims, and both essentially deny every fact and every responsibility, not having subjected them to a fair trial has not helped to obtain truth and clarity, nor to ensure that they truly "converted".

The statement by the Vicariate of Rome has perhaps had the opposite effect to that hoped for: numerous few media outlets consider the Rupnik case to be the heaviest blight on this pontificate. In just over a week there will be a new consistory: do you think that some cardinals will finally be able to raise the issue?

I sincerely hope so. Just as I believe that, as the Gospel and every healthy relational theory remind us, "a house divided against itself cannot exist"; I think that a Church so torn apart by these unclarified intrigues will not be able to hold together much longer. It honestly pains me that the bishops still don't understand that hiding evil destroys the Church; it doesn't preserve it at all.