

AMBIGUOUS DEFENCE

Jesuits expel Rupnik absolving themselves

ECCLESIA

25_07_2023



**Luisella
Scrosati**



The only clear-cut thing about the affair involving Marko Ivan Rupnik is his now definitive dismissal from the Society of Jesus. The ex-Jesuit chose not to present any appeal to the dismissal decree that was delivered to him on 14 June last, within the limit allowed by Canon Law of thirty days. And so, the Delegate for the Interprovincial Houses and Works of the Society of Jesus in Rome (DIR), Fr Johan Verschueren, was finally able to declare in

his *Open Letter* of 24 July that "according to the new canonical norms in this regard", Rupnik "is no longer a Jesuit religious".

Verschueren offers his version of events, choosing the monotonal refrain of defending the poor Society of Jesus. Along the lines of: we tried our best, but Rupnik is stubborn and left us no alternative. In fact, the Jesuit first explains that the Society did not want to go down the road of dismissal from the Order earlier in order to bind Rupnik "to his responsibilities in the face of so many accusations, inviting him to embark on a path of truth and confrontation with the evil denounced by so many people who have felt hurt". But faced with his "insistent and stubborn inability to confront the voice of so many people who have felt wounded (...) we found it necessary to dismiss him from the Company".

Regarding Rupnik's dismissal from the clerical state, Verschueren perseveres with the strategy of saving the good name - what is left of it - of the Jesuits: "It is not the responsibility of the Society of Jesus per se, but of the Holy See. As Major Superior, in the different circumstances of these long and complex affairs, I have always wished to be able to start a process that could guarantee the judicial ascertainment of the facts, the right to defence and the consequent sanctioning penalties (or possible acquittal). However, various reasons, among which the current limits of the regulations concerning similar situations, have not allowed this". Again along the lines of: we tried our best, but fate was against us; "The gods have spun the thread of fate for wretched mortals" (Iliad, XXIV, 523).

P. Verschueren does not explain either what the current limits of canonical regulations are or what the other reasons are. Aspects that might perhaps have been a tad helpful in clarifying the matter, but were evidently not tailored to the Order's all-out line of defence. But had he not *written* that "when Fr Marko Rupnik's dismissal from the Society becomes definitive, it will be possible to further investigate the issues". And what investigation would that be?

The Jesuit redirects responsibility to the Vatican, taking care not to mention any names or surnames, but taking it out on the "regulations", and... case solved. No frank public confrontation: too risky. Instead he entrusts his favourite journalists - Nicole Winfield for *Associated Press* and Iacopo Scaramuzzi for *Repubblica* - with an attempt at argumentation. AP - you will remember - was the one that planned the *interview* in which Pope Francis said he knew nothing about the Rupnik affair; Scaramuzzi is the "chum" of Fr. Spadaro, who is Francis' "chum". In short, maximum transparency.

The former explains that this would be because “at the time of Rupnik's alleged abuse, the Vatican usually did not punish sexual or other misconduct between priests and adult women, considering such relationships consensual”. More recent improvements in church legislation “cannot be applied retroactively, and the Vatican generally hates to make exceptions to punish past misconduct involving adults”. Someone should explain why in reality, in this pontificate, numerous priests are being dismissed with approval in a specific form by the Pope, with fewer and less serious accusations than those levelled against the ex-Jesuit, and without even giving them a chance to defend themselves, whereas in Rupnik's case there is claimed to be a problem with canon law.

And the truth is very simple: it is Pope Francis who assured Rupnik that he would never sign anything against him. This is the reason why Rupnik has always behaved snootily, has gone to great lengths to get himself kicked out of the order, thus ridding himself of those inconvenient - but purely formal - restrictions from his superiors. Just as it was Pope Francis who signed the speedy removal of the excommunication and wanted the previous crimes to be allowed to lapse.

And this despite the fact that Scaramuzzi's article tries to tell the magical fairy tale that all Jesuits, both those dressed in black (or plain clothes) and those dressed in white, acted with transparency and responsibility. Spadaro's friend first succeeds in laying the responsibility for the removal of the excommunication on the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, without minimally involving the Pope. Then he plays the same tune for the abuses committed in the 1990s: the Society of Jesus is said to have recommended "the Doctrine of the Faith to conduct a criminal trial, waiving the statute of limitations, but the Vatican dicastery, led at the time by another Jesuit, Cardinal Luis Ladaria, in October 2022 decided not to proceed, saving him for the second time".

Cardinal Ladaria is the designated victim on whom all responsibility for the Rupnik case is dumped. The Pope knew nothing about it, while the Jesuits' resolute actions were thwarted by their ex-Prefect confrere. As likely as Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

The Society of Jesus is said to have been exemplary in doing what it could, namely containing Rupnik with restrictive measures. It is a pity that these measures were not made public, so the ex-Jesuit could continue to do what he wanted, without anyone bothering him. It is Scaramuzzi himself who confirms this, just as he is trying to show the transparency of the upper echelons of the Society of Jesus. In the autumn of 2022, when Ladaria (sic!) allegedly decided not to waive the statute of limitations, Fr

Verschueren, "had a note posted on the notice boards of the religious order making it known, for the first time publicly, that the Jesuit was subject to restrictions".

Clear? Until October 2022, practically no one knew of the restrictions hanging over Rupnik, who was thus essentially free to move as he wished. And indeed he did. Now, to impose secret restrictions that no one monitors means only one thing: to show that you have formally taken action, but in practice to let things continue to go the same way. Will we have to wait for the coming of a Clement XV to resolve the issue at the root?