

U-TURN

Pope waives statute of limitations: Rupnik goes on trial

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**Luisella
Scrosati**



Apparently, it's not always true after thunder comes rain. The Vatican Press Office's [Bulletin](#) yesterday, Friday 27 October, gave some surprisingly positive news. It was announced that "the Holy Father has asked the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith to

review the case” that has been at the centre of continuous controversy since December last year: Rupnik and his abuse.

The Pope has finally “decided to lift the statute of limitations to allow a trial to take place”. This is basically the go-ahead to open the Pandora's box on the nine abuses committed in the 1990s, deemed credible by the CDF, and the fifteen others later admitted by the Jesuits. The communiqué specifies that the Pope's decision was prompted by pressure from the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, which "brought to the Pope's attention that there were serious problems in the handling of the Fr Marko Rupnik case and lack of outreach to the victims".

“Lack of outreach to the victims” is obviously an understatement: Francis selects his 'neighbours' very carefully and knows how to make time for his kindred. He has been able to find time to meet Sr Jeannin Gramik and her bodyguards, to shoot the documentary for Disney +, to give more interviews than his *motu proprio*, to even converse with Maria Campatelli, Rupnik's defender to the hilt, complete with photos of the amiable encounter. Just about everything and anything except receive a single one of Rupnik's victims.

We must also be sincerely grateful to Cardinal O'Malley who, perhaps irritated by the Vicariate of Rome's decidedly arrogant comment last September (see [here](#)), found the courage to point out that there were indeed 'serious problems' in the management of the ex-Jesuit affair, but probably not in the way the canonist Don Giacomo Incitti, long arm of Cardinal De Donatis, intended, by throwing mud on the work of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. His will not be an easy task, because if he wants to go all the way, he will have to step on many toes, including those of the Pope himself. It is far more likely that Pope Francis will now play the part of the one who has been bamboozled by prelates unworthy of his trust. The clue will be in how many and which heads will be chopped off: some 'old friends' might be sacrificed, starting with De Donatis, in order to save the boss.

In this way, the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors also seeks to make reparation for the very bad impression made by Father Hans Zollner, when he admitted that he never replied to a letter he received on 15 June 2022, which raised numerous problems concerning his then Jesuit confrere.

“The Pope is firmly convinced that if there is one thing the Church must learn from the Synod, it is to listen attentively and compassionately to those who suffer, especially those who feel marginalised by the Church”, the statement continued. Who

must learn: the Church or Francis? Because the Church had listened to the woman who had led to Rupnik's excommunication: it had listened to her and punished the culprit. But it was the Pope who thwarted everything. As the Church had listened to the other women and was willing to open a trial, but it was the Pope who prevented it. Was it necessary to wait for the Synod to understand that victims must be listened to?

The Church, however, is not only called to listen, but also to judge and fairly punish the guilty. Otherwise, there is little point in speaking up and being heard. All the more so when the accusations are multiple and of enormous gravity. Because the women abused by Rupnik are struggling daily with depressive syndromes, feelings of shame, and all that dark world that moves within those who have experienced abusive situations. We must therefore be vigilant that this process does not turn into a farce, but is carried out in the manner and within the timeframe required by law.

It is then difficult not to ask the question: why did the Pope wait until now before making this decision? It may be that he has really been cornered, especially after the news of Rupnik's reception in the diocese of Koper (see [here](#)), in order to continue to play the wandering priest, as if nothing had happened. Among other things, Bishop Jurij Bizjak wanted to play the part of the pseudo-guarantor bishop, solemnly declaring that "*until Rupnik is found guilty before a court of law, he enjoys all the rights and duties of a diocesan priest*". Too bad that Rupnik has already been found guilty; and too bad that even the walls know that a bishop, when preparing to welcome an excommunicated priest into his diocese, is obliged to take all prudential information about his person. All the more so when it is a 'gossiped about' priest. Either Bizjak has forgotten, or he has received sufficient proof from the Jesuits that this character is not the most recommendable, since he has been dismissed from the order.

No less important is the Synod factor: an assembly that has made listening, welcoming, the promotion of women, and transparency its banner is not in perfect consonance with the way the Rupnik affair has been handled. The Pope who at the Synod points the finger at clericalism is the same one who is protecting the worst example of clericalism in modern times.

It is certainly a curious coincidence that the Pope took this decision just as Cardinal Ladaria packed his bags and in his place arrived 'Tucho'. Who, from the very first days, immediately safeguarded himself by saying that he would never deal with issues concerning the protection of minors and vulnerable people, because he was not competent in the matter. The fact remains, however, that it will not be possible to bury the work begun by Cardinal Ladaria, who followed, in this matter, the hard line of

Ratzinger.