

TRIAL

Rupnik case, time for justice not more patience

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"A new trial has recently begun, judges were appointed. And processes for justice take a long time. I know it's very difficult for the victims to ask that they be patient, but the Church needs to respect the rights of all people". On 4 November, Pope Leo XIV made these comments in response to a question from an EWTN journalist. The reference is to Father Marko Rupnik, who has been accused of sexually, psychologically and spiritually

abusing around twenty nuns over several decades. It is also alleged that this abuse was the inspiration for his artistic works.

On this subject, the Pope had previously said: "Certainly in many places, precisely because of the need to be sensitive to those who have presented cases of being victims, the artwork has been covered up. Artwork has been removed from websites. So, that issue is certainly something that we're aware of".

Finally, he stated a general principle: 'The principle of innocent until proven guilty is also true in the Church. Hopefully this trial, that is just beginning, to give some clarity and justice to all those involved.'

As the *Daily Compass* has noted before, this method of **impromptu interviews** is not the most appropriate for a pope, not least because he is forced to respond to questions that sometimes require much more in-depth study with a few off the cuff remarks. This is certainly the case with Rupnik. On this occasion, the Pope probably could not have said much else, but the story of the former Jesuit's phantom trial cannot be dismissed with two comments; doing so risks humiliating the alleged victims.

Furthermore, the way the whole Rupnik affair has been conducted under Francis's pontificate is a huge scandal for the Church that cannot be underestimated, and an adequate response is required to restore credibility to the issue of abuse. This is not least because, in this case, we are dealing not just with the abuse committed by a depraved priest, but with a real 'Rupnik system' involving Jesuit superiors and various cardinals who allowed the Slovenian priest to act with impunity for many years and who are still protecting him.

On the subject of patience, it should be noted that the first complaints made by alleged victims to Jesuit superiors regarding Father Rupnik's behaviour date back to the 1990s — at least thirty years ago. However, they were only taken seriously in 2021 when, at the instigation of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), the Society of Jesus launched an investigation. This found the allegations credible and recommended a criminal trial to the CDF. However, nothing came of it, as in October 2022, the CDF declared the case to be time-barred. In the meantime, however, another very serious case concerning Father Rupnik emerged, involving an accusation in 2018 of 'absolving an accomplice of a sin against the sixth commandment'. This was deemed true, and in May 2020, Father Rupnik was excommunicated. However, the excommunication was lifted a couple of weeks later, in a manner that was never clarified. It should be noted, however, that only the Pope can cancel an excommunication.

It was only when the scale of the scandal became public, with its shocking testimonies from victims, and following the intervention of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, that Pope Francis decided in October 2023 to waive the statute of limitations and allow a trial. However, the trial never started, and after further revelations about the abuse and media pressure, the appointment of 'five independent judges' was announced last month. Their names, qualifications, and selection process remain unknown. Given what has happened, this procedure raises many suspicions, not least because, in the meantime, Father Rupnik — dismissed from the Society of Jesus for disobedience, yet incardinated by a sympathetic bishop in the Diocese of Capodistria in Slovenia — continues to work and travel in Rome and the surrounding area, despite the restrictions imposed on him. Furthermore, it has **recently emerged** that he has continued to preach at the Santa Severa House, run by the Aletti Centre, of which he was director for a long time.

In light of all this, asking for patience from the victims and respect for the rights of the accused seems ironic, to say the least, (read our dossier here). There have already been thorough investigations into Father Rupnik; the accusations have all been deemed credible; and the former Jesuit has already been excommunicated. It should not take long to ascertain the truth and arrive at a verdict. However, the network of protection and complicity is more active than ever. To refresh one's memory, Father Rupnik's great protector is the former vicar of the Diocese of Rome, **Cardinal Angelo de Donatis**. If the former Jesuit is still working in the Diocese of Rome, this suggests that the current vicar, Cardinal Baldassarre Reina, is also curiously distracted. Let us also mention the current Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Victor

Manuel Fernández, who took a full two years to announce the start of the trial. He justified this by saying that there are 'perhaps more serious cases, but with less media coverage'.

More serious cases? Are there more serious cases than that of a priest who abuses nuns for decades, composes artistic works during the abuse, absolves an accomplice in sin and commits continuous sacrilege, all while being protected by a network of superiors and prelates that reaches as far as the Pope? It would be highly unusual if cases more serious than this had never appeared in the press.

Perhaps Pope Leo should consider all this and decide that patience has run out.

On another occasion, Pope Prevost rightly said that the mission of the Church is greater than just focusing on the problem of abuse. However, it is precisely for this reason that it is important to resolve the scandals inherited from his predecessor quickly and clearly, in order to recover credibility and move on.