Vatican
Vatican News
Pope Francis greets Jesuit Father Marko Rupnik during a private audience at the Vatican in thi

Pope Francis greets Jesuit Fr. Marko Rupnik during a private audience at the Vatican in this Jan. 3, 2022, file photo. Rupnik, whose mosaics decorate chapels in the Vatican, all over Europe, in the United States and Australia, has been dismissed from ministry by the Jesuits after being accused of abusing adult nuns in Slovenia. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Nicole Winfield

View Author Profile

Associated Press

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Rome — June 15, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Francis' Jesuit religious order said on June 15 that it has expelled a prominent Slovenian priest from the congregation following allegations of sexual, spiritual and psychological abuses against adult women.

A statement from the Jesuits, obtained by the Associated Press on Thursday, said that Fr. Marko Ivan Rupnik was dismissed from the Jesuit order by decree on June 9 "due to stubborn refusal to observe the vow of obedience."

Rupnik is one of the most celebrated religious artists in the Catholic Church, and his mosaics decorate churches and basilicas around the world, including at the Vatican.

Late last year, the Jesuits acknowledged he had been accused by several women of sexual, spiritual and psychological abuses over a 30-year period. But he had largely

escaped punishment, apparently thanks in part to his exalted status in the church and at the Vatican, where even Francis' role in the case came into question.

The Jesuit statement said Rupnik has 30 days to appeal the expulsion order. He remains a priest, just not a Jesuit priest.

The Rupnik scandal exploded in December when Italian blogs and websites reported that consecrated women had complained for years about abuse only to have their claims discredited or covered up by Rupnik's superiors. The case had remained a problem for the Vatican and the Jesuits because of suspicions that the charismatic priest received preferential treatment by the Holy See, where a Jesuit pope reigns and Jesuit priests are in top positions at the sex abuse office.

Advertisement

After the allegations erupted, the Jesuits reluctantly admitted Rupnik had been declared excommunicated in 2020 for having committed one of the gravest crimes in church law — using the confessional to absolve a woman with whom he had engaged in sexual activity — but had repented and had the sanction quickly removed.

The next year, Rupnik was accused by nine women of having sexually, psychologically and spiritually abused them in the 1990s at a community he co-founded in Slovenia. Even though the Jesuits recommended a church trial, the Vatican's sex abuse office refused to waive the statute of limitations and declared the crimes too old to prosecute.

That outcome underscored how the Catholic hierarchy routinely refuses to consider spiritual and sexual abuse of adult women as a crime that must be punished, but rather a mere lapse of priestly chastity that can be forgiven, without considering the trauma it causes victims.

After the scandal, the Jesuits invited anyone with other claims against Rupnik to come forward, and 15 people did.

The Jesuits then asked Rupnik to respond, but he refused, according to the statement Thursday.

“Thus, we forced Father Marko Rupnik to change communities and accept a new mission in which we offered him one last chance as a Jesuit to come to terms with his past and to give a clear signal to the many aggrieved people who were testifying against him to enter a path of truth,” the statement said. “Faced with Marko Rupnik’s repeated refusal to obey this mandate, we were unfortunately left with only one solution: resignation from the Society of Jesus.”

Francis' role in the Rupnik case also came into question, given the unusually quick turnaround in which he had been declared excommunicated and then had the penalty removed — a period of less than a month — as well as the Vatican's refusal to waive the statute of limitations when the second set of allegations were lodged.

In a Jan. 24 interview with the Associated Press, Francis denied he had any role in the handling of Rupnik’s case, other than to intervene procedurally to keep the second set of accusations from the nine women with the same tribunal that had heard the first.

He added that he was shocked by the allegations against Rupnik, with whom he had reportedly been close.

"For me, it was a surprise, really. This, a person, an artist of this level — for me was a big surprise, and a wound."