



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on November 13, 2020

Pope's Former Envoy, on Trial for Sex Assault, Could Escape Prison Time if Convicted

The sexual assault trial for the former Vatican ambassador to France began this week, although he was exempted from being present at court after he provided a doctor's note saying it was too dangerous for him to travel from Rome to Paris, where the trial is being held, amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The lawyers for the accusers of retired Archbishop Luigi Ventura asked that the trial be pushed back due to his absence. But the court [ruled against](#) the postponement and then considered testimony from various men who claimed Ventura groped their buttocks in public.



Photo: solidcolours/iStock/Getty Images Plus

Among the accusers was a former seminarian, Mahe Thouvenel, who claimed the clergyman grabbed him repeatedly during Mass in December 2018.

"These are facts that happened to me, that hurt me, and I suffered a lot," Thouvenel said.

Asked in court what he would have said to Ventura had the former envoy attended the trial, Thouvenel replied: "Monseigneur, why did you do that?"

Ventura is being tried on five counts of alleged sexual assault. Three of his alleged victims, who filed police complaints of inappropriate touching and groping, were present in the courtroom.

According to Thouvenel, his seminary kicked him out after he filed a police complaint. Upon being questioned by Ventura's lawyer, he put his right hand on the top of his right buttock to demonstrate one of the spots where he was allegedly groped.

"It's violent," Thouvenel said. "It sticks in your memory."

Another accuser, Mathieu De La Souchere, claimed Ventura touched his buttocks repeatedly during a reception at Paris City Hall.

The judge said that, during prior questioning, Ventura explained his behavior by saying he had a "Latin" temperament and that there was nothing sexual about his gestures.

"Mr. Ventura is lying," De La Souchere told the court.

Ventura has denied the charges. The penalty for sexual assault in France is up to five years imprisonment and fines.

The Associated Press reports:

[Ventura]'s lawyer, Solange Doumic, argued that the case had been blown out of proportion, to become "the trial of the Vatican, of hidden homosexuality at the Vatican."



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She characterized the accusations as “minor.” She said Ventura touched hips or backs but his intentions were never sexual, that any gestures lasted no more than a few seconds, and that he might not have realized they could be regarded as inappropriate. She also said Ventura had experienced behavioral problems since he was operated on for a brain tumor in 2016.

Explaining his absence to the court, she said Ventura’s doctor deemed it “completely unreasonable” for the 75-year-old to travel to Paris as its hospitals are again struggling to handle coronavirus cases.

The Vatican last year surprisingly lifted the ambassador’s diplomatic immunity, making a trial possible. But during the Tuesday hearing, prosecutor Alexis Bouroz produced a Vatican letter, which states that Rome still reserves the right not to apply any eventual punishment for Ventura should he ultimately be convicted.

The prosecutor also agreed to go forward with the trial without Ventura present, expressing his belief that the retired archbishop will not attend future court hearings, making any delay at this point a waste of time.

“The only question I ask myself is why does he deny the facts?” Bouroz asked. “This question will remain unanswered.” The prosecutor asked for a 10-month suspended jail term.

The lawyers for the accusers were incensed at the possibility that the Vatican might spare Ventura of any punishment.

“The Holy See doesn’t give a hoot for your deliberations,” Thouvenel’s lawyer, Edmond Frety, told the three judges.

According to the court, it will deliver its final verdict on Dec. 16.

AP notes, “The Vatican recalled Ventura last year and he later retired. The Vatican has recalled other diplomats when they get into trouble during overseas postings.”

Ventura’s hearing took place the same day that the Vatican released a [highly anticipated report](#) about Theodore McCarrick, a once powerful and politically connected cardinal whom Pope Francis defrocked in 2019 after a Vatican investigation confirmed decades of rumors that he was a sexual predator. The report claimed that Francis did not restore McCarrick to activity while having knowledge of the accusations against him, as claimed by Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò (who has [warned President Trump](#) about the machinations of the Deep State and the Deep Church).

Reporting from previous years, however, contradicts the findings of the new report and suggests Francis did have knowledge of McCarrick’s wrongdoing and yet put him back to work.

McCarrick was well known within the church as a progressive powerbroker and prolific fundraiser in Washington, D.C.



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