

## Vatican excommunication cloud hangs over SOA hero

Patrick O'Neill | Nov. 23, 2008

### COLUMBUS, GA

Among the scores of Catholics gathered this weekend for the annual School of the Americas Watch witness at Ft. Benning, SOAW founder Maryknoll Fr. Roy Bourgeois is a bona fide hero.

This year, Bourgeois has an unprecedented distraction. A month ago, he was informed by the Vatican to recant his support for women's ordination or face excommunication.

After Sunday's events finish up, Bourgeois plans to take a look at his options as he tries to launch an appeal to save his priesthood. He plans to travel to Rome, and he hopes to have an audience with Pope Benedict XVI.

Leading Bourgeois' defense is Loyola University New Orleans lawyer, William "Bill" Quigley, a longtime SOAW supporter, and head of its legal team. Quigley is not a canon lawyer, but he has consulted with canon lawyers, and he is prepared to help Bourgeois plan an appeal, even though it's unclear if there even is an appeal process.

"We're going to invent (an appeals process) if there isn't one," Quigley said Saturday. "There's plenty of provisions in Church law that everybody gets due process."

"Roy, at this point, he's going to ask for an appeal. He's going to ask for an audience with the Pope. He's going to ask for an audience with the Congregation, and hopes to go to Rome to follow through on that."

While he hasn't received his official notification of excommunication, some observers think Bourgeois will likely receive said letter this week.

"He's still hoping he won't be excommunicated as of right now," Quigley said. "We've talked to canon lawyers, and they are clear that it's an uphill battle, but most of the people involved in this movement and all the other change movements, people are always telling you, 'No, you can't do that' or 'There's no way you can do anything about that.' So, if you're going to take these issues seriously, you have to create new evidence, and so the appeal's going to be one of those."

Like many of the reactions to Bourgeois' case, Quigley's foremost emotion is sadness.

"It's sad because it shows the frailty and sort of the dark side of our Church," Quigley said. "The Church is an institution of people, and people have problems."

The Church's inability to address gender issues "is just a glaring problem that we have. As a Church we have a woman problem, and we haven't figured out how to address half the world."

"That's an ongoing problem. I think most of the people of good faith and good heart believe that the Church will figure a way to address this, and that's why excommunicating somebody while we're still in this process that people think is inevitable, that it is going to happen, that we are going to have women priests, probably

going to have them much quicker than we expect, we don't want Roy to be the Galileo of the women priesthood movement.

So it's disappointing in the Church. It's disappointing that they're acting this way, pretending that there isn't a plurality of opinion, that the Spirit doesn't speak in many different ways.

"The Church was wrong on slavery. The Church was wrong in the inaction they took on pedophiles, where they've lined up with colonialism. Historically, the Church has made a lot of mistakes, but after deliberative time they're figured out how to address that. We just hope we can shorten that deliberative time so people won't have to be sacrificed in the meantime."

While much of the attention is focused on Bourgeois, Quigley said ordained women priests have also faced the Church's most severe penalty.

"They've excommunicated all kinds of women who have embraced the priesthood," he said.

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