

**I think it's time for corporate executives, who basked in government protectionism (from taxes and regulations) for the last eight years, to pay their full share of the bailout. What do you think?**

---

**It has been more than a month since Fr. Bourgeois was threatened with excommunication unless he repudiated his participation in the ordination of Janice Sevre-Duszynska. This interview appeared in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on November 23.**

**Q&A: Priest faces excommunication for stance on women priests**

By Rosalind Bentley

Earlier this year the Rev. Roy Bourgeois traveled from his home in Columbus to Lexington, Ky., to take part in an ordination ceremony. Bourgeois, a Roman Catholic priest for 36 years, gave the sermon during the rite. And that's when his troubles began.

The ordination was for a woman, and the Catholic Church doesn't allow women to be priests. Now, Bourgeois is set to be excommunicated as early as this week, unless he repudiates his actions, according to a letter he received from the Vatican in October.

If the excommunication happens, the Maryknoll priest could be the first U.S. priest to receive this penalty for participating in such an ordination.

This weekend, he is taking part in his annual protest against what was once called the School of the Americas (now the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), a facility at Fort Benning. It trains Latin American soldiers, some of whom have been infamously linked to atrocities in their homelands.

Staff writer Rosalind Bentley sat down for a Sunday Conversation with Father Bourgeois.

**Q:** You say the church's position on women as priests doesn't stand up to scholarly scrutiny. But the Vatican would say it stands up to God's scrutiny.

**A:** To try and use God to bless discrimination does not hold up. Just saying "the pope says" doesn't work. Just a footnote: In the early church, women were ordained. There were women priests and bishops. ...

**Q:** I've never heard of that before.

**A:** Well, you and many Catholics have not. It's something the pope doesn't want to talk about. It was really in the Middle Ages that the patriarchy really had such a concentration of power that men began to say, "No way are we going to allow women priests." It's documented. The pope [the late John Paul II] says, "Jesus chose 12 apostles and they were all men." But there's a problem when you start talking about chosen. When Jesus resurrected from the dead, he appeared to Mary Magdalene and Mary. Jesus chose

women to bring this important message of resurrection to the men. The core of this issue is the issue of sexism.

**Q:** I'm gathering you read "The DaVinci Code," then, with some amusement?

**A:** No, I don't read novels. And I didn't go to the movie. I don't have the time.

**Q:** How did you meet Janice Sevre-Duszynska, the woman who was ordained?

**A:** We met in the School of the Americas Watch movement years ago. When I met her, she shared with me that she was a devout Catholic in our church who felt called to priesthood. Janice was just one among many who forced me to look at this issue, the call to priesthood. As Catholics we profess that the call comes from God. So ... I began to ask myself: Who are we, as men, to say to women, "Our call is valid, yours isn't."

**Q:** What was the ceremony like?

**A:** Where we gathered, in this Unitarian church, there were Catholics there who came in the name of their faith to support and who believed in Janice's call to the priesthood. The ceremony I went through for my ordination in 1972, it was the same ceremony. That event [Janice's ordination] was filled with joy and hope.

**Q:** Why did you do it at a Unitarian church? Not to be disrespectful, but wasn't that sort of cowardly in that, if you're going to be in-your-face, then do it at a Catholic church?

**A:** There was no Catholic church available. There was no priest or bishop that would allow them to do that ceremony in a Catholic church.

**Q:** There was no other like-minded priest willing to take the risk?

**A:** A bishop who would have done that would have been immediately excommunicated. A priest, a pastor who would do that in his church would be excommunicated.

**Q:** What would women bring to the priesthood that men don't?

**A:** In our church, we profess that in the eyes of God women and men are of equal stature and dignity. All I'm saying is that we need the wisdom, the compassion, intelligence, the experience and the courage of women to make our church complete.

**Q:** Well, there are nuns.

**A:** No, no, no. Nuns are not ordained.

**Q:** How many women have been "ordained" in the U.S.?

**A:** 36. The numbers in Europe and Australia are not known.

**Q:** You'd be the first U.S. priest excommunicated for such an action. Why didn't you do it anonymously like a handful of European Catholic bishops are said to have done?

**A:** Why act in the shadows? I believe in transparency.

**Q:** So was this your Rosa Parks moment?

**A:** The Rosa Parks moment was earlier for me in the Vatican in 2000. When I was invited to speak on Vatican radio. I had 15 minutes, and 13 of those minutes were devoted to talk about the SOA. I knew what I had to say, I said, "There will never be justice in our Catholic Church until women can be ordained."

**Q:** What happened?

**A:** The [station] manager came in, furious. I had 30 seconds to go, but they just cut me off and came in with Gregorian music.

**Q:** Will you recant?

**A:** I could never recant.

**Q:** What does your family want you to do?

**A:** My brother and two sisters said: "You are gonna break Daddy's heart. He's 95." They were asking me to reconsider. My daddy said: "God is gonna take care of Roy. Roy is doing the right thing, and I support him." Then my siblings came onboard.

**Q:** Have you heard any more from the Vatican?

**A:** Nothing. They might have the hope that this sinner, this priest who has gone against church teaching, will perhaps at the last hour repent.

**Q:** You've led protests outside the gates of Fort Benning against the School of the Americas. Will you protest at the Vatican if you're excommunicated?

**A:** Of course. I do believe that, as a priest for 36 years, I should be allowed 10 or 15 minutes with the pope to make a personal appeal.

**Q:** Has this experience shaken or strengthened your faith?

**A:** It has brought me closer to God. It has brought me deeper peace. "Weeping will endure the night, but joy comes in the morning."