

A Petition to Reinstate Rev. Roy Bourgeois

The Corpus Executive Council is very pleased to present this petition for reinstating Rev. Roy Bourgeois — who is being unjustly punished for preaching at a woman's ordination. He told the Vatican that it was against his conscience to say that he did not believe in the ordination of women. Because Corpus is on record for favoring the restoration of a married priesthood in the Western Church, and for reviving the ordination of women in the Catholic Communion of Churches, we ask Pope Francis to follow the majority of Catholics who stand in solidarity with Rev. Bourgeois. John and Maureen Sheehan, Gloria Durka, Paul Bumbar, John F. Shankey, Jim Ewens

A. Prologue

The excommunication of Fr. Roy Bourgeois by the Vatican occurred because he preached a homily at the ordination of his friend, Janice Sevre-Duszynska, on August 9, 2008. The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued this decree on May 29, 2008, "A bishop involved in the ordination of a woman — and the woman herself — is excommunicated *"latae sententiae"* (automatically)." This Decree was broadened to include Roy's action (and that of other like-minded "offenders") because he was not, in fact, the ordaining bishop at the ceremony. We support Roy because we approve of the stance he has taken on the basis of "primacy of conscience" and because we ourselves are publicly on record for favoring the ordination of women and married men in the Catholic Church.

There is a curious disconnect in the Vatican action against Roy: he has been censured precisely because he is a priest. We, who are, mostly, laity have, generally, not been censured, perhaps, because there are way too many of us — tens of millions — who have voiced the identical approval of women priests that Roy has embraced.

B. Summary of Roy Bourgeois' Achievements

Roy exemplifies a number of qualities and experiences that few can match: a four-year veteran in the Navy, winning a Purple Heart for his service in Vietnam; five years working as a Maryknoll priest in the slums of Bolivia; then time in the inner cities of El Salvador and Chicago; starting the School of the America's Watch 25 years ago; serving over 4 years — 1460 days — cumulative time in jail for peaceful protests against SOA and nuclear war.

No one who has met Roy — or worked with him at the yearly SOA demonstrations — can gainsay his honesty, warmth, and commitment. He is, clearly, a modern day prophet, a man who has consistently been able to carefully discern and then act upon the truths that he is convinced in conscience must be embraced. He summarizes this well in his booklet "My Journey from Silence to Solidarity" when he writes: "Often I think of my commanding officer in Vietnam, years ago, who told me, 'Lieutenant, your job in the military is to implement our country's foreign policy, not to question or discuss it.' Today I hear our church leaders saying something very similar when they tell priests and Catholics 'Your job in the church is to implement our Church's teachings, not to question or discuss them.'"

C. Historical Perspectives

Over the years, the leaders of the Catholic Church have dug their heels in on defending particular issues: birth control, same sex marriage, tubal ligation, vasectomies, abortion — and, since John Paul II declared in 1993 that it was "settled theology" — the ordination of women: a stance that many theologians oppose. (On June 6, 1997, theologians at the Catholic Theology Society of America took a vote on a statement that said: "There is serious doubt regarding the nature of the Church's lack of authority to ordain women as a truth that has to be infallibly taught." 216 voted yes, 22 voted no, and 22 abstained.)

The Vatican has, historically, also pontificated on other significant issues, such as usury, slavery, torture, the questionable human status of native Indian tribes in North and South America. And, oftentimes, when the opposition was most determined, the Church unleashed its most powerful weapon: excommunication.

It's difficult to imagine, in the year 2018, being told by celibate priests and bishops that practicing birth control is a serious sin, as is voting for a politician who is "pro-choice"; that supporting the ordination of women can result in your

being forbidden to say Mass — and being expelled from a religious Order. Further, that being involved in a same sex marriage (a legal right in the U.S. and more than two dozen other countries as well) can cause you to lose your job in a Catholic school or parish. This despite Pope Francis' 2015 Synod upholding the primacy of conscience, plus a variety of national polls showing that over 99% of Catholic women of child-bearing age use some form of artificial birth control — and that 70% of Catholics endorse the ordination of women priests.

Talk about a massive disconnect between Church leaders and the 70 million U.S. Catholics who, by their Baptism, are full members in the very same Church. Many voices have been raised in support of the various issues listed above. Their right to do so was upheld by theologian archbishop Joseph Ratzinger, who wrote, in his 1967 commentary on a key Vatican II document, "Gaudium et Spes," "Over the pope. . . there still stands one's own conscience which must be obeyed before all else, if necessary even against the requirement of ecclesiastical authority."

D. A Roman Spring

When Pope Francis was asked about gay priests he said, "Who am I to judge?" Can we not now imagine a Church — and a hierarchy — that takes into full account the voice and the experience of Catholics on issues that impact their families and lives on a daily basis.

Such a stance would allow Roy Bourgeois to state his beliefs without stripping him of the exercise of his priesthood or his place in the Maryknoll Order. It might, also, support — rather than deny — the right of couples to practice birth control, and the right of divorced and remarried Catholics to follow their consciences and receive the Eucharist. It would embrace the uniqueness of those in our midst who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. And, as Francis himself is now learning to carry out in Chile, it would initiate full justice for women and men who were sexually abused by priests worldwide — including the removal of bishops who shielded their abusers from office.

These actions could, also, showcase a Church that both Millennials and Baby Boomers would acclaim and attend. A Church where men and women have equal rights and equal opportunities. A Church where Edicts, Censures, and Excommunications would no longer be seen — or heard — in the land. It would, finally, be a Church that Jesus Himself could be proud of, He who said, "Come to me, all you who are heavily burdened, and you will find rest for your souls."

We wonder why over 30 million people (America, Oct. 19, 2017) have ignored or walked away from the Church in recent years — and decades. The answer is crystal clear, borne out by numerous studies and polls: the Church has become outmoded, autocratic, and out of touch. Its policies and positions, its decrees and dogmas matter less and less to a wide spectrum of people in the U.S. and around the world.

E. Conclusion

In summary, we urgently request the Vatican to reconsider the excommunication of Roy Bourgeois — and all other Catholics who have been similarly banned by the Decree of May 29, 2008. May the denunciations cease, so that Pope Francis' Church of mercy and compassion may prevail. Jim Ewens, Editor Jimewe@me.com

This Petition is endorsed by the following groups, numbering tens of thousands of members:

Corpus, Dignity, Catholics for Choice, Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church,

SOA Watch, Call to Action, Quixote Center, Woman's Ordination Conference, Roman Catholic

Women Priests, Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference.