

Pink Smoke over the Vatican and a New Kind of Feminism

By Jenna Haines

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The first New York screening of *Pink Smoke over the Vatican*, a controversial independent film on women's rights to priesthood, took place at Barnard College this Saturday at The Athena Film Festival. Director Jules Hart attended the screening and spoke with Rev. Jean Marie Marchant and Father Roy Bourgeois on the implications of the emotional and political pull of Hart's premier feature length film.

Hart, not Catholic herself, said that she originally had no intention of making a film on Catholicism when a female, ordained priest asked if Hart would tell her story. However, Hart's feministic research led her to others affected by the disallowance of women priesthood in the Catholic Church, which threatens excommunication for disobeying this religious law. The issue of women's rights in the house of religion places a unique variety of feminism into the limelight, according to Hart.

"I thought they [Catholic women] were being co-opted into the system," said Hart. "I had no idea how emotional it was. I had no idea of the devastation in these women's souls."

According to Marchant, there are only about 100 ordained, female priests and 5 female bishops in the U.S. today. Marchant left her role as a chaplain for the Boston Archdiocese a year after her secret ordination as a priest, driven to separation largely due to her disagreement with her church's view on homosexuality. "When I saw my church spending money and initiating vicious campaigns against homosexuals, that was the day I said I was done," said Marchant. "I made the decision to resign, rather than force the Diocese to fire me."

The film captures many stories like Marchant's—women who are divided from their church and professed homes because of a calling for priesthood and their less traditional perspectives. However, women are not alone. Some outspoken men, like Bourgeois, have also experienced the consequences of the Vatican's ruling against female ordination.

Bourgeois, founder of the School of the Americas Watch and reported contestant for last year's Nobel Peace Prize, was threatened excommunication for his participation in a women's ordination ceremony in Aug. 2008. "Somehow we start learning that silence is the voice of consent," said Bourgeois. "Like the suffrage movement, this movement is unstoppable."

Marilyn Saviola, who works for Independent Care System with Angela Bonavoglia, the moderator for the event's panel and a speaker in the film, watched the screening from the confines of her wheelchair. As a disabled female herself and an employee of a service for the disabled, Saviola expressed appreciation for the accepting message of the film. "It talked about issues that alienate people from this church," said Saviola. Along with the

plight of women, Saviola addressed needs for broader acceptance in Catholicism for those handicapped, diseased, homosexual, or belonging to another minority group.

Marchant reiterated a similar message from a leadership perspective in her closing remarks. “We’re about renewing the church,” said Marchant. “The issue of inclusivity is crucial. Our communion is very interested in sending out that message to all communities that are marginalized.”