

The Decision I Took in 1988

I am a sixty-two year old male, baptized into the priesthood of all believers -- *le spécifique chrétien* according to Yves Congar – in 1933; temporary professed as religious, 1954; perpetually professed, 1957; ordained into the ministerial office of the presbyterate (priesthood), 1959. I officially said 'au revoir' to the 'ordained priesthood' and to the OMI (Oblates of Mary Immaculate) in 1988.

In my heart, thoughts about saying 'au revoir' to my Oblate Congregation (OMI) and the institutional Church ministry (the presbyterate) began to occur several years ago. But the process of deciding and of making *official* my decision was time-wise prolonged, often enlightening and, at times, most painful. The reasons are both *psychological* and *theological*.

Psychologically, I was unable to make the decision while my mother -- who lived to the beautiful age of ninety-four -- was alive. I feared that telling her would cause her a stroke or provoke her into disowning me as her son, or perhaps cause both. These were consequences, whether real or imagined, which I foresaw as personally impossible to live with. After my mother's death in late October of '85, ill health disallowed me from dealing immediately with my own personal concerns.

Theologically, during the past ten years, experiences of divine revelation as *new awareness* had taken hold of me. The American theologian, Avery Dulles (in *Models of Revelation*), described revelation as *new awareness* as "a transcendent fulfillment of the inner drive of the human spirit toward fuller consciousness." He added: "Rather than going beyond experience, revelation [as new awareness] is itself an experience of participation in divine life. . . . It gives a new perspective . . . on the

self and on the world as they are experienced in the whole of life." Finally, he concluded: "To the transformed subjectivity of the recipient of revelation [as new awareness], the objects of experience become symbols mediating a contact with the divine."

Theologically, among such mediating/symbolic experiences that led to contacts with God (or *revelation as new awareness*), the following were significant:

1. For some thirty years I had functioned as an *institutional member of the Church -- a presbuteros (presbyter / priest) of the Roman Church* Over the years, however, I had increasingly felt that by remaining officially a *presbuteros* in the Roman Church, I was witnessing to one of the world's most sexist organizations as well as contributing personally to the proliferation of the systemic sin of sexism.

2. Furthermore, during those thirty years -- due to the persisting institutional Church's ministerial theology of power *over bread and sin* (Eucharist and Penance) -- more and more I felt that I was being treated by so many people in the Roman Church as a heavenly sorcerer living in a world dichotomized between the sacred and the profane. I was being treated as a 'sacralizer' of the secular or, in the words of Yves Congar, as "a priest of Hera or the sun, of Ceres or Baal, not a priest of the Gospel."

3. Lastly and in retrospect, after some forty years in religious life -- from a fourteen year old Oblate seminarian to a twenty-one year old temporary professed religious, and since then, from the age of twenty-four, as an Oblate with perpetual vows -- I came to realize (especially because of the vow of celibacy) that community and 'priestly' life had offered me the unexpected opportunity to transmute myself into an a-sexual person: that is, a person who substitutes repression of sexual urges with urges to control people. Thus, I came to realize that *power*

had become for me the all-encompassing value of human survival which, for too many years, I had mistaken for the liberating, redemptive and humanizing empowerment of the Good News of Jesus. To the contrary -- and now I do know -- it was not the empowerment of Jesus' liberating Good News that had inspired me to become a member of a religious community (the OMI) and a priest. It was the enslaving search for *power* that one experiences in *seeking* an ecclesiastical career which "one succeeds [in attaining] by winning the approbation and favor of the right personages" (Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*).

Needless to say, the time came when divine revelation as *new awareness* translated itself into an experience of conversion and repentance; hence, into saying 'au revoir' to the presbyterate and to my community, the OMI (the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.)

In conclusion, I must add that I am a person who was inspired by and converted to the spirit of openness of Vatican II. The 'sixties were transitional years. From an institutionally bound, moralistic and legalistic individual, I became then a people-centered as well as an issue-oriented and a life-concerned person. The 'seventies and 'eighties, however, were years of disillusionment. These were times during which inquisitive voices -- often dissenting voices but, nonetheless, honest ones -- were progressively silenced by the Church. As a result, these voices felt less and less at-home within ecclesiastical confinements. In such circumstances, as a *presbuteros* and official spokesperson of the Church, I became more and more riven by conflicts.

In final analysis, it is the search for wholeness, integrity and peace that -- in 1988 - led me to say 'au revoir' to the official Roman Catholic Church ministry of the presbyterate and to my religious community, my brothers, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.