

House Church Witness

AN AFFAIR WITH GRACE

In the name of the Father; in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I had an affair this year with grace. My wife knew about it, she always has known about those kinds of affairs. Every time I have one of those kinds of affairs, she knows about it. It felt as if it was an affair to end all affairs. I saw a few knowing looks as I began to tell you about this, which leads me to suspect you probably also know about it.

But I'd like to just stop and check; maybe to describe succinctly what this affair was like and see if you do know about it. As I recall, I was attempting to check and see what kind of vision I had; either past vision or something I anticipated coming up in the future. And what I saw was a black hole. I was trying to keep something moving and I ran into a brick wall. I didn't simply lose my momentum, I lost my inertia! I turned to check with my meditative council, to see what advice someone might give to me. The sound of silence! What to do? Resign? How many times this year have you considered handing in your resignation? Disappear in the middle of the night quietly? Well, that's still a little ignoble. Evaporate was the best solution that occurred to me. Just evaporate.

There was one thing left, that was my own voice. I heard my own voice say "I am the Order." And with that one thing left I began to discover for myself that this experience that I was having, this affair with grace, was a message! And I made up my mind right then, that I was going to decode this message. It was time; I'd had these messages before and I'd never decoded them. So I put myself in the posture of searching and waiting, of waiting and searching. The first step in breaking the code was to attend to my experience. I was filled with shame. I started searching for a message in my shame. I began by supposing, "The Order need to take care of me." With an intuitive flash of clarity I grasped the lie in this story. Slowly I began to understand the positive aspect of this shame. It came as a message, "I need help." Then I decided to shed the garment of shame in which I was shrouded. I shook this threadbare garment off; it fell to the ground and I stepped over it. At this point I finally realized that the Order needs people who can care for themselves so that it can care for the world. So, the first step was finding the positive aspect of this behavior of mine and then stepping beyond it.

The second step was beginning to discover new maps of my reality. I think the first time that happened to me was in the Gandhi movie. Where, in the garden, or just before Gandhi goes out to the garden for the last time in his life, he is talking with the LIFE photographer, the woman. They are having a conversation about how he gets along with other people and he says, "I have so many battles in my own heart that I am very tolerant of other scoundrels." Then as an afterthought, he adds, "As a matter of fact, that's where the battles of this world need to be fought, in the human heart." Now, I suppose that that is not too much different than our framework for the Question of God lecture; the external situation is never the problem; it is always the internal crisis that is the problem. I don't think that is too much different than what Gandhi said. But somehow Gandhi's saying it that way enabled me to see something new. So

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that was the first occasion where I began to see things with a new map. I began finding new maps to see the territory with which I was already familiar. I also began to add some new members to my meditative council and I started to add some new methods to my kit bag. It is very full, the kit bag I have, but I began to add some methods that allowed me to know what I know in instances where I was not aware that I knew. I began to add some methods that allowed me to further trust my intuitions and to be more consistent in calling on them.

These two steps got me on the way. I had an experience coming from Minneapolis to Chicago on my way back to this Council which is, for me, a fine analogy. I was on a plane. I was sitting on the left-hand side of the airplane; it was a double-seated row and the right-hand side was triple-seated. I was the only one in my row so I had plenty of space, and behind me the seats were completely empty. Back one row and to my right were seated three fairly good-sized people, one man and two women. They were in their middle sixties and appeared to be crowded in. The man made a loud request to one of the stewardesses going by, "Can I sit over there?" And she said, "Why, surely." And so he moved over to the seat behind me. As soon as he was in the seat I had this sense of a boyish presence behind me. Now this is about a sixty year old man, but there was a boyish presence behind me. He was bouncing around in the seat, looking out the window, telling the two women on the other side of the aisle what he saw through his window. He bounced up over the back of my seat and started to tell me what had happened. His niece was going to Germany and they had come to see her off at the Minneapolis airport. But suddenly they realized in the midst of making a decision to see her off in Minneapolis, that she wasn't going to leave from Minneapolis. She was going to leave from Chicago. So they asked themselves why shouldn't they just come down to Chicago. And after they asked that, somebody produced an airline schedule and within fifteen minutes they had reservations and had purchased their tickets. And they were on their way to Chicago. I think he probably hadn't been on very many airplane flights. I tried to ignore him as much as I could and get back to my work. Of course, it helped that we started to take off and he had to fasten his seat belt. Then I just assumed that he was talking to himself. But I couldn't ignore him. "Oh, boy, here we are; we are going to have to go North to go South," as the plane taxied to the south end of the field. "I wonder how much fuel they are using while we are on the runway?" "Oh, we're really going to take off!" We got up into the air and apparently that had enough of a sobering effect to quiet him down for a while. But then he said, "Oh, look. There is an airplane way down there!" Well, that intrigued me, you know. I like to fly and I'm always interested in where the airplanes are and how they are related to each other, so I looked down. There was one down there and we had a conversation about how fast it was going. Then he said "Look at all the farm land." I thought maybe I could throw him off a while and I said, "Yes, if you know your territory, you ought to be able to tell where you are," and left him alone. It was quiet for a while, and then he said, "Oh, there's Chippewa Falls; oh, there is Lake Wisconsin. Hey, Myrtle, Eau Claire is over there. Ooooh, the Wisconsin River! We are going down. There's Mosinee; there's Highway 51." And we landed. Well, this sixty year old man was a little boy. He was having a new experience; he was an old man who was seeing with new eyes, using new maps for old territory. He knew this territory; he was a native of Wisconsin but he had never seen it with this map. He was taken up in the process of seeing the old territory from a new perspective.

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And now, that caused me to reflect on my own journey. When I began this, what I am calling an affair with grace, I didn't call it an affair with grace. I am now calling it an affair with grace. But I had a different map of what it was when I began. Now I've begun to decode the messages. Just as the social process is in microcosm a process which is taking place in me or in you and in macrocosm a process which is taking place in the world, the same kind of process of discovery that happened to me is going on in our midst. We've had an experience in this last year or maybe more that we are now in the process of decoding. We are declaring our intention to break the code on the experiences we've had in the last year or so and to search and wait, and wait and search. It's going to make us feel as if we're children. There is a certain vulnerability in that kind of experience of being children and having to give up habits, convictions and certainties with which we've surrounded ourselves. But it is going to grant us rebirth. Originally I thought that this was an affair to end all affairs, but now, I don't believe that's true. Just as that's not true for me, I suspect that this process in which we are engaged will be one which is ongoing, not one which will allow us to say when we're through with this Year of the Order Council, "We've arrived"; but will be one which delivers us to our birthright. The birthright of dying and being reborn on behalf of the journey of the entire universe.

Amen.