

THIRD PLENARY ADDRESS: THE TWENTY-YEAR MARCH AS AGAPE
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I am rather frightened these days as I become aware of the fact that the twenty-year march and the disclosure unto us of the other world by the other world could only happen together. The twenty-year march is love, ontological love. And the twenty-year march, though this is an awkward way to put it, would not exist unless the other world disclosed itself, because that march is love--ontological love, not what you were taught in Sunday School that Christian love is.

I am frightened even more, for some strange reason. Our Fathers knew about this. Maybe I have known it in my mind, but I am frightened now that I know it with my being. To be God's man means to go on the march. That is what is frightening. And if you do not go on the march, then you are not God's man.

Take the other world and the encounter with the mystery, and then take the intensification of that which is the last trek. After you have been swirled in the awe of encounter with mystery and have hopelessly struggled to escape, you discover only your own knownness. And right in the midst of discovering in the mystery the transfiguration of all things, there comes the terrifying experience of ontological dubiety, in which self-doubt is intensified into doubting the universe itself, in such high heat that nothing can ever touch you again.

I remember when I first started teaching, some little squirt would throw in this hand grenade and that hand grenade, as if to say, "But have you thought of that?" And if you had not thought of that, the implication was that your whole thing was nothing. Well, after the experience I am pointing to, you are forever untouchable, for you have doubted the bottom of doubt itself. And in this awareness, you become aware that in knowing all you know nothing. The great revelation comes to you that the way life is is mystery and ever remains mystery.

"Well," you say, "what I require of this universe is to Know!" But revelation is unknowable. And in the midst of this, you experience the separation beyond all separations. Or, you say, "What I demand is that God be something." And God is nothing. God is eternal mystery, and every time the bottom of my deeps reach out to hold him, my hand grasps mystery. That's the alienation beyond alienation that makes you untouchable. In the midst of that final absence or fall, you feel as if you have been cosmically duped into missing the mystery. And then, it is silly. You feel that you know you love the mystery, that you love God. Love: that is not strong enough. You adore God.

Now, precisely at that moment of intensification comes what for me is the most surprising ontological indicative of them all: agape. I discover that I deeply appreciate this tragic, tragic life, that I appreciate this tragic, tragic world--not the world that I demand, but this world with all its brutality, all its sadness, all its horror. It is then I know that I am glad to be alive. Then, even if you could show me another universe, I would not go. It is then that I become aware deep down inside myself that I care, that I am concerned. No imperative here, only the indicative: I care. And nothing could ever happen again in this world that would alter that. It is not of my making. It is not of my deciding. It is an indicative, a given in my life. I care about this world.

I wish David Hume were here. I would like to talk to him about the "innate propensity of sympathy." I think he was wrong. But perhaps on one occasion he caught a glimmer of the other world. In the other world you care. It is at the moment in which you grasp your responsibility for the whole world--the past, the future, all--it is at that moment that you discover the power of love within yourself and within this world. You can take the River of Consciousness and follow it through to its intensification, which is agape, love for this world. This is ontological love; it has nothing to do with liking this or that. It is this complex of acknowledgement of the glory of your own life in this world, plus a fellow sympathy with all creatures, not just man, and a sense of responsibility for the whole journey of creation, plus that strange power. That is Christian love.

This is what I mean when I say that the Long March is inseparable from the other world. You may understand the other world and not go on the Long March--but then you are not in the other world. It is not your being. Whenever man has discovered this world of intensified consciousness, he went on the Long March. Whenever man was encountered by the mystery, whenever man became an authentic self, he put his knapsack on and started the Long March to redo the social processes of humanness.