

# Edge of the Church Reflection

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Joe Crocker

Ref. Lec. on last qrtr.

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I thought my first task was Grace to you and Peace, and then on second reflection we've already greeted

one another and it's obvious whenever we come together these days that immediately there's a conscious

ness of a profound relation a profound relatedness doesn't have anything to do with the kind of human

relations that society would talk about but if we ever get ahold of the word again maybe we'd be able

to say without any hesitation that we're a spiritual fellowship. Or we're a fellowship of the Spirit.

And it's like <sup>once</sup> ~~what~~ we've encountered each other it's there. And that might be one of the most important

things we are ever engaged in doing and being whoever it is that we are, here at this particular time in

history. I don't know whether the remnant image or issue is helpful. Did you think that there would be

a body who were highly self conscious people who once again would dare to hold onto the Spirit deeps and

dare to relate to one another out of the word. And dare to engage in a common task to be mission. That

might be who it that we are. I find it somehow helpful as I've encountered some of the manifestations of

the historical church. I've begun to look for a remnant and it ~~is~~ might be that we who are the fellowship

of the Spirit are indeed that remnant. You almost have to be a little cautious when you say something like

that. Rather hold close. One that could be...

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of an eye we could be filled with pride about that. And that would be our undoing. But I am conscious at this moment as I have been since coming here and meeting with you and I'm sure you have been conscious of it too whether it's been articulated or not that there's a strange and wonderous spirit fellowship that is embodied here in this group. I've found myself kind of wishing as I anticipated this maybe I just have all my thinking so well together that I wouldn't have to refer to my notes. Or that I might have had one of those high bar stools just to sit back on and relax a little bit and just talk. Seems to me that a spin at this time isn't quite the dervish that it once was, doesn't need to be. Rather it's more in a reflective category for me. I don't know really how other people see me but sometimes I see myself as a rather overly serious person especially when one of the young ones in the house used the word grouch the other day. He was wrong. I've found when I look back on my life and I can look back on more of it now but probably all through my life there's been a kind of seriousness that been there sometimes authentically and sometimes as a facade but I find myself these days with a new kind of seriousness and yet somehow I wouldn't want that seriousness to /have fall into formality. I still lingering with me some fastidial remains of New England formalism. Formality of all of that. But I wouldn't want to be formal tonight. I guess the only formal thing that I'd want to engage in would

Those that you know and some of those that you've only heard about some of those that are sort of the nature of the outfit that we are you may never encounter for years to come. Like never even hear their names and yet I would presume to bring you their greetings and you need to know that they're still standing. And some of them have experienced this quarter there's just one continual bucketing in the spirit deeps. I suppose they struggled the same struggle that all of us have whether they've been able to articulate it as you have they've been engaged in the same task and I'm sure that you can think of your colleagues probable this week of all the weeks in the quarter this is the time when they would most likely like to be somewhere other than where they are. And that dynamic goes on all the time, I suppose but it's this week they would like to be here. Any other place but here is where they'd want to be. to engage in what's going on here. And to participate in what we're participating in You need to know they're still there. Some of them, you've probably heard about but oh there's one or two who've who've fallen. I sometimes like to think when somebody shows up missing these days it might be that they were standing too tall. or they maybe got a little too proud and the devil picked them off. Or you've heard about some perhaps who were striding a big or drooping I'll just reflect a bit. That might just be a self conscious tactic to avoid the sharp shooting of satan. And it's like one of the things that you might

notice about our time . is that there are, satan doesn't attack the corporate body anymore have you noticed that? There was a time when we went through a period where I mean the whole body call it whatever you will.

The Institute, the Order, whatever we did as a corporate body was attacked, sometimes head on and sometimes tangentially. I think satan has given up on that he is clear that he is not going to get anywhere that way.

but one think that he is doing is that occasionally he's pickin us off one by one. But I want to say that your colleagues are still standing. And some of the little boys are becoming men. Add some of the little

girls are becoming women. in ways that we would have thought virtually unbelievable. Some whom you would

least expect and that gives you all the confidence that it's the work of the Lord that's bringing that

about and not their hard work. Like the Lord is growning up some men and women who are our colleagues and

I don't know it's times like this when I 'm most conscious of that dynamic that of representational responsibility. that sort of breaks in on me in a new way. It's like we stand here and we literally have

ten to twenty pther people standing in our shoes. I don't know how you measure it, maybe we have a

hundred other people standing in the very shoes that we are standing in. That we gather here representat-

ionally as the Order, representationally for the historical church representationally for those primal

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I guess what's behind all of this kind of reflection is just the realization that's come to me in a whole new way this quarter and it's come with a sense of wonder about it that is as was mentioned here I think George referred to it earlier today that we as a corporate body are a historical fact Like it or not we're in history and in spite of all of the fragility of covenants whether it be the fragility of a marriage covenant or the fragility of a covenant with the order or the church or with god in spit of all of the contingency that just permeates life regardless of the complexity of the task regardless of the interior pain of vocational decision regardless of what we called last quarter our unfocusedness we as a covenanted body, we as an order we as the movemental church are in history and I don't know whether it's ~~theologically~~ theologically correct or not but it's like I want to say even if god wiped us out tonight history would have to contend with us tomorrow I mean it's that kind of a given fact. and here again I suppose a word of caution for it's like in a twinkling of an eye once you've said something like that you could open the flood gates of all kinds of pride. and yet we stand with that kind of awareness and I experience it as rather increased burden. to know that about ourselves. Our corporetness is a reality. And all you have to do is witness the reports we had today I -mean we are a corporate network well we've said this if we

decide to anything in history then we could virtually do it I sat and listened to the kind of reports  
and it was like that old electric grid that we had there on that on that local church experiment and the  
lights just went on all over that grid with a rather phenominal kind of network of corporateness that we  
that we can turn on and even though we may experience it as unfocusedness we can focus it upon a task.

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Virtually overnight, say, our corporateness is a reality. I think, as I said before, that Satan knows  
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that. I don't think he's going to bother us too much, you know, trying to hit us head-on as a corporate  
body. It's like--it isn't too much to say--that we stand with the historical Church, the movemental Church,  
the gates of Hell will not prevail. That's where I find myself standing today--with a confidence that I have  
not experienced before in my life. But, what you know about Satan is that if he can't get at you one way,  
he isn't going to quit altogether. He's going to find another way. And, I think he's going to play up to  
the kind of, O, what I call the drive to individualism that seems to have manifest itself anew. And I  
suppose there are many different ways of getting ahold of this, but it's like you find going on in the kind  
of struggle that people have today. And we look upon ourselves to, indeed, discern what's happening i-n  
society. It's like I find that people, our colleagues, will use almost any rationale that they can to bolster

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or to give them a reason ~~to~~ for collapsing or attempting to collapse a covenant that will take them out of a corporate context, even at the moment when our corporateness before the world and before history is greater than it's ever been--it's like one-by-one people in the midst of their struggle cut themselves off from the corporateness of a family, cut themselves off from the corporateness of the order, cut themselves off from the corporateness of being engaged in a missional task. It's ~~as if~~ as if they're out to collapse every covenant that would hold them over against the reality that our corporateness is. I don't know if that's just a very recent manifestation of a death urge--what I do know is that there's no possibility for life when a man cuts himself off from his societal network and his societal relation. And, I sense that there is a move in that direction, however conscious or unconscious you may be of it. One of the strange things is--given rise to a kind of individualism--is the kind of blindness that comes with half-truths. I don't know where you've experienced this recently, but I've found that I have been more vulnerable when someone has said something

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that's been half truth about what's going on. And, I don't know even quite whether this is just deciding to live out of what we might call apostacy or deciding to live out of our unfaith, or whether it's the refusal of the possibility that's breaking open to us; but, well, it's like this past week we decided to do what-- remember when we struggled with such things as an Accomplomat? We decided to take a look at the accomplishments of the last quarter. On a Sunday evening, I said, "Well, we ought to be able to run through that in one collegium on Monday and then move on." It took us three days in a collegium to get stated to ourselves what in fact had been accomplished. And, as I talked with others across the area that same kind of--it's like we've gone ~~and~~ out and done something phenomenal and we've come back and haven't been willing to believe what it is that's happened. It's like--well, it was an attitudinal shift that was required that the old, perhaps trite illustration, of people taking a look and saying, "Well, the bottle's half empty, I mean, half of it is gone." It isn't their fault

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kind of dynamic that we seem to be dealing with. I don't know whether you'd want to classify that in terms of

living out of our disbelief rather than standing present, and I mean, it's been a rather phenomenal quarter.

I sat here and listened to all of this Town Meeting stuff, and behind all of that (were you thinking about it, too),

why, everything else was going on. I mean, we had perhaps one of the best quarters that we've had in a long time.

in teaching RS I, PLC, and LEWS. We finally got it stated to ourselves in New York the other day that in a bi-

metro for which we're responsible (White Plains and Manhattan and the Bronx) there have been more people who have

gone through courses this quarter than there has in any other quarter since 1968. And we could hardly believe

it when we took--in fact, we could not even get that stated for three days. I mean, it took us that long. I don't

know whether it's a fear of engagement that you can see. It's like you touch that whirling gearbox, and you've

already felt the initial tug that you know is going to take your whole arm. And, it's like you want to pull it

back. And, a kind of fear of acknowledging our engagement, and, I suppose, the kind of cost that's related to it. I find that that's much more subtle than it used to be, if that's the death urge, or the urge not to embrace the life that's given to us. It comes in a much more subtle form these days than it ever did before when we first started talking about that death urge. The other day when I was talking with some of the priors across the area, you know, just checking out Town Meetings and other things like that, I let a question fly from left field. I asked, "Well, how did your Daily Office go?" And, the usual response, almost without exception, there was a pause. And, not in every case but general enough so that you could say that across the area, sometime during the past quarter a disaster would have been a fairly accurate description of what was going on. Or, at least, a profound struggle with the symbolic. The struggle to be there. And, one remark was helpful. It said that, Well, there was a definite change once we started

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praying to God rather than to our colleagues. And, we get a sense of something that was going on relative

to the symbolic life. Or, it's as if, I put it together with what I've experienced this past quarter,

that there's been a kind of unconscious lashing out at the symbolic--an unconscious criticism, I mean,

an undercutting of the power of the symbolic. It's as if we know well enough that that's where our power

is and find a striking out against that and not willing to receive the power that's inherent in it. And,

I don't know, that might have something to do with just what's going on with us today relative to celebration.

We find that we have difficulty in having that Daily Office come off day after day after day after day.

I think it has something to do with the fact that we struggle in the whole dimension of celebration in the

midst of life. What does it mean to celebrate the life that's given, the life in its profundity. It's

like the celebrations that we used to have almost today look as if they were somehow superficial. At the

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time, my God, they were fantastic happenings; but if you go back and try to pump some life into them, they just don't come off. It's like a whole new dimension of celebration is called for; and it's as if we could stand here and say that the power of the symbolic is being released in us. It's like you look on down the line and you know that we're going to be celebrating in a way that we can't hardly imagine today--just tomorrow it will be that way. Or, that what we're moving into out of the kind of struggle that goes on today is that we're moving into a whole new grasp of the deeps of the joy of life and what it means to symbolize that in celebration. I just get the picture that across the area if there was anything that had to go and had to give this year or this quarter, it was the Odyssey. Not in every case, but if there was anything--you know when things were bending and getting a little tight--well, that was the things that was--it sometimes wasn't thrown out entirely, it was revised and called a Trek, you know. And,

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nobody knew what that was. And, I, for one, am going to be waiting to hear what happened--and the only arena where I've heard that something happened in that whole arena of spirit nurture with a kind of profound encounter in Chicago. But, it's like, how is it that we stand before the power of the symbolic and embrace it--dare to embody it. I sense the other arenas of struggle that you and I engage in and maybe since we've sort of taken a plunge into secular society--like taking a dive off a high board into the world--that where the struggle has come -- it's been in the whole arena of interior discipline. We've fooled around with getting ahold of methods of how it is that you deal with the governor and the mayor and the Bicentennial commission, but if you've heard it today it seems like ~~what~~ we're just like clicking it off--you know, we just went ahead and did it. But where the spirit has been struggling has been in the arena of the interior discipline, of how you get ahold of what it is that's going to hold you to that task when you know that what you've done

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has just been the scratching of the surface. Or, it's like that in that dive our hands have just hit the surface of the water; and we haven't even begun to get that plunge into it yet. And, it seems that the arena where I find people struggling is where I experience my own interior struggle ~~is~~ in this whole question of discipline. I recall way, way, way, back in those days when Frank Hilliard stood in our midst and talked about the day is coming when we would have to get ahold of the deeps of discipline. And, I sense that it's beginning to come true. What I find is that all the ways that I thought that I knew how it is you elicit the discipline in a body of people--it's like they might have worked two years ago, but somehow there's something new called for today. And, it isn't just the difference between a direct approach and a tangential approach. It isn't that simple. I find people struggling today with vocational decision--and I do. I thought I had all my vocational decisions made, you know. I'm getting along so that

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I should have anyway. I feel that anyway. You know you make a vocational decision to be the church, you make a vocational decision to be ordained, and it's like that lasts you for a while and then you make a decision to be the order, and that lasts for a while and then you become conscious of the fact that, by God you have a whole new vocational decision to make if you are going to be the religious. I find that our youth these days, I refer to our order youth, are struggling at this point of vocational decision, finally coming down to the point of deciding not where part of their life is going to go part of the time or for a little while but where their whole life is going to go, and wanting to hold on, wanting to hold back, wanting to reserve just a little bit, and knowing, having the radical lucidity- so what's new, but to make the decision about my whole life. But I sense that whole arena of vocational, it's like we're making a third vocational decision that's the way I've experienced it. And that's not

unrelated to the fear of engagement in the world. Now you can go out and make calls, but I mean to engage for the rest of your life in caring for the world. The issue isn't simply a question of how much freedom do I have. I guess I became conscious of that in these last days more than I've ever been before in my life but to realize that I've got all the freedom that I need to be able to decide what I'd going to be obedient to and sense that that's where the struggle comes. God knows, we've got 101 things we'd rather be obedient to, you know in the world's eyes the world, some good things too. How is it that you get ahold of the profound, of the deep vocational decision of being obedient to being, being obedient to God and none other, or the cry I hear when that struggle gets manifest in the day in, day out work we engage in is like you fix run out this day and you're going to make a plc call and you're going to make contacts for town meeting, and you're going to deal with somebody else for primal community

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inyo your life. I always thought this social demonstration business was going to come down on the doing pole, and I sort of got ready for that, and I'm sure that without prayer we're not going to be able to engage in society at all and we're going to experinece ourselves engaged in doing, engaged in prayer. But what in fact I sense is going on is social demonstration has driven us to deal in a whole new way with chastity and with contemplation and with being itself, and that's nothing that you can fofus on for too long, but that's where we're going to be. I find that question of chasitty is a rather critical one. How is it that you get said to yourself that what we are about is one thing, is one thing. Going to ask myself the question of what is ti that's coming into being, or what is it that we are becoming. Whatever it has been this past quarter - well I was going to say we had some enjoyable structures with those HOPE papers. I odn't know anything that has brought as much vitality or life to the house as that has. There was

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one when we were struggling with Cousins paper, and we had a young theologian in there who just about came apart at the seams because he had come to Ecclesiola and he had thought in our study there would be something that would be religious, theological, We went through that Cousins paper, and just about screamed that Cousins should have said something about Jesus or about Christ or about the activity of the church or something, and just could not reconcile within himself the kind of profound truth that was being opened to him about life. And that's just a deep interior strain that he emitted, which led me to believe that one whole arena, as Gogarten indicates to us, is that the whole arena of being the new people, or its sort of the flip side of the individualism that I spoke about before, and you call back to that time when we did call it - you know - the New Individual and the New Society, I mean there is if anything I would say emerging within us a new grasp of individualism or individuality that comes from daring to meet head on the whole question of participating in the creation of new piety. I don't ever know what that's going to be, but I know as you and I create or participate

in the creation of a new society, or create a new community or new structures of caring for community that at

the very same time we are participating in creating a new piety. That goes to the very depths of life itself.

That would lead one to say something like this, that whatever else social demonstration is, social demonstration

is an interior happening that gets manifest, its something that happens in the interior of a man and its gets

expressed in his care for the world or his care for society. And the creation of that piety or that new metaphor

metaphor or that new grasp on what we in the church have pointed to with such terms as the Word and Jesus Christ

is going to be far more than just getting some sort of translation job done so that instead of talking in the old

religious terms we talk in some new secular terms. It's going to be far more than that kind of transposition. It's

like you and I would be reaching down into the very depths of humanness itself and getting ~~an~~ ahold of the

happening that happens in a man's life that makes all the difference between life and death because he dares

once that happening happens to give up his life and we'll get ahold of that happening and perhaps rearticulate

what the church has been articulating for the last 2000 years which now comes to us, comes to society as perhaps  
if not outmoded at least inadequate on questions of humanness. I don't know what that's going to mean for us,  
but I do know that I already have information of the kind of pain and struggle that that will call forth from  
us, for we'd be creating also, or participating in becoming a new style. I don't sense myself as having a hold of  
more than simply an intuition or an inclination of that which we are becoming or whatever. Maybe we first have a  
hint of this when we broke loose that word sophistication. I ~~and~~ occurs to me that what we've been doing is that  
we have been creating a style of relatedness. We're clear that we are not engaged in the mission in the basis of  
some kind of human relationships. And we know that if we engage in the kind of task that we're engaged in that  
you don't have in the first instance human relationships. You have missional relationships. That it seems to me  
that all those volumes that were written about etiquette, of the patterns of acceptable behavior were challenging

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hold humanness, that however we might look askance at Emily Post what she recorded was the patterns which sustained humanness which created society. It seems to me that we are becoming a people who are redefining the patterns of human relatedness that will allow humanness in our own time and in the future, and it breaks all the kind of permission that some have given themselves to trample needlessly, or it makes us conscious, I might put it this way, of the delicacy of spirit surgery when we relate one to another, and makes me all the more conscious of the always increasing burden of our tasks. I'd like to think that some day it's going to get a little easier, but I just sense we're going to move on from one burden to another until some day we find that all the burdens that pile up are light and easy, light and easy. I would want to maybe get it said this way, that we've taken a high dive, or we've taken a dive off the high board into the world

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And somehow for me it seems to me that if we've struggled with that vocational decision all over again, if you've struggled with interior discipline, if you've struggled with obedience and chastity and fear of engagement, we've lived out of half truth or are blind to the possibility and promise that is already ours, that if our struggle has been and continues to be with articulating what our new piety and hope is, that were precisely where we've needed to be. I mean the past quarter has not been a mistake, has not been some kind of error in the cosmos. I have been precisely what it has needed to be and we have experienced life precisely where we have needed to experience it. We have encountered precisely what was called for, or I guess I'd point to that and say that this quarter has been one of radical engagement in the struggle with our interior discipline. It perhaps has also been a time when we have been first begun to realize that what we struggle with in the deeps of life is what it means to not only have hope not only to have the hope that never disappoints, but what it means to embody that hope as the people that we are. And I find that there are things

