

A Loner Finally Connects!
A Mini-Autobiography By Don Evans

Reflections Before and After My 80th Birthday Party

Introduction

These reflections on my life began as notes for a talk that I didn't have time to deliver at my Birthday Party on September 21st, 2007. As I prepared the notes I was full of gratitude for my deepening connections with friends and family. The celebration itself began with all of us singing "Happy Birthday to US" (everyone has a birthday sometime in 2007!). It ended with my dancing with anyone who wanted to connect with me in that way.

For several weeks after the Party, I had no extended time to write up my notes. Meanwhile in my spare-time moments I was pondering the notes more deeply. I was also reflecting on new inner processes that were beginning in October. In November I was pondering for the first time a Journal that I hand-wrote in Assisi during five momentous days with St. Francis in May, 2003. The Journal and the current processes turned out to be closely connected. My notes were expanding. And I was starting to include some matters too confidential and too "heavy" for a talk at a Party.

In my original notes I had outlined how I had learned to connect with other human beings in five different ways: intellectually, emotionally, musically, vibrationally (spiritually) and in breakthroughs from convention. Although my connecting through music began in my teens and continued throughout my life, the others emerged successively. so I realized that the pattern that I was uncovering was mainly sequential. Of course I was not only uncovering but also creating this sequential pattern so as to make more sense of my life-story. I would be oversimplifying my life, ignoring details that did not fit the pattern. And I would be creating the pattern in relation to my present life-concerns. Indeed, the pattern in my life seemed to be culminating in the connections that I was celebrating at my Birthday Party.

Of course, my sense of "culmination" was not realistic. I had already discovered on many occasions that there is no limit to my possible connections with others except the hidden terror and anguish and despair that constrict me bodily, emotionally and spiritually. During November two

infantile traumas that I had not previously re-experienced emerged into consciousness, enabling me to understand my loner- tendency in new ways. They could not emerge until now, when in my daily life I feel the complete opposite. Back then I felt abandoned and abused. Now I feel loved and blessed. And as deeper constrictions are uncovered and released I will be enabled to connect even more deeply with other human beings. So the apparent “culmination” continues! I’m finishing these reflections on December 18th, but by the time I send them out on New Year’s Day there may be more to add!

Most of my notes for my birthday talk had to do with learning how to connect with other human beings. Some notes, however, had to do with learning how to connect with God. In my talk I had planned to explore another overall pattern in my life: my hidden quest for mystical intimacy.

During my teens and twenties I was stirred spiritually in various ways, but I did not link the stirrings to this hidden quest. I now realize, however, that the quest not only was at work in them but also deeply influenced two crucial life-choices. The quest arose out of an intense though unconscious longing to live within the Mystery of Divine Love. In later decades I had obscure glimpses of the longing, but I confused it with my longing to find the perfect mate.

Only in recent years, as I’ve begun to experience the fulfillment of the mystical longing, has it become clear what I’ve been longing for. Recently it has also become clear how living within Divine Love confirms and transforms all my connections with other human beings. This clarity is not through concepts and language. It is a knowing that involves a not-knowing, an immersion in Mystery.

Later on I will be exploring all this as Theme #2: “Learning to Live within Divine Love”. I’m about to plunge into Theme #1: “A ‘Loner’ Connecting With Other Human Beings”. Before I do so, I need to mention two things:

(i) This is not a private document. You can pass it along to anyone who might be interested. I’m sending it both to people who were at the Party and to people who were not. I’m just guessing who might be interested in reading it. Eventually I plan to put a version on my webpage:

individual.utoronto.ca/devans

(ii) Some readers may even be interested in reading some webpage essays that fill in aspects of my life story that are barely mentioned here:
“Spiritual Counselling and Counselling Spirits” (my involvement in shamanism)
“Life after Death: Reflections on Experiences” (my involvement in spiritualism)
“Transformative Meditations for Spiritual Healers” (opening to myself, to the cosmos and to the Mystery).

Theme #1: A “Loner” Connecting with Other Human Beings

(1) Connecting through the Mind

As I’ve already mentioned, throughout my life there have been a series of shifts from being a “loner” towards being much more connected with other human beings. On the occasion of celebrating my 80th Birthday, I wanted to express my gratitude to some of the people with whom I have felt connected. Each connection is different, indeed unique. And for each I feel not only gratitude, but also an appreciation that includes awe and wonder.

During my infancy, various traumas prevented me from feeling “at home” in my own home. During the early 80s I re-experienced these traumas and gained some liberation from their unconscious influence on me. In November, however, I clearly re-experienced for the first time some horrific dimensions of one trauma . I had remembered almost dying from an infection in my ears when I was nearly two years old. What I had not previously remembered in my body was feeling so exhausted, desperate, abandoned and alone that most of me wanted to die.

After the memory surfaced I realized how influential the trauma has been throughout my whole life. Although I had never attempted suicide, a tendency to despair would sometimes take over, compounding my natural responses to disappointments. Above all, the trauma had constrained me from opening intimately to other human beings. Only at a time when I have at last come to feel very much at home in my body and in the world of people is it possible for the trauma-memory to emerge and for the trauma to be gradually dispelled.

As a child I lived mostly in my own private world of thought, fascinated with arithmetical data such as populations of cities. (Maybe today

I would have been diagnosed as autistic.) When I was 14, I wrote an ingenious and speculative essay entitled “ ATheory of Life and Matter”. I attempted to connect with my teacher by asking him to read it, but it was returned without comment months later. Five years later when I was studying philosophy at university I did receive responses to such metaphysical reflections, but during my teens I did not connect strongly through my intellect with anyone, whether teacher or fellow student.

As I’ve just indicated, my introduction to university life brought a decisive change. I began connecting intellectually with others, both as a student from 1946 to 1955 and 1958 to 1960 and then as a professor from 1960 on. During this whole period (until 1969 when another change began) my sense of identity was mainly as an intellectual within academia. My unconscious slogan was similar to Descartes’ famous saying: “I think, therefore I am”. This sense of personal identity reinforced my overall sense of being a “loner” but there was an important exception: I could feel connected with other academics as we engaged in intellectual discussion. And I was very good at this, especially at Oxford, where I honed my skills in conceptual analysis as a co-operative process of discussion with other academics. Indeed my unconscious sense of identity became “I think with others, therefore I am”.

Although I still respect the life of the mind, both in others and in myself, I’m thankful that I did not confine myself to that throughout my life. Since I did feel strongly connected intellectually, I became conscious of being a “loner” only occasionally and temporarily: usually when some emotional crisis arose. Being a loner was mostly an unconscious identity. Indeed, it was only as new ways of connecting emerged at various stages in my life that I came to realize what I had been missing!

(2) Connecting through the Emotions

In 1969 a momentous change began: I became involved in psychotherapy. My sense of identity was modified. I continued with “I think, therefore I am”, but to this I added, “I feel, therefore I am”. The new involvement included emotional engagement with other people within intense encounters. As I acknowledged previously-unconscious fears and longings and angers and as I listened to others do the same, I became aware that I share with many other human beings an emotional shadow-side. We’re “all in this together”, whether or not we’re intellectuals. (I still remember an incident when, in my first group, an ex-convict looked me in the eye and said, “You’re like me. You’re hung up on your old man!”)

My experiences in psychotherapy opened up new ways of connecting with people outside psychotherapy, especially within Therafields, the community within which I was partly immersed until 1980. There was also a gradual shift in my focus as a philosopher, for I was learning a great deal about human nature in therapy groups and also from studies of the dynamic processes that are secretly at work within us. Indeed, by 1979, as I explored questions about human fulfillment, I was turning away from philosophers as partners in dialogue. Instead, I was more in dialogue with thinkers who were in touch with the dynamic processes that are secretly at work within us: not only writers on psychotherapy but also novelists and playwrights. This shift in context was evident in my teaching and also in my writing, for example in my book, *Struggle and Fulfillment*, which I wrote in the late 1970s, connecting these dynamic processes with processes of religious and moral development.

The only philosophers with whom I clearly shared a similar approach were the existentialists. Our approaches to knowledge are very different from the impersonal techniques of science and of most philosophy. My focus was mainly emotions and theirs was the will and radical freedom, but we both emphasized understanding human nature through a process of personal change that involves uncovering one's own secret resistance to the truth about oneself. This need to expose one's own self-deception by undergoing personal transformation is in sharp contrast with the impersonal techniques of science and of most philosophy. These techniques try (often successfully in the case of science) to ensure universal agreement, and this is a very important human achievement. The price of this impersonality, however, is that it excludes the discovery of any truth that requires personal change for it to be discerned.

(3) Connecting through Music.

The third way of connecting began in 1940, long before my emotional awakening through psychotherapy. But it made that awakening possible, for it was only through my piano lessons with Margaret Grant during my teen-age years that I initially learned how to become aware of my own emotions. In retrospect, I now see that she saved me from breakdown. As I became able to create beautiful sounds on the piano, a whole range of conflicting feelings opened up: joy and grief, peace and rage, love and fear. She also encouraged me to make use of my very limited access to broadcasts or recordings of music, and through this I learned that I could be deeply stirred by listening to music. Most important, as I enjoyed the delights of

playing with her on her two pianos, I connected with her in ways that had not previously been possible with any human being.

We ended our collaboration in 1946 with a two-piano concert, and she wisely advised me not to take up piano as my career. (My hands are too small for virtuoso piano playing, and somehow she intuited that I had many other undeveloped talents.) Although music did not become my vocation, it continued to be crucial in connecting me emotionally with myself. In 1969, Margaret and I met again, this time in Toronto. For twenty years we played two pianos for an hour every week, connecting with the music and with each other through music. Sometimes at the end of the hour she referred to my involvements in psychotherapy and in church activities and said, “Don, this is my therapy and my religion!” Even at the time I realized that what she said was also partly true of me.

In recent years it has become clear for me that music is crucial in linking, as vibrations in my body, the emotional and spiritual dimensions of my being, connecting me with myself and with others. I’ve been playing my piano less, and more central is my practice of “dancing”: moving semi-gracefully to very rhythmic music nearly every morning. I do this by myself – that is, with God! But I love to do it with other human beings as well, exchanging energies in a spontaneously playful way. That’s why dancing was for me an essential ingredient in my 80th Birthday Party.

Sometimes, however, I connect with myself and with other people in ways that don’t involve audible music, but do involve an awareness of vibrations/energies in my body. This often happens when I am in a meditative state. So when I referred just now to “spiritual” dimensions of my being I was getting ahead of myself. These spiritual dimensions were opened up to me, not through psychotherapy, and not clearly through music, but by meditation. The opening began nearly thirty years ago.

(4) Connecting Spiritually

In the early 80s I explored spiritualism for two years and then began to explore shamanism. Previously I had had experiences that were spiritual, but these ventures opened me up, more than ever before, to a spiritual dimension of our humanity.

My theme here is connections with human beings. I will not be considering ways in which spiritualism and shamanism involve experiences

of connecting with a spiritual realm heavily populated with spirits who need help from me or who can bring help to me. Nor will I be considering how shamanism included experiences of connecting with nature and with many of the elements and creatures within nature. As I've already mentioned, I discuss these parts of my life-story in various webpage essays.

Through spiritualism and shamanism my sense of identity was modified to include a third dimension: “I connect spiritually, therefore I am”. Gradually I began to realize that we human beings strongly influence each other psychically/vibrationally and that this goes on over great distances and often unconsciously. A new awareness/commitment arose: it was important to “broadcast” positive rather than negative feelings and moods into the world. Not only did this realization further modify my sense of being alone. It also motivated my intense involvement, during the mid-80s, in promoting the United Nations International Day of Peace across Canada.

What appealed to me above all about the Day was the way in which a minute of silence could be the occasion during which we human beings could set aside, however briefly, the differences that divide us. During the silence we all joined together in a common focus on peace: soldiers and pacifists, right-wingers and left-wingers, people of conflicting religious faiths and of no faith. The ritual was a mini-meditation on letting go of our attachment to our belief-frameworks for the sake of peace. For a minute we no longer regarded our differences in conviction as ultimate: we're all in this together. For me the experience was not merely an intellectual abstraction, a lofty thought. I could feel the connection happening vibrationally in my body. (I was at that time also sometimes connecting psychically with individuals over long distances, so such resonating was not new to me.)

As I look back on my involvement in the Day of Peace, I celebrate its success. One year we engaged a million Canadians in the minute of silence! Back then, in the mid-80s, the Day was observed on the third Tuesday of every September. Since then the Day has shifted to September 21st, my birthday. I was reminded of this on my 80th birthday when a former organizer phoned me to wish me “Happy Birthday” and to reminisce concerning those “good old Days” together.

In retrospect, I now see that, for all its immense value, my sense of spiritual connection with humankind through the minute of silence lacked something. This “something” became clear to me in May 2003 during five momentous days with St. Francis in Assisi.

(5) Deepening Encounters with Individuals

When I arrived in Assisi and settled in my hotel room close to the great Basilica in his honour, I lay down and meditated. To my surprise I couldn't pull into consciousness the image of the risen Jesus with which I usually began. Instead, it was as if my spiritual "converter" could only get one channel. I kept seeing an image of St. Francis by Cimabue. I had first seen this fifty or so years before in Assisi. The image persisted, and St. Francis became my interior guide and teacher for the next five days. I kept a Journal, and sometime I'll write it all up to put on my webpage, but here I'm going to try to sum up what I learned at the time and in subsequent months back home.

The core impression that St. Francis made on me was his earthiness. The copy of Cimabue's Francis that I brought back from Assisi is framed in wood that creeps on to the fresco itself, so that he is emerging from nature as a very embodied human being. This earthiness affected me in many ways that might seem at first sight to be unconnected:

(i) Spontaneous Encounters. During the past 25 years I've often connected with other human beings as we meditate together, and we become "heart-present" to each other. The change since Assisi is that in everyday life, not in a meditation group, I often find myself spontaneously connecting with whoever I happen to meet in the moment, and a mutual heart-presence emerges. Sometimes it's a total stranger, the driver of a taxi that I hail. Sometimes it's an acquaintance whom I'm just beginning to get to know. Sometimes it's a patient in a hospital where I visit. When I reflect concerning this, I realize that's what's new about it is that I'm no longer constricted by an arrogant assumption that I don't have anything in common with this "ordinary" person because my preoccupations are mainly intellectual, or mainly psychotherapeutic or mainly spiritual. It was not that I was habitually brusque or rude, but I didn't initiate an encounter with them. Of course I don't always initiate encounters these days. Sometimes I simply have to be with my own thoughts. When I do connect, however, I'm usually soon discerning something in this fellow human being that I appreciate.

Some people have been living like this all their lives, but I've been a slow learner!

(ii) Befriending the Marginalized. At one sacred site, San Damiano, I witnessed the arrival of hundreds of marginalized persons with severe

intellectual, emotional or physical handicaps or with illnesses that looked terminal. Each person was accompanied by an attendant providing respectful and compassionate help. I felt that I was seeing Roman Catholic spirituality at its best, and I immediately remembered the story of St. Francis kissing the leper. I resolved then and there to do similar volunteer work eventually in Toronto. I'm sure it influenced me to become a weekly visitor at Bridgepoint Health Centre in recent years and to do so not as a "duty", or to fulfill some image of the ideal Christian, but quite "naturally": with a sense of "of course, these are fellow human beings"!

(iii) Opening up to Friends and Family. Some of you may have observed that in recent years I've been realizing far more intensely how much you matter to me and how much I matter to you. I've been letting myself love and be loved in "ordinary" ways. Much of this I've not been aware of at the time, but I was very aware when, a few years ago, I decided to have my ashes scattered, not at a remote spot, but at a designated site in Mt. Pleasant Cemetery where there is bush (yes, bush!). This was not a momentous decision in terms of its likely consequences (maybe nobody will visit the site!), but for me it indicated that an important inner change was going on within me. I was realizing that many of you will miss me when I die. Missing me might find expression in going to a designated place to mourn me, or it might not. Indeed, we eventually both need to let go and move on. But what I realized was that I was allowing the connection with you to "register" in my heart.

Again, I note that I'm a late learner of what to many non-loners is obvious! Assisi was a turning-point for me.

(iv) Savouring Significant Sacred Sites In previous decades I had (perhaps with some inner arrogance) contrasted myself with others who were moved to travel to sacred sites. I had no interest whatsoever. Why go to India to visit Ramana Maharshi's sacred site if I already connect spiritually with the great Hindu saint in my Toronto home? Why go to Israel/Palestine if I already connect spiritually with Jesus right here? In my Journal, however, I noted how wondrously-important it was for me to be in Assisi. I had come as a tourist but as St. Francis made my body his dwelling-place I had fallen in love with the physical place where this was happening. Previously I had not let myself love any particular place enough to feel any challenge in letting go of it!

Now I realize that what I said in my Journal was not true of my attachment (noted at the Party by Nick and by Catherine in their speeches) to “Land of the silver birch, home of the beaver, where still the mighty moose wanders at will”! Every summer I feel that I must get up north to a “blue lake and rocky shore” resembling the one that had grounded me to some extent as a boy at our family cottage on Lake Superior. My disdain had been for travelling physically to a place associated with a spiritual teacher with whom I could connect spiritually. But even as a boy some physical places had mattered spiritually to me, though not consciously.

What I learned in Assisi was a new intrinsic connection between the spiritual and the earthly. Since 2003 my rented cottage has been a place mainly for connecting with friends in nature and for meditating, either with them or by myself. Blue lake and rocky shore have been combined with heart-presence and with openness to the Divine Mystery.

Connecting the spiritual with the earthly-sexual was a fifth theme at Assisi.

(v) Sexuality and Spirituality (From my Journal for May 17, 2003): I was praying in the basement of the Basilica near the tomb of St. Francis. The place was full of his spiritual presence. I was feeling immense gratitude to him. In that moment he was for me my central mentor and way of access into the crucified and risen Christ and into the mystery of the overflowing joy and love within the Godhead. I asked him, “Is there anything I can do for you, Francis in return? For the Church or for your Order?”

His reply was “No. What you can do is pursue further your path of trying to bring together an active, vigorous sexuality with spirituality. This is now very close to my heart. It needs to happen. It was lacking in my times. This is new territory. Whatever can go on happening in you concerning this is helpful in the long run.”

My conversation with St. Francis continued. He asked me to give a message to a boy in Canada that the boy could turn to St. Francis at any time for protection and companionship. I agreed to do so. But I felt moved to ask him again concerning his endorsement of my attempting to bring together my sexuality and my spirituality: “How can I check whether this is from you, and not merely from my own conscious and unconscious wishes?” His reply was “Did the message come when you felt full of me? Is it still coming now as you feel full of me? Didn’t I tell you the same thing yesterday?” (He had!).

All this helped to prepare me for a new experience of the risen Jesus

early in 2006. Prior to this I had been aware of Jesus in my body as lord, as friend, as radiant light, as compassionate healer, as warrior-protector, as peace that passes understanding and in many other ways. What was new was experiencing him delighting my whole body as orgasmic lover. Since then I am often aware of him mainly in this way. And it has become clear that whenever I am connecting energetically with anyone some sexual-spiritual energy is involved.

Sometimes I am very aware of it: not only during physically intimate encounters but also during exchanges of energy on the dance floor. In most encounters, however, it is not prominent. The context and the connection are remote from what we usually think of as “sex”. Nevertheless there is an orgasmic sexual-spiritual ingredient, for this is in my body and my body is the medium for my non-verbal “message” to the other person, whether this message be healing or joy or appreciation or compassion or so-called “platonic love”. And I am connecting with the whole being of the other person, including not only spirit but also body.

Sometimes, of course, other people can misconstrue this. And until recently, I sometimes did so myself. I had not sufficiently acknowledged or understood the intensity of my longing that some day I would meet the mystery-woman who would complete me and I her. In so far as I have uncovered and discarded the desperation that distorted this longing and in so far as I have come to feel complete within myself within God’s love, a life-changing yet simple realization is arising: Connections with others can simply be enjoyed for what they are: no more, no less, and wondrously varied!

What I said just now about being “feeling complete within myself within God’s love” introduces the second main theme in this presentation, the story of my hidden longing for mystical intimacy with God. This longing has been secretly at work throughout my life. It is only recently, however, as it is beginning to be fulfilled, that I have come to realize how important it has been.

Theme #2: Learning to Live Within Divine Love

1. Mystical Longing Secretly Motivating Me:

One evening in September, 1950, a momentous change of direction occurred in my life.

I had arrived in England to begin studies at Oxford, planning to take

a course called “Philosophy, Politics and Economics” as a preparation for getting into the Canadian Department of External Affairs. During the previous two summers I had been heavily involved in international student politics as a representative of the Student Christian Movement, first at a Moscow-sponsored youth meeting in Hungary and then at (what I later learned to be) a C.I.A.-sponsored youth meeting in Turkey. I had decided to become a diplomat. If I had done so, I might well have participated in a very exciting period for Canadian diplomats, including Pearson’s initiation of a peace-keeping intervention by the United Nations during the Suez Canal crisis.

I went to a play by T.S. Eliot called “The Cocktail Party” in London and when I returned to my hotel room that night I realized that my calling was to become a United Church minister.

This involved a change in course plans (no politics or economics) and a commitment to study theology afterwards. What was it in the play that had sparked this shift from diplomat to pastor? At the time all I knew was that I had been in some way in God’s presence and that the need for the shift had become obvious.

During the 70s I became aware of some emotional factors that had been at work, including an unconscious desire to connect more closely with my mother. But it was not until a few years ago, reading the Eliot play again, that I realized what had motivated me at a deeper, spiritual level. It was part of a speech by the heroine, Celia, in which she tries to put into words the “vision” that had inspired her to leave London high-society on a mystical path:

“For what happened is remembered like a dream
In which one is exalted by intensity of loving
In the spirit, a vibration of delight
Without desire, for desire is fulfilled
In the delight of loving. A state one does not know
When awake. But what, or whom I loved,
Or what in me was loving, I do not know.”

When I read this passage I realized that Eliot was articulating a state that I now recognized. Something like this began happening in the 1990s, a sustained state of being loved and loving, of living within a divine love that is utterly mysterious, yet delightful and fulfilling. I realized then that in previous decades I had enjoyed encounters with Jesus that brought glimpses of the Divine Mystery mainly “out there”. A shift was beginning, however,

and it was confirmed when, in June 1994, I began to be aware of Jesus dwelling within me, enabling me to start living within divine love as he already does. What the play had stirred within me in 1950 was a longing, then unconscious, for what would not begin to become clearly conscious until many, many years later.

As I reflect on being a late learner concerning divine love I do not chastize myself for being so resistant during most of my life. Nor do I write off the various non-mystical involvements and projects that motivated me, for these, too, have their own significance. And although I realize that my being a late learner concerning human love distinguishes me adversely from many other human beings, I now see that my slowness concerning both kinds of love arose from having to deal with early traumas that shaped me into a “loner”.

I have already indicated how early traumas made me a “loner” in relation to other human beings. Concerning my becoming a “loner” in relation to God, I have a strong conviction, based on experience: I came into this world full of divine light, and one of the effects of the traumas was to almost-extinguish that light. Fortunately there was also within me a deep desire to return into intimacy with God and a deep desire to connect, somehow, with other human beings. Both these desires are, I believe, at work to some extent in every human being.

After I probed Celia’s vision a few years ago and it shed light on my shift in 1950 from becoming a diplomat to becoming a pastor, this new light helped me better understand another crucial life-decision. In 1948 I converted back from philosophical agnosticism to the Christian faith during a Christian Mission at the University of Toronto. An articulate Anglican priest called Jim Puxley lived for a week in my men’s residence, and he combined an informed passion for social activism (which I understood) with stories of Hindu/Christian meditating in India (which I did not understand). Both these challenges from Jim affected me. The former consciously influenced me towards becoming a diplomat, but the latter influenced me in subtle ways that I was not then aware of!

Thus new insights came from pondering the influence of Celia’s vision in 1950 and Jim Puxley’s presence in 1948. About the same time I also gained new insights concerning an important influence during 1943-46: the Methodist spirituality in my United Church congregation that strongly shaped my late-teen Christian faith. This influence became clear to me when, a few years ago and for the first time in my life, I began studying John and Charles Wesley and their combination of social activism and mystical hymns.

Methodism had prepared me to respond to Jim Puxley's combination of activism and mysticism as my return pathway to Christ.

An Important Digression:

The appeal of social activism did not disappear for me in 1950, though it receded into the background until the mid-1960s, when I was a leading Canadian opponent of the war in Vietnam, co-organizing the first "Teach-In", leading the first demonstration on Parliament Hill, and even organizing a march of 400 University of Toronto professors on the U.S. consulate in Toronto. Even in the late 70s and late 80s, when I was more drawn to organizing meditative events such as the United Nations Day of Peace, I organized Ontario-wide political campaigns against impending legislation that threatened the civil liberties of counsellors.

It was not until the early 90s that I deliberately withdrew from all such activism to focus on learning how to connect with myself and with others and with God in a heart-present way. Although I have no regrets about my social activism, and I support it financially to express my gratitude to those who contribute to human welfare in this way. I now realize that it was not for me an adequate way to be liberated out of being a loner. And I now realize how rare it is for activists, however noble their cause, to avoid being caught up in a dominant "us-versus-them" ideological framework, connecting with fellow human beings only within a camaraderie of conflict against the enemies of the noble cause. Some people such as Ghandhi and the Dalai Lama manage to remain activists while also loving not only their personal enemies but also the enemies of justice and freedom and peace and the environment. Although this combination is rare, perhaps it is what more and more of us are being called to live.

Such a combination is not, however, my calling, and this seems unlikely to change at this stage of my life. Moreover it seems to me that some people such as, say, Ralph Nader, are genuinely called to an activism that is largely impersonal and "us-versus-them" in character. They oppose oppressive institutional structures and they oppose people who dominate others through those structures. Such activism does not suffice to bring in a better society, for it perpetuates human conflict and it constricts human connecting. Humankind, however, can not afford ignoring oppression while we wait until everyone becomes a saint.

Indeed, history shows that many saintly individuals were unable to recognize oppression as oppression. For example, Christian saints condoned the enslavement of blacks and aboriginals, the fundamental subordination and semi-slavery of women in relation to men, the rejection of Jews as Christ-killers and the rejection of homosexuals as sub-human deviants. They were not likely to kill anyone in these groups with their bare hands, but they accepted ideologies that legitimized the power of the dominant group in society to do this as an exercise of state authority. And the ideologies encouraged mobs to fill up with hate and destroy these minorities in times of crisis. Although, more than most human beings, the saints uncovered the self-deceptive and destructive tendencies within themselves as individuals, they were less insightful concerning the deceptive and destructive ideologies that shape the ideas that seem obvious in each society.

Although some Jewish prophets emphasized a responsibility for the poor and marginalized in a society, the tendency of dominant groups to create ideologies justifying their power over those whom they oppress was not clearly identified until the rise of secular sociology in the middle of the 19th century, especially by Karl Marx in his attack on Capitalist doctrines. When disciples of Marx actually gained power, however, they did not apply his insight to the Communist doctrines that justified the oppressive powers of the Communist leaders.

Even though growth in saintliness reduces one's individual participation in evil and even if it usually improves one's discernment of oppression, it is rare and it takes time. Meanwhile oppression gets worse if it is not actively challenged.

To sum up this digression: While my personal calling at this stage of my life is focused on being transformed through dedication to a mystical path, not allowing myself to be distracted by aside social activism, I do not invite everyone to join with me in this . I thank God that the Dalai Lama exists, combining transformative mysticism with social activism And I thank God that Ralph Nader exists, focusing almost exclusively on social activism. I also thank God for people who contribute to society in many other ways, dedicated to scientific research or to artistic creativity or to parenting or some other dimension of human life. None of us by ourselves can be completely human. We supplement each other, filling in the gaps, enriching human life.

So I return to my journey into transformative mysticism.

2. Mysticism: Being Emptied into God and Being Filled with God

In this section I hope you'll bear with me as I introduce some general descriptions of mystical meditation that are necessary as a background to what I'll be presenting more specifically from my life-story later on.

During the 1980s I sometimes meditated in a mystical way that is described in many texts, both Christian and non-Christian. It involves a deliberate "emptying" of consciousness. One way is to focus the energy of one's attention more and more on one item in consciousness such as one's breathing or a sacred word ("mantra") or a candle-flame or an icon. Everything else recedes towards the "edge" of consciousness. With practice the emptying becomes more and more thorough and a meditator may enter into what many call "pure consciousness". The emptiness (or "no-thingness" or "nirvana" or "Godhead") is all that remains, an emptiness that one can only refer to in negative ways: silence, stillness, formlessness, darkness or unknowing. One may have a sense of "falling" into a bottomless abyss. Indeed, in an imaginative Christian version of this one descends in an elevator, focused on Jesus; after quite a while he gets out and soon one realizes that the door is open and one can decide whether or not to step out into total darkness!

On some paths similar to mine, if one lets go into the fall, (if one, as it were, stops clinging by one's finger nails to some thing) the emptiness may eventually be filled with divine light or love or compassion or joy or serene peace. These energy-states all have a distinctively divine quality that distinguishes them from what one previously experienced. For example, experiences of spiritual light are among the experiences to which one may become attached and which need to be shed from consciousness during the meditation of self-emptying. But the divine light after emptying seems to come directly from God, and one is spontaneously filled with it. One is not attached to it by one's desires. (As Celia said concerning divine love, "a vibration of delight without desire, for desire is fulfilled in the delight of loving".) Eastern Orthodox mystics call these vibrations the "uncreated energies of God" in contrast with energies that are creaturely gifts from God, for example the universal energy that pervades the cosmos. In my own experience the divine energies are incomparably more powerful. As one mystic-theologian puts it: "God who is inaccessible in His essence is present in His energies. They are God himself in his action."

I still vividly remember being in such a state, aware only of God, while on retreat in the early 1980s, but that was an isolated event and soon afterwards a disappointing event triggered deep distrust and despair in me, and the ecstatic state receded almost completely. My own use of the self-emptying meditation, both then and now, has been as a way of becoming more receptive to my own inner mystery and the Divine Mystery as a source of practical guidance. Having “done” considerable emptying, I then stop and wait, asking for discernment: “Is there anything within me right now that is an obstacle to deeper connection with another human being or with Divine Love or with both?” This practical emphasis arose partly because I’ve never had a sense that, on the path to which I am called, pure consciousness is the goal. It is only significant in that the movement towards it helps me to reduce my narcissistic self-preoccupation. The real goal is to embody the Divine Mystery in me, in this particular human being. My goal is not to shed my humanity completely so as to realize that only God is real.

Also, my own awareness of the uncreated energies of God has arisen mainly in meditations that involve being filled with created energies from God as I become more open to myself, to other people, and to the cosmos. In recent years this has increasingly provided a context for also opening myself to the divine energies. One such breakthrough happened in mountainous woods near Assisi, when I was so joyfully filled with St. Francis’ connections with nature and with God that I filled a whole valley with my (his, God’s) joyful sounding for several minutes. And this access to divine joy has continued periodically ever since.

Previously I had been granted brief glimpses of divine light, sometimes when helping people of other faiths. I still remember what happened while I was involved in spiritual counselling with a devotee of Krishna: an awesomely-radiant blessing that came Krishna to both of us. And on another occasion, as part of a process of protecting a Muslim from Iran against black magic, we asked Allah to send angels: we were both immersed in intense divine light. Similar experiences within Jewish and Buddhist and aboriginal contexts convinced me that access to uncreated divine energies is not confined to Christian contexts. Indeed, a mystic who was deeply immersed in one of the other spiritualities would have a more intense and sustained access than I do when I’m graced by a glimpse into their path.

My own path has been centrally Christian and I would find myself much more frequently participating in Jesus’ awareness of uncreated energies. To the extent that Jesus’ bodily presence was allowed by me into my own body, these energies would move through me to anyone for whom I was a vehicle for healing. In particular, I was becoming more and more a vehicle

for divine compassion. One Thursday in October, 2007 there was a sudden acceleration of this process. As I stood at the foot of a patient's bed I felt I was being initiated into the Mystery of divine compassion, which flowed unimpeded through me, blessing me on the way, and deeply affecting the patient. This was a step towards what happened in December, which I will eventually report in the next section. But first I must return to what I learned from St. Francis about embodied mysticism.

3. Learning Embodied Mysticism from St. Francis

Earlier I outlined five changes in my way of connecting with other human beings that began during five days with St. Francis in May 2003. These changes also involved a change in my mystical connection with God.

I've already drawn on Assisi Journal for May 17th, when I first visited the crypt of the Tomb of St. Francis in the basement of the great Basilica. In my Journal for May 19th I noted some new discernments that were given to me during a return visit there. I paraphrase it as follows:

My calling is to embody the Godhead, the Divine Mystery. Previously this had mainly involved resonating bodily with the divine energies communicated to me through participating in Christ's resurrection-body presence. But the new approach was to balance this divine focus with much more of a human focus: on everyday, earthly human existence. I was to become more aware of the vulnerable, mortal lives of Jesus and Francis. Concerning my own humanity I was to acknowledge more deeply not only my own vulnerability and mortality but also my shadow-stuff that constricts my connection with both God and humankind. Much more needs to be uncovered and then either shed or transformed.

In the crypt, Francis was helping me to sink fully into my materiality as I sat beside the stone wall touching its formidable, harsh surface again and again. I was told that in the future I should repeatedly remind myself of Francis at work in me, realizing that he was bringing both me and God more fully into my body. Every time I reminded myself, a deeper embodiment would occur.

As I left the crypt and went up to the main Basilica, I felt weak and knew I needed to lie down. Fortunately my hotel room was nearby. For over an hour my self-awareness was "heavy, dense, very material". I was learning something new: although embodying the Divine Mystery sometimes involves feeling light, diffuse and heavenly-spiritual, this earthy experience is indispensable. More generally, I was learning that although embodying the

Divine Mystery may at times be awesomely ecstatic, the process continues through ordinary, everyday consciousness.

A further Journal entry for May 19th continues this emphasis on embodiment as earthy and ordinary, expanding on what I said earlier concerning embodiment of sexuality: “A new ‘project’ for our times, endorsed (I believe) by Francis for me and for others, involves combining a truly earthy sexuality and a mystical union with God. This goes beyond a bodily exchange of sexual-spiritual energies, though it may include this.”

As I reflect on this now, in December, 2007, a generalization arises from all this: Christians are called to continue Christ’s incarnation of God, and this involves not only becoming more and more “partakers of the divine nature” but also becoming more and more completely human. We are called to become more and more like Jesus in his connection with both the divine and the human.

This involves discerning whatever within us impedes both the divinizing and the humanizing process. For me – though maybe not for others - this includes uncovering childhood traumas. In the Introduction I referred not only to the mastoid-operation trauma but to a second one that also emerged in November. I’ll spare you the details, but suffice it to say that what erupted into consciousness during a meditation was a repressed bodily memory of a sexual interference. Many other such memories had previously emerged, mainly in 1982, but this one had been buried more deeply. So it was the worst! It broke my heart.

At the beginning of the healing process that followed, I drew on my present awareness of being loved by many different women and men and by many diverse spiritual presences (centrally Jesus as my Lord and my Lover). This utterly-opposite present context made it possible for the trauma to become conscious after being repressed for nearly 78 years. And it gradually made it possible for me to gradually shed much of the bodily-emotional residue that remained within me. What’s new in this healing process is that, as it went on, it has increasingly involved a very specific bodily awareness of what is going on, especially in the back of my heart, my right lung and my right shoulder-socket, which were directly affected when I was being abused. Increasingly during December my consciousness during healing involves focusing on the earthy/ordinary rather than on spiritual presences. I trust that Jesus is at work in what is happening physically, and I let him take over. In this respect the healing involves experiences that resemble the “dense”, “heavy” embodiment that I first experienced in the crypt of St. Francis.

Surprisingly, however, the healing process experienced as very literal, physical embodiment has been associated with three new spiritual breakthroughs:

(i) First, there was an engagement with a patient (X) whom I had previously passed by because to me his condition seemed hopeless. I had assumed that, in contrast with others with whom I could have some non-verbal energetic or psychic contact, he was beyond access by me. When I entered the room he shares with three others, I suddenly felt moved to stand in front of him. Immediately I was being initiated into divine compassion, as I had been previously with another patient. But what was new was that both of us were being utterly immersed in divine compassion together.

(ii) Second, during a morning healing-meditation, I was focusing my attention on my heart, my right lung and right shoulder-joint. I received a surprising instruction: “Recall your experience of divine compassion with X and direct that same compassion to these bodily parts and to yourself generally”. Suddenly, as I was “doing” this, the energy-field of divine compassion swept outwards to include X, while still encompassing me. As this happened I realized that the divine compassion was healing him as well as me; indeed, he was being healed through me. But in some way, as he was receiving healing, he was also in some way, contributing to my healing.

(iii) Third, the next time I visited X, what happened spontaneously was very new. There was no longer any sense of my bringing something to him, plus perhaps his reciprocating (as had happened with some patients previously) but rather that his healing and mine were both part of the same divine energy-process. Although we remained distinct as human beings, we were not really separate, for our healing/transformation involves each other. My identity in some way includes his, and vice versa. The fact that he more obviously needs healing is irrelevant.

That day in December I also visited several other patients and found that something similar happened spontaneously. It happened even where previously a patient and I had been aware of my bringing peaceful energies to her and then her sending some back for me to receive. Something more organically-connecting was going on than my being sufficiently “humble” to receive healing from her, where her condition is so obviously worse than mine. Rather, I was realizing experientially for the first time the truth of the mystical teaching that healing has to happen in all of us if any of us is to be completely healed. The slogan “We’re all in this together” has taken on a deeper meaning for me than ever before.

Moreover, I'm realizing that within this new process I am connecting both with people and with God and that this process is spontaneous and that it can occur whenever I'm meeting another human being. Human healing/transformation is more obviously needed in hospitals, but less dramatic versions of it are part of the stuff of ordinary, everyday life. My own hunch is that even if people are not conscious of divine compassion they are drawing on it whenever their own human compassion moves them to help another human being. But of course I don't press them to believe this. Beliefs matter so much less than human compassion!

Much later on in December there have been three new developments in my morning meditations: First, my joyful experiences of sexual-spiritual intimacy with Jesus as Lover have become even more central in the process of my physical healing, often resulting in my body shaking-out the remnants of trauma that remain. Second, the sexual-spiritual component in the energy-field of divine compassion has become even more obvious, as is its presence (in various ways and degrees) in encounters with fellow human beings, whether in a hospital or in everyday settings. Third, I've been made aware that the process in which my own trauma-suffering is being healed and transformed is including, more and more, a healing and transformation of other people's suffering; indeed, I am being called to focus, more and more, on this "work" for others. God has been working hard on me to soften me up to be a locus and a vehicle of compassion and of joy!

A Postscript Concerning a Saying by St. Francis

"Can true humility and compassion exist in our words and our eyes unless we know we too are capable of any act?"

My own interpretation of this saying is that true humility and compassion preclude having any sense of being superior to another human being and any judgment that anyone who could do such-and-such is beyond compassion. My hunch is that, like the saintly Jean Vanier in our time, St. Francis had uncovered impulses within himself similar to those that motivated people to despicable or destructive actions. And, like Vanier, he realized that although he himself had not as yet performed any such actions, he could understand how, in extreme circumstances and/or with a different life-history, he could do so.

A less immediate interpretation, but one based on the life and

teachings of St. Francis, and applicable in other traditions, is that “any human act” includes not only the worst but also the best, not only what seems sub-human but also what seems too saintly to consider as a possibility. If we are to have true humility and compassion we must become like Jesus (or the Dalai Lama, or Ghandi) and we won’t become like Jesus unless we know that, deep down, we are capable of becoming like him. And this involves coming to know the divine reality at work in him.

This positive appreciation of one’s own saintly possibilities is correlated with being willing and able to appreciate a similar inner mystery within other human beings, however hidden this may seem to be to them and to oneself. Indeed, it is only to the extent that one is actually becoming truly humble and compassionate that one can discern the saintly possibilities in others where their conduct is obviously destructive. I’m not able to discern this in some people, but I’m beginning to understand how St. Francis could, and to move towards this in my remaining years. What a blessing!

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