

Reflections Before and after my 80th Birthday **(a sequel, February 10, 2008)**

Further Explorations: **Divine Healing, Divine Love and Self-Love**

Introduction

In my mini-memoir, “Reflections Before and After My 80th Birthday” which I emailed to many of you on January 1, 2008, I reviewed some patterns and themes in my life, drawing on notes for a talk that I never gave for my 80th Birthday Party (September 21, 2007) and on new developments up to January 1, 2008. Some of you told me that you enjoyed reading it. That feed-back, plus some instructions to write that came to me during meditation, have encouraged me to write a sequel.

Maybe later on I’ll be moved to write a further sequel, though I don’t expect to stir up interest on the scale of Harry Potter! In fact, if you would like to unsubscribe, please let me know. I know that what I’m writing about is not of widespread interest, even among my friends!

For a few people, however, it may even be inspiring. It’s not that I feel that I’m writing a spiritual recipe for anyone else to follow. Indeed, I’m becoming more and more certain that each person has their own unique path to uncover in relation to their own distinct calling. But I’ve been edified and encouraged by others who have left behind some public journalling, and I feel moved to do likewise. Feel free to pass this along to anyone you think might be interested.

If you want to unsubscribe, or to give me some feed-back, or to receive my first mini-memoir, my phone is 416-924-3943. My Email is donald.evans@utoronto.ca. I’ll also be referring to my webpage: <http://individual.utoronto.ca/devans>

This second mini-memoir is in three parts:

- (I) Two Recent Processes of divine healing**
- (II) Divine love has many dimensions**
- (III) Self-love as understood in 1978, 1988 and 2008**

I should note in advance that Part III, unlike the first two, is not mainly reflections on new experiences during January, but rather a consideration and revision of views concerning self-love that I expressed thirty and twenty years ago. I now see myself as having been very much on the right track back then concerning the crucial significance of learning how to love oneself. But I lacked the experiential basis to really understand some of the things that I was writing about! And there are important differences between what I understood then and what I now understand about loving oneself and loving others. So in Part III, as in my initial memoir, I'm looking back over my life, noting continuity and change in relation to a central theme in my life-story. This may or may not be of interest to you.

Part I: Two Recent Processes of Divine Healing

Two processes of divine healing occurred since January 1, 2008. The first involved the prominence of erotic/orgasmic divine energy in physical healing. The second involved my computer, my father and despair.

(1) Erotic/orgasmic divine energy in physical healing

During January the prominence of what I call the erotic/orgasmic" aspect of divine love in physical healing has become even more obvious, especially in a recent process. .

About nine years ago I became aware of a feminine spiritual presence working within me and through me in bringing a measure of physical healing, and the presence was partly erotic. Those experiences, however, were not comparable in focus or intensity to what the divine erotic presence has been bringing recently. I've experienced penetrating healing in particular bodily parts, beginning with the prostate and moving up into the heart, the right lung, the right shoulder and the mastoid and occipital bones connected to my right ear, which was so severely traumatized in infancy. The starting-point was the prostate and this was clearly linked with the stirrings of orgasmic energy that I've been aware of as beginning there. From the prostate the energies spread generally throughout my body, but they have been focused particularly on the bodily parts that I mentioned.

A few days ago the process became so prolonged and so relentless that I realized I needed some help, and specifically from a particular

woman-friend who would be guided by Spirit concerning what to “do”, whether to intensify the process to a completion or to slow it down. And I also wanted her to, literally, hold my hand, for I felt a very human need to receive her support and her love and not to face this alone. My friend came over and soon it was clear that the process required the physical presence of a loving woman to complement the predominantly masculine presence of God through Jesus. Through her participation the process (which had begun to feel like being on runaway horse!) not only calmed down but felt complete, as if I had arrived at my intended destination. The process was not an exchange of sexual-spiritual energies between us, but a transmission of divine-presence energy through her as well as through Jesus’ resurrected-bodily presence. And the divine-presence energy was primarily orgasmic.

Since I had often been aware of such energy spreading within me through Jesus, this was not new to me. What was new was the focused way in which this divine orgasmic energy brought physical healing, and the clear awareness that in such healing sometimes Jesus is not enough, for a loving woman needs to be his associate. Some previous experiences had pointed in this direction, but not so decisively.

Only a few days before all this happened I had been instructed by Jesus on two occasions to enjoy the orgasmic exchange of love between him and me simply for its own sake rather than as the vehicle for this or that change in me or blessing in others (e.g. a physical healing). Even if this celebration only lasted for five minutes or so, it was important for me to realize that valuing it for its own sake is a crucial part of living within divine love. By analogy, times of sexual intimacy with one’s spouse are not to be valued only instrumentally in relation to some purpose. In the precious moment, the other suffices. Perhaps this prepared me for the contrasting moment where Jesus did not suffice in bringing healing. .

How do I understand what is going on when Jesus is within me as sexual lover? Some experiences in the fall of 2007 involved a strong awareness of my “feminine side” receiving him. I even associated this with the image of the feminine spirit, whom I called Anna, who previously had seemed to be somewhat distinct from me, as a special spirit-guide. But there was also an awareness of Jesus’ erotic presence as strengthening and transforming my “masculine side”, especially my confidence and assertiveness as an erotic lover.

What are the implications of these experiences for other people? It is possible that orgasmic energies have been prominent in my processes of physical-emotional-spiritual healing because of the crucial prominence

of sexual wounding in my own early history. People who have a different history sometimes report no such prominence when they report their own physical healing. Perhaps this is an important difference among people. In some cases, however, my hunch is that the orgasmic energies are involved, even though neither the person nor the healer is aware of them. A similar denial of orgasmic energies is very evident to me in a different context: not physical healing but religious revival. I have witnessed some charismatic evangelicals ecstatically arching their backs and opening their upper chests and extending their arms up and back in what involves at least some elements of the “orgasmic reflex”. Some of them would indignantly deny that their spiritual state is partly sexual!

Nevertheless I do not maintain that what’s been true for me is true for everybody. Indeed, we human beings differ so much in so many ways that it’s likely that some people differ radically from me both in what ails them and in what heals them. In general, however, my impression is that we human beings resemble each other more in what ails us than in what heals us.

(2) My Computer, My Father and Despair

During the weekend of January 25-27 I went through another powerful transformational process. I had hoped that the two processes in November/December had completed the work on traumas in infancy, for the positive spiritual results were so wonderful. But of course I was mistaken! This new process had to do with my father: uncovering and releasing a deeper layer of grief/disappointment that was connected with practical helplessness and with cold rage. The way in which the uncovering took place was interesting: apparently-unrelated events in my daily life combined with repressed bodily memories that were about to emerge into consciousness.

All my adult life I have felt incompetent when I had to deal with material things that need fixing, whether these be flat tires or leaky taps or jammed drawers or defective toys or – more recently - balky computers. Of course the demands of real life had forced me to learn some skills, but always with a sense of anxiety and personal incompetence. Mostly I understood all this as an unchangeable fact about myself. Even today I regard it as partly true: I am incompetent! Indeed my klutzy behaviour increases as I get older! But even back in the 1960s and 1970s I also realized that part of the explanation was that, unlike my older brother, I never had the opportunity to learn any such skills from my father.

During psychotherapy in the 1970s I learned that I had a deep distrust of my father. I also learned, through “work-therapy” led by competent and patient men, that I could learn some rudimentary skills and gain some limited self-confidence. In the early 1980s I started having memories of infantile traumas, and I realized why I distrusted my father. I began to shed some of the bodily-emotional shock that remained in my body because of them. By the mid-1990s I was beginning to find reconciliation and friendship with him in spirit and a few years ago was even able to bring some healing to him. So when new traumas emerged into consciousness at the end of 2007 this did not involve feelings towards him in the present. As bodily memories of grief and disappointment arose concerning his emotional abandonment of me and as I re-experienced the confusion and anger that I felt as an infant concerning his abuse, I was not, in late 2007, feeling that way towards him as he lives on in spirit. Nor was I feeling negative towards him when in January 2008 I had to shed further “stuff” within myself in a process for which I was being prepared during the previous month.

In order to explain what happened in January 2008 I must fill in some background. A few years ago I bought a computer, for me a very daring step. Not long after making the purchase, I phoned my youngest son, Gareth, who was my patient and knowledgeable guide into a strange, new world, yet again seeking his advice: “Gareth, something has happened to my computer. I’ve mastered it, I think, but it seems difficult. When I want the arrow to go up, I draw the mouse down, and when I want it to go left, I move the mouse right.” His response, of course, was “Dad, I think you have the mouse upside down!” After that, however, I did make some progress.

In early January 2008 I was using my computer so much that I reluctantly made the difficult decision to hook up my computer to Bell Sympatico so that I could both receive phone calls and be on line sending email. By January 25th I had wasted many hours of my own time and that of friends, trying to get this to work. I was so “pissed off” that I decided to give up, and go back to my UofT phone connection. I had acknowledged to myself and to others that “nothing else in life makes me feel such helplessness and despair”, but I hadn’t questioned or challenged the disproportionate intensity of my reaction.

I meditated, reminding myself of the presence of Jesus in my body and letting myself go into this despair. What emerged in consciousness was a more intense grief and disappointment concerning my father than I had ever felt before. And, even more important, the despair was connected with his failure to provide any support in becoming a competent male

among males. I took a break from the process and prepared a snack, which I ate while watching TV. As I tried various channels I was suddenly gripped by a Shakespearean historical play re-set during the First World War. The main character was standing by the corpse of a man in a morgue and eloquently expressing a sinister cold rage. I shuddered as I realized that I was seeing something that was within me – not dominant or even powerful, but nevertheless subtly at work in my life. I had felt it, and not merely distrust and disappointment, towards my father. Now I must shed it completely.

When I went back into process in the presence of Jesus, my body was taken over by energies that literally shook the residue of trauma out of my body. Shortly after that I felt a remarkable calm, and made the decision to phone an expert who is knowledgeable concerning Imac computers, Bell Sympatico and UofT systems to come. He costs money, but I would ask him to come and to try to hook me up with Bell. If he couldn't, I would ask him to do whatever was necessary to rehook me back to dial-in with Uof T. What was new was the complete absence of despair, both in making this decision and in general! And I now have confidence that, even if my computer lets me down in the future – as I now realize is very likely, for it can happen even to a computer whiz - I'll be minimally rather than maximally vulnerable to despair. I'll resent spending hours on the phone with a technician in India who is taking me step by step through necessary or unnecessary procedures, but it's not likely to "get to me" in the old way.

In retrospect, I now realize that when I meditate my awareness of the presence of Jesus strengthens and transforms my confident assertiveness in the world. I noted in my first memoir that as a young man I had such a confident assertiveness within the intellectual world. This, of course, had not helped me to cope in the practical world where things need to be fixed. The presence of Jesus through my computer-crisis did not transform me into a handy-man, but my awareness of his compassion and appreciation for me enabled me to break the link between my computer-incompetence and my hidden sense of being abandoned by my father.

Part II Divine Love Has Many Dimensions

In the mini-memoir for which this is a sequel, I ended up trying to express in words a new experiential understanding of divine compassion that had emerged during December 2007. Here I will present this again, though in a different way.

Previously I sometimes asked God to bless someone while not myself connecting with him/her, whether close by or at a distance. (Such intercession is especially appropriate if energy-connection is, at the moment, unsafe for one or both of us.)

Or, instead of such intercession, I would sometimes “pass along” some of the presence/energies that were pervading my body while connecting with the person. If the person were close by, I sometimes would also be receiving from him/her and through him/her.

What was new in December was different from either of these in that I became conscious of “stepping” into a divine-energy process that is already going on, where both the other person and I are being healed and each of us is involved in the healing of the other. This new mystical state differs from intercession and from “passing along” energies in two ways:

(i) The energy-process is divine in the sense that it involves uncreated energies that directly express divine presence, in contrast with the created energies within nature and within us human beings. Compassionate divine (uncreated) energies and compassionate human (created) energies differ in that, in my experience, the divine are limitlessly powerful and they also transform my human energies. They also intensify my awareness of the horror in the suffering while not thereby debilitating me. (In distinguishing the two kinds of energies as “uncreated” and “created” I am drawing on the theology of Eastern Orthodox Christian mystics. It is a way for me to convey in language my experience of some energies as coming “straight from the Source” whereas others are a dimension of this material world. I realize that the distinction may be expressed in other ways by people in other mystical traditions.)

(ii) Although the new mystical state did not obliterate my sense of being distinct from the other person (as some “Eastern” mystical experiences do), I had a new and expanded sense of my identity as somehow including the other person. It became obvious that healing has to happen in all of us if any of us is to be completely healed. Another change that took place in January was in my daily thank-you to Jesus every morning. For about two years I had thanked him for four gracious gifts: (i) renewing my sexual “juiciness” (ii) bringing me healing (iii) enabling me to grow in love and (iv) initiating me into divine mysteries such as divine compassion. In January I gradually realized that the first three belonged in the fourth, along with other divine mysteries. And I realized that living within divine love meant living within all of these as dimensions of divine love. They are all present, but sometimes one is prominent, sometimes another.

I began Part II by outlining a recent shift into bodily awareness of divine compassion as a dimension of divine love. The shift occurred because I was initiated by Jesus into this mystery. The same was true of my new bodily awareness of divine love as erotic/orgasmic. Another dimension of divine love is divine joy, into which I was decisively initiated five years ago by St. Francis in Assisi, who of course was filled with Jesus.

Still another dimension of divine love is divine glory. When I am aware of divine glory in a bodily way I am stirred in three distinct but inter-related ways: (i) I celebrate and appreciate the wondrous radiance of God's presence. (ii) I am also moved to celebrate and appreciate the glory that the divine mystery is bestowing on me, both in creating me and in gradually transforming me. (iii) I am also being enabled to celebrate and appreciate this glory in everyone else, even if thus far their potential far mostly hidden from them and is difficult for me to discern.

This threefold new awareness applies not only to divine glory but to the other dimensions of divine love. It has gradually emerged prominently in consciousness as a result of a daily practice in which, in the presence of Jesus, I ask God, the divine mystery, whether there is anything in this moment that I need to discern because it is impeding greater intimacy with divine love. Usually the answer involves uncovering and shedding an idolatrous attachment to a person or to a project or to a familiar way of responding in life; but sometimes the answer is a challenge to celebrate the greater intimacy that already has been emerging within me and in my perception of others.

Some aspects of divine love such as divine peace and divine glory/radiance/light were uncovered for me in many stages over many decades. Another aspect, divine creativity, emerged in a recent initiation, but was prepared-for over several decades in which I learned how to resonate bodily with the primal energies at the centre of the earth, which are created energies similar to the "Big Bang" energies at the beginning of the universe. The new initiatory shift was a "glimpse" of the divine energies out of which the "Big Bang" originated and which continue to sustain everything in existence. Thus far my awareness of divine creativity has not been as sustained as my awareness of other mysteries. Of course I've been indirectly aware of it for many decades in so far as I've been aware of my continuous dependence-for-existence on Mystery. But this creaturely awareness of myself and of everything is not the same as an awareness of the Mystery's creativity in sustaining everything in existence.

During January 2008 I have come to realize more clearly than ever

before that all the various aspects of divine love are interconnected and that even when one aspect is prominent, the others are to some extent also present. For example, something of the erotic/orgasmic divine or the joyful divine can be involved while visiting a dying patient, though the compassionate is prominent. And divine peace may subtly pervade an erotic encounter. Moreover, even when no particular aspect is prominent, and the situation seems very “ordinary”, including nothing that is obviously miserable or “sexy” or exciting, all aspects may be quietly present, and easily awakened into consciousness.

Although my recent initiations into aspects of divine love have come through Jesus, who is already pervading my body and my consciousness, I do not regard him as the required way for everyone. Indeed, much has happened to me that was not, at the time, consciously linked by me with Jesus. Maybe he was at work, but it would be an unnecessary venture of faith for me to make a point of claiming this. My experience of Jesus is that concerning other human beings he is not concerned that they consciously accept him as Lord, especially if they are already on a path that is helping them to become more loving human beings. (So I don't pray to God or Jesus for the conversion of the Dalai Lama to Christianity and I don't lament the fact that Ghandi never became a Christian!)

During January my experience of Jesus clarified in relation to my initiation by him into the erotic/orgasmic dimension of the divine love, which began two years previously. Although my “entry-point” into an awareness of orgasmic/erotic presence pervading my body is my awareness of Jesus, his presence involves not only his human nature but also his divine nature. So I'm aware not only of Jesus' passion for me (which is in some ways similar to that of another human being), but also of the divine passion for me. This divine passion for me combines both yearning and delight.

Most traditional Christian thought tends to contrast human “eros” (yearning, needy love) with divine “agape” (unconditional love) and either degrades human eros or praises it in so far as it is a human yearning for connection with God rather than with creatures. So I'm aware that in speaking of God's yearning passion for me and God's passionate delight in me I am proposing something that is not mainstream. . Nevertheless some Christian mystics have reported something similar. And conventional Christianity, as presented by some evangelical and Roman Catholic preachers on TV, depicts an intimacy with God as a love affair, a mutual wooing: it is not completely clear that this is to be understood as only an analogy. Even John Calvin, a thorough-going pessimist concerning

human nature, wrote this in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (see United Church Observer, February 2008, page 49): “Let us take courage. Although we are nothing in our own hearts, we find perhaps something of ourselves in God’s heart. O Father of mercies, O Father of the miserable, how do you fix your heart on us! For your heart is where your treasure is.” Calvin is alluding to Jesus’ saying concerning human treasuring: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”. We humans must choose between wealth and God as our human treasure.

Although it is clear that Calvin saw God’s treasuring of us human beings as what I experience as divine love’s “appreciative” awareness of us, it is not likely that for him divine love also included an erotic/orgasmic dimension. What he says implies, however, an experiential understanding of divine love as a passionate need to connect with us human beings and to celebrate us. For me the celebration of us includes the whole of us, including our human sexuality, and concerning this Calvin might concur in some guarded, qualified way. Where I clearly differ from Calvin is when I understand God’s passionate need to connect with us as expressing God’s sexuality. Of course it can seem naïve to refer to God’s sexuality. God as Mystery is ultimately beyond not only sexuality but also any of our human ways of depicting God, whether as father or mother or any other anthropomorphic metaphor. But if it is true that the mysterious God expresses God very directly through God’s own uncreated energies, these energies could include not only light and love and peace and creativity but also an erotic/orgasmic dimension.

For me, living within God’s love in daily life involves all the dimensions of divine love, including the erotic/orgasmic. Sometimes it is prominent, but sometimes divine compassion or divine glory or divine peace or divine creativity are prominent. In each case, all the dimensions of divine love are present, but some are in the background and some in the foreground of our human consciousness.

Why do I view all these divine mysteries as aspects of divine love rather than viewing divine love as a mystery alongside the others? For two reasons. The first reason is doctrinal, for “God is Love” means that God is essentially love. If any statement is to be offered alongside the statement “God is Mystery” as an attempt to define God it is “God is love”. The second reason, for me the main basis for the doctrinal reason, is experiential, for the one quality common to all the mysteries is an expansive inclusiveness, like the crucial quality of a loving human heart.

(In so far as I am a Christian I have respect for some central teachings within Christian scripture and tradition, above all “God is Love”).

I am grateful to the Christian community for preserving this. But I reject some very common Christian teachings that conflict with “God is Love”, and thereby conflict with what is experientially crucial for me. Two examples are the common Roman Catholic claim: “No salvation outside the Church” and the common Protestant claim “No salvation except by accepting Jesus as personal Saviour”. I reject any claim that promotes an ultimate “Us-Them” division among human beings, even it seems to be backed by scripture and tradition.)

Part III Understanding Self-Love in 1978, 1988 & 2008

One theme in my reflections during the fall of 2007 was the connection between treating myself with both appreciation and compassion and treating others in the same way. This was becoming experientially more clear and more profound as I learned how to live within a divine love that is both appreciative and compassionate.

A few days ago I realized that much of this was not entirely new to me. About ten years ago I began meditating on loving myself in a way that combined compassion and appreciation, drawing on Buddhist sources and personal insights. I introduced it to individuals and groups for several years. Finally I decided to write it up along with two other meditations in an essay called “Transformative Meditations for Spiritual Healers”, which is on my webpage. The meditation has two distinct parts:

(i) promoting healing of ailing bodily parts by shifting one’s attitude towards them in the direction of compassion (acceptance, mercy, friendliness, inclusion, non-judgment)

(ii) celebrating sensually all bodily parts, appreciating them with the touch of my hands or the touch of my consciousness.

Eventually, with practice, the two parts often merge, for what they have in common is a kind self-love that is friendly and affectionate.

I presented the meditation to people who are involved in spiritual healing as a practice that has a twofold purpose:

(a) First, it is valuable in itself, for loving oneself is valuable in itself.

(b) Second, it is valuable as one way of preparing oneself to love others as a healer

The reminder in February of my two-part meditation on self-love was connected to something that happened in January. I had suddenly realized during a morning meditation that my interest in exploring what is involved in self-love and its connection with loving others did not begin recently. As long ago as 1978 I was writing about this. In the meditation I was told to

look up and ponder what I wrote back then for a book that I eventually published in 1980 called *Struggle and Fulfillment* (SF). In that book I drew implicitly on my experiences through the 1970s within a psychotherapeutic community, including new ventures in friendship, especially with men. In 1988, while preparing a draft of my book *Spirituality and Human Nature* (SHN), (published in 1993) I wrote a chapter called "On Loving Oneself Well".

It seemed important for me to trace continuity and change within my life-story between 1978, 1988 and 2008. And perhaps this would be interesting or even illuminating for others to read.

In SHN I first explored the myth of Narcissus and Echo as a way into understanding phoney self-love, which is preoccupied with one's own comparative status and power (self-inflation/self-deflation). Then, drawing explicitly on SF, I presented genuine self-love. I did this first by noting six elements in genuine "friendship-love" for others. I went on to show how each of these is an element in friendship-love towards oneself. In each case I explained why loving oneself is required if one is to be able to love the other person.

(1) Confirmation: "If I confirm you, you feel firm on the ground, your own ground. As you stand before me, you feel that I am *with* you, *for* you. I am not going to pull the rug from under your feet. I am not going to invade your territory or draw you into mine against your will.

How is this possible? I can only affirm your existence in your own space and your own style if I already affirm my own existence in my own space and my own style. Only if I have a strong sense of who I am can I reinforce your sense of who you are. If I do not feel firm on the ground, if I feel shaky and insecure and threatened, I am likely to try to undermine you, If you rely solely on me for your sense of having a basis and as right to exist, I am not confirming you at all; I am merely making you dependent on me." (SHN, p58-9)

(2) Confrontation of another person is a caring challenge to realize that he/she is being destructive towards another person or towards him/herself. Confrontation of oneself is similar, and it is crucial: "One exceptionless rule in therapy and life generally is that one cannot lovingly confront someone else about anything unless one has confronted it in oneself." (p.59)

(3) Celebration of another person is rejoicing in his/her unique, special way of expressing life and creativity. "If I cannot celebrate myself I will envy him. I will resent his light because it accentuates my darkness...Or if I

am not envious, I will be a parasite, feeding on his strengths."(p.60)

Celebration is very different from narcissistic attachment (whether to another or to oneself) for it has nothing to do with comparative status and power, with seeing the person as "Number One" in contrast with being "lowest of the low". Specialness is simply a unique way of expressing life and creativity.

(4) **Commitment**: "Implicitly I make a vow that I will be loyal and consistent in my caring through all kinds of unfavorable circumstances: 'for better, for worse, for richer or poorer...'"

"Such a commitment to my friend is possible only if I am also committed to myself: loyal and consistent in my active concern for my own well-being."(p61)

(5) **Respecting Freedom**: Friendship-love for another person involves respecting his/her freedom to make their own decisions rather than handing over responsibility to other people (including me) This is very difficult if I do not respect my own freedom/responsibility to make my own decisions. We can respectfully encourage and support someone, but we can not respectfully rescue them, overriding their freedom.

Rescuing oneself from exercising one's freedom takes two main forms: (i) drifting along, distracting oneself from making a decision (ii) asking someone else to do the deciding.

(6): **Affection** towards one's friend is "the desire for physical and emotional closeness or intimacy with one's friend. The physical component is important even if the friendship is not that of lovers who have sexual intercourse. Affection is embodied. I feel it in my body and I want to express it through my body. I want to see and hear and touch and embrace. And affection means that I want emotional closeness too."(p63).

"But what if the friend has little affection for himself? What if he dislikes himself, cannot stand his own body, and abhors his own feelings? My affection will be thwarted by his self-disgust. I may give him affection but he cannot receive it.. And I can only give him affection if I enjoy being close to myself, if I like myself, accepting my body as I am aware of it through all my senses, and accepting my feelings, whatever they are. The ways and the extent to which I can be affectionate towards others are restricted by the ways and the extent to which I can be affectionate towards myself." (p63)

Having outlined six elements in friendship-love towards another person (a "neighbour") and towards oneself and noted that the former requires the latter, I went on in SHN to note that I need to love my

neighbour if I am to be able to love myself. “If, for example, I am not confirming others, I cannot confirm myself.”(p64)

I went on to ask why this is so. Why are the two loves so radically interdependent? Indeed, why are they so similar? Here is the answer that I gave:

“Both loves are actually the same love. Love is a cosmic force, a flow of life-energies, a spiritual current, in which we participate as *channels*, not as *originators*. The emotions and attitudes and actions which we usually call *love* are very important, not because they themselves are love, but because they are the human occasions and conditions in which love, the presence as power which pervades everyone and everything, can flow.....I love, yet not I but cosmic love loves through me.”(p64)

I was writing all this in 1988 because I had often experienced being “sufficiently *open* to the cosmic life energies that one can feel them coming in through the heart and going out through the hands to heal another person”(p.65) As early as 1974 I had experienced surges of life-energy flowing through my body as part of a dramatic healing-release from crippling arthritis. The context back then was psychotherapeutic, especially bio-energetics body-work. From 1982 to 1988 the context for experiences was shamanic, but nevertheless similar.

In SHM, however, I went on to talk about a mystical love that, I now realize, I had only superficially experienced at the time. In contrast with being open to life-energies I spoke about surrendering my whole self “into the living God who is living me” so that one is “not only a *channel* of love, one *is* love, divine love” (p65). Indeed, I even went on to say, “This is not an experience, a particular content of consciousness. It is a way of being conscious”(p65). What I did not realize back then is that within this mystical way of being conscious it is possible to experience the awesome intensity of the uncreated divine energies. These are ever so much more powerfully transformative than the cosmic life-energies.

It is not that cosmic life-energies are usually replaced by divine energies, but that they are amazingly enriched. And when we consider erotic/orgasmic energies in particular, it is important to realize that both cosmic and divine versions are important. Indeed, for most human beings the cosmic are more prominent.

Another change since 1988 is that my new awareness of divine presence, of what is involved in living within divine love, has also involved a radical shift in my understanding of commitment. My ongoing friendship-love towards some people is even deeper than it was decades ago. And towards some new people in my life I am becoming increasingly both loyal

and involved. But more and more I am realizing that I am having very significant loving encounters with people whom I may not be seeking to meet again, nor they me, and that this is the norm.

Why is it the norm? Because living within divine love involves this richness in every moment. I'm not there yet, but it is gradually become more "normal". It's not the same as the "living in the moment" that some New-Age gurus advocate, for it does not make total independence the ideal. On the contrary it involves a strong sense that "we're all in this together".

Another closely-related shift is that over the last decade or so my commitment towards living within divine love has gained precedence over every other commitment. My commitment towards any another human being and my commitment towards myself are both subordinated to my commitment towards living within divine love.

The reason for this commitment is that to the extent that I am living within divine love I am learning how to love others and how to love myself most fully and authentically.

The basis for this ongoing commitment is a daily practice. At least once every day I meditate, asking whether there is anything I need to discern that is in an obstacle the way of increasing intimacy with divine love, for example, an idolatrous attachment.

What I have been presenting concerning living within divine love is very similar in some ways to mystical paths in many traditions, including Christianity, though the path has usually been envisaged as suitable for people who are celibate. The path has usually involved an awareness that intense friendships can become idolatrous attachments, distractions from one's devotion to God, and preventing one from living within a norm where one is free to love anyone. Some monastic orders have even prohibited friendships, ignoring the fact that Jesus is reported as loving particular people in a very special way, yet loving many diverse people as he met them. Nevertheless even these monastic excesses do not eliminate the significance of moving towards a state of living/loving in every moment. This significance remains even if one does not rule out commitment to special friendships.

Where I differ is in not exemplifying or advocating celibacy in the sense of no-sexual-activity. I realize that a minority of celibates can achieve a "sublimation" of their sexuality and participate in many dimensions of divine love. An even smaller minority (e.g. St. Theresa of

Avila) become very aware of the orgasmic/erotic dimension of divine love within themselves, but do not connect with anyone else in a way where this predominates.

During the past four years or so, I have increasingly been experiencing an orgasmic/erotic dimension within both human and divine love. This has caused a significant change in my attitude towards sexual intimacy, which is the most obvious way in which this dimension is expressed. I no longer view this as something that is best restricted to a context of long-range commitment, or even marriage. Such a context can be the best for some people, but certainly not for all. There are several reasons for this:

(i) What matters is that we be more open to this dimension, which is present to some extent in all loving encounters. As many insightful writers such as D.H. Lawrence have noted, fear-based rules restricting sexual conduct tend to repress our awareness of the orgasmic/erotic life-energies that pervade nature and pervade us. Such rules also tend to repress any hints of divine orgasmic/erotic energies.

(ii) Even where the orgasmic/erotic dimension in human and divine love is partly in the foreground, there are many forms of expression through touch, through exchange of energy or through both, that fall far short of complete sexual intercourse. (Indeed, some of us in old age are no longer capable of this!) The key issue is what kind and degree of expression is appropriate for a particular couple at a particular time. And as in other loving encounters, there need be no commitment to ongoing encounters, though there may be.

(iii) It is true that transformation towards becoming more able to love oneself and others can happen through loving encounters that are minimally sexual. It is important, however, to realize that sometimes even more profound transformations can happen where a loving encounter is maximally sexual. And there are many gradations in between! What matters is appropriateness. Discerning what, if anything, is appropriate requires from both people an openness to guidance from Spirit, excellent communication concerning boundaries,, considerable inner clarity concerning motivation, and awareness of imbalances in power. These requirements are very important, and I know from experience that self-deception can bring mistakes. Indeed, for some people sexual adventuring is likely to be more harmful than helpful, both to themselves and others. But excessive caution often prevents people from ever realizing how much they are missing!

As I conclude this mini-memoir I want to restrain my personal enthusiasm for living mystically within divine love, and re-affirm my respect for other ways of living. I've already been moving in that direction as I stressed the importance of sometimes participating in non-divine, sexual life-energies in loving encounters. Similarly the meditation on self-love that I presented earlier, with its cultivation of both compassion and celebration, includes no appeal to mystical/divine celebration. It is valuable in itself, for whatever promotes human loving is valuable, whether or not divine love is consciously invoked. I am very grateful for being called to my mystical path, but it involves no repudiation of positive elements in my pre-mystical life-history, and no distance from people whose calling is not mystical.

Indeed, during the past few months I have found myself responding with more immediate empathy and excitement than ever before to whatever is going on in my life, whether it be a brief conversation with a stranger or a sentimental TV drama or a new piece of music (classical or popular) on the radio or a young man's contribution to class discussion or the snow on the branches outside my window. I'm very much in love with life!

People have also noticed that the "deeper" I've become the more playful and light-hearted and unpredictable. I hope that continues!