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## PREFACE

Having completed these autobiographical reflections I am certain that, without the invitation to do so, I should never have embarked upon the task at all. A natural reticence and a dread of appearing arrogant or self-inflated would, I am sure, have guaranteed that much of my life story remained firmly in the private domain of my own diaries and personal archives. The decision to accept my publisher's invitation was not an easy one and even now, I am not wholly convinced that it was wise. Self-revelation by definition involves rendering oneself vulnerable and to be vulnerable runs the inevitable risk of being wounded. It yet remains to be seen whether in putting my life in the public arena I have stirred up for myself a measure of avoidable suffering.

I am fully aware that on the surface there is perhaps little to suggest that my life has been particularly exceptional or exciting. Most British men of my generation grew up in a country torn apart by the ravages of war. Most subsequently saw service in the armed forces as an inevitable outcome of conscription and many, like me, were the first in their families to go to university and to enter the professions. What perhaps makes me somewhat different—again at a purely superficial level—is the experience of a public school education and the subsequent life of an Oxbridge undergraduate which would not normally be the lot of a butcher's assistant's son. These facts alone, however, would certainly not warrant an autobiographical study. My decision to commit my life to paper was finally prompted by my reluctant acknowledgement that my inner life and the consequent understanding of

the nature of my own being seemed unusual. Nor could I deny that in the 1960s there were few full-time counsellors and psychotherapists around and that there is an inevitable fascination about the struggles of the first pioneers in an emerging profession. My adherence to the person-centred approach to therapy made me even more of a rarity in those early days when psychodynamic or social work models were more commonly adopted.

If the undeniable fact that I was one of a very small minority of persons ploughing a new furrow at a particular time seemed some kind of justification for autobiographical exploration, it did not engender the necessary motivational energy to get me started. I had to convince myself that by telling the story of my life it was at least remotely possible that some readers might find sustenance for their own journeys and even some glimmerings of meaning in an increasingly confused and desperate world. It was at this point, of course, that the fear of being perceived as arrogant and self-inflated reached new peaks. If I attempt to summarise what I believe about myself and about the universe I inhabit, the message is breathtakingly simple but leaves me wide open to the accusation of *folie de grandeur* or of insane naïveté. From my earliest years I have considered myself to be infinitely loved by the source of all being and, in turn, to be capable of loving with the same power and intensity. Not that this self-concept has been easy to cling on to: it has received many hard knocks and there have been times when it has disappeared almost without trace only to be rediscovered thanks to the intervention of others or mysterious shifts in the cosmic dispensation. At no point, mercifully, have I ever considered myself unique in my belovedness or in my capacity to love. On the contrary, if I have any claim to specialness it is, I believe, in the utterly inexplicable gift of being able to perceive in myself what must be true of everyone. And yet my experience as a therapist tells me that countless numbers of my fellow human beings have no concept of themselves as lovable and certainly have little inkling of their ability to love with divine intensity.

Perhaps this is where, in paradoxical fashion, global crises and disasters can provide a wake-up call. As I was completing my manuscript the appalling Tsunami tidal waves struck the coasts of South-East Asia. Three years ago I had the same experience as I was struggling with the final chapter of *The Mystical Power of Person-Centred Therapy* and the devastating attacks took place on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. What, I asked myself then, could be the possible merit in writing books in the face of such unmitigated horror? To believe that men and women are infinitely lovable and have it within them to be infinitely loving, let alone to believe that there is a loving force sustaining the universe, seems a tall order when human beings are inflicting untold suffering on each other and the very planet seems

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bent on wreaking destruction. And yet these horrors undoubtedly call forth—at least in the short term—almost unimaginable responses of compassion which leap over national and cultural boundaries and cut through bureaucratic and legalistic red tape like a knife through butter. The tide of destruction—whether human or environmental—releases in turn a tide of love and solidarity which refuses to be held back and then gives a glimpse of how men and women can be and how the world could be transformed. It is as if we have to be plunged into despair before we can discover a hope which lies beyond the darkness.

I suppose in some ways these autobiographical reflections are my attempt to ensure that during the time that may still remain to me I do not altogether lose 'the vision splendid' of which Wordsworth speaks in his 'Intimations of Immortality'. For those who can empathise with the struggles of a weary but as yet undaunted person-centred therapist and of a Christian who refuses to abandon a Church which sometimes drives him to the verge of despair, there may be moments of recognition or even of inspiration which will help a little in the darkest times. For others there may, at least, be some interest in learning of the now distant pioneering days when to admit to being a counsellor was to invite sarcastic comments about the corruption of local politics and the failure to keep the streets clean. There may also be those who will be astonished to read of those days when universities were full of radical students and when it was possible to study without falling into crippling debt. And if none of this arouses much enthusiasm at least there are the blessed interludes of pure farce with which my life seems to have been most generously interleaved.

Norwich  
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