

The title of this thinksheet sounds like something Virginia Woolf of the Bloomsbury set would have called "unofficial love" at the level of high culture, or just "orgy" at low-level culture. Not so. Here's the way this actual weekend of mine went:

FRIDAY morning, a counselee reported what'd happened at breakfast that morning. "I was pensive, and my husband inquired why, 'What are you musing about?' SHE: 'My mind is fooling around with the concept that love is a decision before, while, and if necessary after it's an emotion...a mental decision" beyond disillusionment's power. [She's been working, with various exercises I'd given her, on commandable love, which romantic-emotional love is not: "You shall love the Lord your God, and your neighbor as yourself."] HE: "I'm off other women. Be nice to me, and I'll be nice to you." I: "Hardly a formula for ecstatic-romantic affection, but a bright fresh beginning!" SHE: "It takes so long to grow up [the couple being 50]. Readiness is so precious! I feel more open to truth, to love, to what you've been trying to communicate to me these months... more open than ever before in my life, and eager!" I: "The body plods along at nature-speed; the mind fuses around it and presses ahead of it; the soul is often left far behind, as you've done till now. When all three are going at the same speed, peace and joy and integration and real love--for self, each other, God and the whole creation."...That evening, our family went to see Ingmar Bergman's latest, "Face to Face," in which psychiatrist Jenny Issakson [Liv Uhlman] is cured of death fear as she sees her grandparents' love for each other as Gramps is dying: "For a brief moment I understood that love embraces everything, even death." A GP/MD [Erland Josephson], whom at first she thinks wants only to lay her [but it turns out her body is repulsive to him: he's homo], sticks with her throughout her psychotic seizure, attempted suicide, and after-miseries--sticks with her in a chesed-agape nongenital love more beautiful and powerful than Bergman has ever managed before. [His expressed creed: "Let me be real." SHE: "What's real?" HE: "To hear a human sound...to know that a joy is a joy....It's likely it doesn't exist."]

SATURDAY Loree and I had dinner with three atheistic Jewish couples. In the livingroom is a great Rembrandt-like portrait of an old Jew with yarmulka, and I ask the host who it is. "It's grandpa; he died that year, age 49, though he looks 65." I: "How did he die so young?" The host is uncomfortable with the conversation, yet makes no move to break it off and send us all into a lighter vein more appropriate to our cocktails. He: "Well, he was run over by a New York City trolley 60 years ago, when I was two. [Pause] He was pushing the baby-buggy, and the last split second gave it, me, a shove to safety." Another guest: "_____, we've known you for 30 years and have never heard that story! How come?" HE: "It makes me sad. It made an atheist of my father, and none in the succeeding two generations has been confirmed." I: "Your father chose to look backward, at the corpse of his father, rather than forward, at the life of his son. Backward and death are atheist; it's one option. Would it have been your grandfather's? It certainly was not the choice made by those who gave us the Bible!" Another guest: "Did your parents ever say to you, as a guilt-control device, 'For the likes of you somebody should die?'" HE: "Never." That guest: "A gentle family." I, next contact with host: "If you choose to focus on your grandfather's love and sacrifice, you will come to gratitude and perhaps joy and faith, as in Second Isaiah and Jesus....In fact, the Christian confession goes something like, 'For the likes of me somebody did die.' Jesus Christ died for me, for us, for all."

SUNDAY, four events redolent of the power and beauty of love--of which I mention only this: a Quaker saint sitting in our livingroom creating a global sense by making cat's [=creche] cradles [with stories] from all over the world.