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Journal #2: Spirituality of the Heart – Personal Reflections

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Having studied the spirituality of the heart (its scriptural basis, tradition, and theology), I present in this journal entry three areas of reflection centring on the *renewal of my heart* (or, receiving a *new heart*): informative insights, challenging conclusions, and life-changing lessons.

Informative Insights

Even though it is God's design to bring about a new creation – a new earth and a new heaven – the *renewal of my own heart* is an integral dimension of this plan. In this, I can be reassured by the fact that God himself promises to achieve what God requires of his people (Ezek 36:25-27).¹ Based on the new covenant, I know that it is by Jesus Christ that this promise is fulfilled. He is the mediator of the new covenant, and it is he who renews my heart.

Having had my heart renewed by God, I believe that my new heart is God-given and good. However, I also realize that I can and must go deeper to find, at the core of my being, the Spirit of God – which is the life-gift of God and the love of God. I sin when I am distracted from this new heart.

¹ *The NIV Study Bible*, 1630. Ezekiel 36:25-27 – “I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a *new heart* and put a *new spirit* in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put *my Spirit* in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” [emphasis mine].

To the degree that I believe my new heart to be the sacred place where God meets me, I can experience, in the words of Fallon, “rightness of heart, interior strength, biblical peace”.² This peace cannot be disturbed by distractions or onslaughts from without because it is a peace that transcends all understanding.³

Since my renewed heart is now the home of the Spirit, I can only conclude that its original home must have been the heart of Jesus. In other words, Jesus’ heart is the home of the Spirit, and he has given me a new heart because he has granted me his Spirit.

Finally, my new heart will lead me to the new earth and the new heaven. The same Holy Spirit, the stream of living water, will flow not only from my heart, but also in the city of God (Rev 22:1; see also Jn 7:37-39).⁴

Challenging Conclusions

Faced with the mystery of the Trinity, and in utter humility, I realize that in order to renew my heart, *God must first open my heart*, as he opened the heart of Lydia (Acts 16:14).⁵ The Law by itself, and my external observance of it, is not enough. Then, I must receive the word in my heart (Lk 8:15).⁶ Finally, I must keep the word (Jn 8:51), remembering the example of Mary who “treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). Such a spirituality of the heart is a spirituality of grace (since God first opens the heart) and conversion (renewal of heart).

² Michael Fallon, “Heart in the Scriptures: Notes Towards an Understanding of Heart in the Scriptures”, *Encounter* 37 (1983): 13.

³ *Ibid.*; *The NIV Study Bible*, 2291. Philippians 4:7 states that “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”.

⁴ *The NIV Study Bible*, 2458. Revelation 22:1 – “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb”.

⁵ *The NIV Study Bible*, 2129. Acts 16:14 – “One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message”.

⁶ *The NIV Study Bible*, 1974. Luke 8:15 – “But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop”.

Furthermore, the renewal of my heart will affect my attitude towards fellow humans. My love of God *and* love of neighbour become one: in the least of the brethren I find Jesus himself, and in Jesus I find God. I find that, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “love of neighbour is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing [my] eyes to [my] neighbour also blinds [me] to God”.⁷

Life-Changing Lessons

To begin with, *faith in Jesus* is essential in my receiving a new heart or in renewing my heart (Rom 10:9).⁸ Then, believing in Jesus and accepting his word, it is not merely his word that dwells in my heart, but Jesus himself as well (Eph 3:16-19).⁹ This new heart, or renewal of my heart, is the effect of the indwelling Spirit of Jesus (Gal 4:6).¹⁰ Also, it is the Spirit who pours out the love of God into my heart (Rom 5:5).¹¹ Finally, the uncreated, divine love which fills my heart is, incredibly, God’s own self. And, because God is unlimited, then God’s love, too, is unlimited.

These notes, then, reflect what I have found *informative* in the readings, what has especially *challenged* me, and what I have been *reminded* of for my own life.

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), par. 16, <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html> (28 December 2010).

⁸ *The NIV Study Bible*, 2184. Romans 10:9 states: “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”.

⁹ *The NIV Study Bible*, 2275. Ephesians 3:16-19 – “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God”.

¹⁰ *The NIV Study Bible*, 2262. Galatians 4:6 – “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’”.

¹¹ *The NIV Study Bible*, 2172. Romans 5:5 – “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us”.

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