

INSCAPE March 2015

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and the communion of the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!

HEART FAILURE

The French journalist Jean-Paul Kauffman was released by Muslim terrorists in Lebanon in 1988 after three years of captivity. He described his relationship with God in his prison confinement: "I felt in that solitude that I had no one to speak to but God. I felt very close to him, then, perhaps because no one was there to distract me. I feel further removed from God now that I am back with my family in comfortable surroundings. In that prison, I was face-to-face with God. I almost miss the luxury of that solitude. I have a nostalgia for that intimacy with God. I try to find it now in my house in the country, but the intensity cannot be repeated.

I knew that God was with me in my ordeal. I cannot tell you how I knew, I just did. I felt that he would protect me. I avoided the opportunist trade of favors. I'll do this for you if you do that for me. I just said to him, "Let your will be done,"...

The problem with life today is that few people ever have to confront death. As a hostage, I was confronted with it daily, so fear wore off....Suffering like that burns away all impurities, all that separates one from the honest contemplation of God and of oneself. I don't feel God in church, so I don't go. I have lost the intimacy with God. But I had it once. Once you experience God, you are forever changed."

This journalist-hostage underwent great sufferings in solitude, and inner fears. Yet his basic fear of death was overcome by the experience he had of God as living in the deepest core of his being. This experience set him free from the exigencies of time and space. He was freed from the clamors of society and the opinions of others, dictating to him who he was as a doer, because he experienced his true ego in oneness with a loving, indwelling God.

LIVING IN A TRANCE

Technology has cast the human race into a trance. We walk about sleeping, unaware of an inner world of power, beauty, joyful play, and infinite love. Science has built a complete religion, based on the paradise myth of a material world of flowing oil and money, pontificated by the moguls of industry, attained by hard work on the part of all who wish to share in the kingdom of this earth. But we are being shocked out of our new religious torpor by the impending cataclysmic signs floating ominously in the West.

The Hindu poet Tagore, in the decade before World War II, voiced the problem which is still very much our own contemporary problem: "Civilization is almost exclusively masculine, a civilization of power in which woman has been thrust aside in the shade. Therefore, it has lost its balance and is moving by hopping from war to war. Its motive forces are the forces of destruction and its ceremonials are carried through by an appalling number of human sacrifices. This one-sided civilization is crashing along a series of catastrophes at a tremendous speed because of its one-sidedness. And at last the time has arrived when woman must step in and impart her rhythm to the reckless movement of power."

Don Juan, in *Journey to Ixtlan*, teaches his disciple the necessity of “stopping the world.” The disciple went into the desert and in silence listened to the real world for the first time. He saw what was always there, but most people fail to see. Don Juan explains: “What stopped inside you yesterday was what people have been telling you the world is like. You see, people tell us from the time that we are born that the world is such and such and so and so, and naturally we have no choice but to see the world the way people have been telling us it is.”

THE JOURNEY WITHIN

We in the West are beginning to see the need of complementing “head” knowledge with another type of knowledge. We see the need to turn “within” in order to make contact with a sacred presence that is more powerful than we are. A sacred meaningfulness that gives ultimate direction beyond our immediate selfish needs is sought to offset the almost exclusive emphasis on rational knowledge.

We modern persons, heading into and encountering the upcoming decades, eagerly cry out to contact the *numinous* or sacred world, described by Rudolf Otto (Eminent German Lutheran theologian and scholar of comparative religion). This cannot be taught. It can only be evoked, awakened in the “heart” by the transcendent power of God’s Spirit. It is inward that we must go, into our hearts, that scriptural symbol of the interior locus or “place” where we meet our Maker and Beloved in ever-expanding consciousness.

This consciousness of the divine presence, as loving, uncreated energies abiding within us and without us, in each material atom of the universe, grows as we tune in more consistently to listen to God’s revealing Word, as he speaks to us and reveals God’s numinous presence in the signs of written Scripture, Living Tradition and Worship in Spirit and Truth as well as recorded history of the past and of the present moments in history now being lived and created with our human cooperation. We can read these signs also inside us in the depths of our own consciousness and unconscious.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS OF OUR BEING

God has made us to live “naturally” at home in loving union with him. God’s numinous or sacred presence was meant to be discovered within the inner depths of our being as well as inside the material layers of the world around us. We have always sought to look upon the face of God through myths and legends, symbols and sacred rituals. It is our technical world with its own religion of matter and the exclusive exaltation of rational knowledge over heart knowledge that has extinguished in our world the light whereby we can see God everywhere, live always in his loving presence, be joyful like happy children, be creative in developing the potentials that lie dormant that could bring forth so much creative love activity in our universe.

It is inside, into our hearts, that we must go. It is a terrifying journey that few of us have the courage to make. Many of us are attracted to the possibility of living constantly in loving communication and we make a valiant beginning. Most of us come running to surface after a short time. We miss the noise, multiplicity, the gaudy lights of the carnival and the raucous pitch of the hawker enticing us to see the greatest wonder on earth. The cotton candy and the sticky carnival apples delight us and make us forget what could have been.

PUTTING OFF THE JOURNEY

We possess the power for undoing ourselves and putting off the whole process of becoming healed of our fears and anxieties and meaninglessness and of being transformed into integrated persons, the ones that correspond to the name and person God knows us to be

when from the depths of our being he calls us by our name "...Fear not; for I have saved you, I have called you by your name because you are mine...Fear not; for I am with you; I will bring your descendents from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from afar. And my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one who is called by my name; for I created him for my glory, I have formed him and I have made him" (Isaiah 43: 1; 6-7). We are masters at avoiding a confrontation with the real person that we could become if we could only put to death the "worldly" ego in us.

We have learned from earliest childhood how to play games, put up masks, become distracted by the words and values that people around us live by, expecting us also to follow their example. We can even busy ourselves "saying" prayers or, even in so-called "silent" prayer, refuse real inner silence to look at our inner feelings, look at both the light and the darkness that are struggling to possess us.

As we indulge in such game-playing, it means we are afraid to be silent and meet God at the core of our being. We fear to look inwardly and honestly ask for healing from the transcendent God when we see through genuine self-knowledge what needs to be sacrificed, what needs to be transformed. Saint Anthony of Egypt (c. 251-356) offers us urgent advise, "know yourself, the therefore you will know God."

HEART FAILURE

Now that you and I are becoming older, is it not true that we catch ourselves reading with greater interest the obituary accounts in our newspapers and on the internet listings and funeral home web-sites? And how frequently we find that persons our own age, or even (gasp!) much younger than we are, have died from one of the leading causes of death: cardiovascular disease, heart failure. We all know that when one's heart fails to beat anymore, the person is usually dead!

Yet there is in our Western world, even in Christianity of the West, a greater type of heart failure and cause of spiritual death than most of us are even aware of. And that is the failure of most of us to journey deeper into greater intimacy with the Trinity---Father, Son, and Holy Spirit---who dwell within what the Old and New Testaments call simply the *heart*.

This is evidently not our physical heart, but the placeless place within our deepest consciousness that is the seat of our human life, of all that touches us in the depths of our personality; all affections, passions, desires, knowledge, and thoughts, especially of beauty, joy, and love. It is in our "heart" that we meet God in an *I-Thou* relationship. The heart, therefore, in scriptural language, and as used by the early Fathers and Saints (The Mystics of the Church), is the center of our being, that which directs us in our ultimate values and choices.

It is the inner chamber where in secret the heavenly Father sees us through and through "But as for you, when you pray, enter into your inner chamber and lock your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret shall himself reward you openly. And when you pray, do not repeat your words like the pagans, for they think that because of much talking they will be heard" (Matthew 6:6-7). It is where we attain inner honesty, integration of our body, soul, and the spirit relationships. In a word, where we develop "purity of heart" in order to see God everywhere, always and in everything "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

PARADISE LOST

The first man and woman conceived by God in the Garden of Eden are depicted in the book of *Genesis* as walking in his loving presence and communicating with him in the coolness of the evening. "He set His eye upon their hearts (put His own light in their hearts) to show them the majesty of His works. They will praise His holy name so as to fully describe the magnificence of His works...Their eyes saw his glorious majesty, and their ears heard His glorious voice" (Wisdom of Sirach 17:7-8,11).

But man and woman lost the presence of God in their hearts. Instead of light, darkness and selfishness covered their innermost selves. They lost consciousness of their true identity and their loving relationships to God and to each other and to the material creation around them. They had been created with a hunger for God's beauty. They were made according to God's image and likeness, "male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). And thus there remains the terrifying searching in every person for his/her true identity, for a loving relationship with God's communicating presence, his Word made flesh, Jesus Christ.

How can we understand this loss of heart knowledge, especially in our Western world, and in Western Christianity to a very great extent? Carl Jung lamented the fact that persons living in Western countries had become impoverished in their use of myths and symbols to transcend their horizontal optic in order to make contact with the Ultimate Ground of their being.

The technological power placed in human hands makes it difficult for us to experience a "creature-consciousness" before the awesome "Otherness" of God as the Ultimate Source of all being. We have also lost the presence of God within us. We have attempted to walk away from God, the God who created us for loving relationships and union with him.

HISTORICAL REASONS FOR LOSS OF HEART KNOWLEDGE

Because the symbol of heart referred to the affective sphere, it had always had a leading role in poetry, literature, private prayer, and devotions in religion in the Old and New Testament literature as well as the Christian liturgies.

Aristotle declared happiness to be the highest good for which human beings seek all other goods. Yet he claimed knowledge to be the highest activity and disparaged the world of affectivity. But happiness becomes meaningless since it must be a "feeling" experience and not merely a thought of willed happiness. Many Christian philosophers followed Aristotle in giving to the human intellect and will the key to human superiority over animals, while the affections of the heart belonged to the irrational part of a human being, where one is most "animal." Such feelings had to come under the domination of intellect and will as an opposing enemy, had to be conquered and led into rational captivity.

LOSS OF AFFECTIVITY

Thus one's affectivity was associated with animal passions and was never a part of the spiritual life except in a negative way that such "feelings" and emotions had to be "mortified" or put to death. Much damage to authentic Christian spirituality was done by reducing all affectivity to an impersonal state. Such a reduction deprived Christians of a personal experience of their own ultimate meaning and uniqueness. It removed affectivity from God's relationships with us, his children.

The intellect to know God's will through his commands and those of the church discipline and teachings, and the will to do his will, became the essential elements of the Christian life. This ruled out any true Christian affectivity to enter into such *I-Thou* relations between God and

ourselves. God became more abstract, far away. He was seen by the majority of most Western Christians as an austere, punishing Judge toward his wayward, penitent children.

IRRATIONAL SENTIMENTALITY

The basis for true affective union between an individual Christian and God was ignored or equated with an irrational sentimentality. Joyful, passionate feelings in conjugal union were suspect and preached against as taking pleasures in irrational passions, while the primary end of marriage as procreation was exalted above any authentic feelings of mutual love. The Roman Mass was celebrated in Latin with its measured precision of expression and controlled reasoning. Little “feeling” was allowed to make such liturgical celebrations truly joyful events, as anticipation of the heavenly dance that awaits us in the life to come.

Mysticism was held in suspicion as dangerous and was brought under inquisitional condemnation as in the case of Meister Eckhart and so many women mystics of the Middle Ages, many of whom were branded unjustly as witches and burned at the stake for their visions. Contemplative nuns were put under obedience to a male cleric as spiritual director, who was to bring the right balance of intellect and will to rein in any wild hysteria of irrational affectivity.

As we are now interested in the highlights of the main causes for holding affectivity and heart experiences as anti-rational, we can postpone any discussion on proper or evil passions to later Inscape Newsletters. We should point out that throughout the history of Christianity there were authentic poets, philosophers, theologians, and mystics who kept a holistic balance between intellect, will and heart in a holy synergism.

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662, a French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer and Christian philosopher) would defend such Christians who believed in heart knowledge, not in opposition to rational knowledge, but as a necessary complement. His statement: “The heart has its reasons which reason does not know.”

SPECULATIVE THEOLOGY

One main factor for repressing heart knowledge and the spirit of wonderment before the mystery of the living God in his loving activities toward his created order came through the separation of speculative theology in the 12th and 13th centuries as Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas evolved a rational system of theology based on the rationality of Aristotle’s philosophy with its disparagement of heart-affectivity. Theology was separated from *praxis* or the experiential and intimate union between God as Trinity and human persons and became a science of clear and distinct ideas. In fact, it was considered to be the Queen of all sciences! Faith would be described and lived as an intellectual assent given to a truth revealed by God through the teachings of the church. Lost was the body, soul, spirit, heart response on the part of the individual Christian.

Thomas Aquinas has done much to objectify God in his impersonalized, but not “real” relationships to us. He writes, “God’s temporal relations to creatures are in him only because of our way of thinking of him; but the opposite relations to him are realities in creatures.” The weakness of our inherited Scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages that colors Western Christianity lies in its inability to bring God into a scriptural, personalized relationship in temporality and in created matter with us. God is seen as a “cosmic-do-gooder,” content only to give us created things, but not to give himself in self-emptying love, bursting forth from the Triune Community of perfect and eternal love, as revealed by Jesus Christ, the image of the Father and his Spirit of Love.

It was Rene Descartes in the 17th century who believed that the key to understanding the universe lies in discovering its logical order. With Newton, Descartes' thought of nature, including God, was "static" and obedient to basic, universal laws. "I think; therefore I am" was Descartes contribution to the dichotomy he drew in seeing human beings as having two distinct and separable parts: a body and a soul or mind. We were more mind caught in a material body that would eventually die, but we would live forever because of our "immortal soul."

IN SEARCH OF MYSTERY

Edwin Scott Gausted, (1923–2011, a Professor of History at the University of California, Riverside. He achieved fame with his study of the genealogy of religion in the United States) in his book *Dissent in American Religion*, points out that a great religious dissent is taking place in America, and it is moving in three new directions. "Dissenters opt for mystery, seek community, and embrace joy." He points out that Americans are more and more seeking mysticism over a clinical rationality. The theology handed them for so long has become for them remote and lifeless, and has been too much tied with an ecclesiasticism that has become impersonal and "correct," but does not speak to the needs of modern persons, nor flow out of experiencing the Word of God in Scripture.

On the positive side he points out that mysticism is awakening the powers of human creativity. A person who seeks mysticism is ready to be surprised by the hidden beauty that is in creation. Pointing out the low road that the quest for the mysticism of the heart can take, with all of its self-seeking, Gausted describes the "high road" that the same quest can take: "Deliberate acceptance of mysticism leads along the high road to humility. Man does not and will not know all, he cannot and need not control all. That high road also leads to the humane, to the needs of the person more than the dictates of the machine."

Jesus clearly taught his disciples that we must be converted and take on the characteristics of little children: "Truly I say to you, unless you change and become like little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whoever therefore will humble himself like this little child, shall be great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3-4).

Next month, as we will celebrate Palm Sunday and Passion Week and Holy Pascha, let us then examine what a conversion to discover the *heart* within all of us means by seeing how to recapture the main characteristic of this spiritual childhood through developing the lost art of living in our hearts through The Gift of *Wonderment*.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10)

Sincerely in Christ's love for all of mankind,

Fr. John Michael Zboyovski