

Mary's Beautiful Heart

In the following notes, I offer a resume of the research on which I reported at the meeting of SHCC, Mariottsville, Md, July 11-13, 2008. The genre of research reporting lends itself poorly to a resume for general discussion. But an essay on Mary's heart may offer both the same points of methodology and an update on some of my thinking in light of the discussion following the presentation of the research.

Key to my presentation was the insight that devotion to the Sacred Heart has as much to do with the heart of the disciple as with the heart of Jesus. There is no end to the delight in presenting Mary as a devotee of the heart of her Son, and there is an utter congruity in speaking of the two hearts together. Heart is a symbol of relationship and, by that fact, of another heart. While the common significance of heart is love, on a deeper discussion more appears than love or perhaps, better said, varying aspects of love: courage, circulation, imagination.

Each carries us into greater reflection. The Coeur de Lion imagery speaks to courage, daring, fire and commitment. Circulation returns us to the grounding of the symbolization of the heart in the actual physiology of the human body. The body is the whole person in circulation, in relationships of giving and receiving. Thus heart is the whole person in circulation, a significance which is magnified wondrously when we reflect on the polyvalence of body in Christian iconography: Christ, church Eucharist. Imagination is related to heart as the diviner of what is beautiful by knowing what is harmonious. To reflect on the heart of Mary under each of these headings is a worthwhile exercise; here however, we limit ourselves to probing the image of Mary's heart in terms of imagination and beauty.

While the discussion of what is beauty may be greatly extended, suffice it here to work from a few simple strokes: beauty is an evaluation flowing from the experience of harmony. The evaluation that something is beautiful or ugly is made by the heart, on the basis of the input from the senses. The senses check in with the heart on the way to the brain, an emotional intelligence. This is a process of imaging, both in confirmation of models with which we work and in terms of breaking and surpassing models no longer deemed adequate to receive the new sensations. Aesthetics, if you will, is the art of evaluating the beautiful, distinct but inseparable from the true, and is central to devotion of the heart. The Greek word for beauty, kalos is said to derive from the word to call. Beauty is the call, the summoning character of the good, the attractive, the irresistible.

Perhaps better for us to speak in adjectives than nouns! A verb catches something of the movement such as is found in harmonize, beautify. The heart is intimately involved in this movement, at times expanding horizons and at others embracing the ugly, improvisation acting as the pulse of circulation. The language of the heart then is dialogue, more dynamic than even enculturation and incarnation, and leads to community and harmony. Some say the mission of the Christian community today is participation in the age old dialogue of salvation, at once initiated by God and sustained in the Spirit but preeminently the work of the heart!

Has devotion to the hearts of Jesus and Mary finally found its niche? And a truly contemporary niche in that the heart symbolizes perseverance, endurance or in the language of our times, sustainability! Any ecological spirituality needs a thrust of fidelity, the assuredness of promises made and promises fulfilled, the kind of experience that leads us to conclude that someone has a heart for us. If the ecological movement depends on showcasing ecology minded people- why, even the power companies do as much in their slick advertizing- a Christian spirituality of ecology will find in the hearts of Jesus and Mary an imagination of a never-ending love that 's "to the end (John 13:1). "

Four Lucan Vignettes

In 2:19 Luke writes: "As for Mary, she treasured all these words and continually pondered over them." The positioning is strategic; the shepherds have heard of the birth of Jesus and just as Mary visited Elizabeth to confirm what she heard from the angel, so the shepherds seek confirmation of what they heard from the chorus of angels. The birth of Jesus is told in two verses and the story of the shepherds takes twelve verses (8-20). While verse 20 may seem repetitive, the sentiment is one of fulfillment: "the shepherds returned then giving glory and praise to God for all they had seen and heard just as the angels had told them." The words echo Elizabeth's beatitude addressed to Mary in 1:45: "blessed are you who believed that the Lord's word would come true." A detailed analysis would explore the themes of glory and praise highlighted in the angelic chorus (verse 14).

Mary is presented within the story of the shepherds treasuring and pondering these events, turning them over in her heart, "pondering" being the mode of her treasuring. We can press the imagery further for the word pondering is from the same verb as to symbolize, throwing things alongside of each other. She is creating a symbolic world, she is harmonizing, she is improvising; her heart is doing its most cherished work captured in the verb "treasure," used often to mean persevere or sustain. Mary is enraptured in the dialogue of God's salvation for God's people, "today a Savior has been born to you in David's town; he is Christ the Lord," (verse 11). Luke is close to sensory overload as he builds the story but Mary's heart is equal to the task of interpreting, naming the harmonies and the reader joins with Mary and the angels in an explosion of glory and praise. A reader response approach to bible reading is truly justified here as the goodness revealed is irresistible. Beauty!

Second Vignette

No one will think that Luke's verse (2:19) was a stray, nor that it was mere cushioning when we turn to another use of the same expression, 2:51, again in a text of neuralgic importance for the developing plot of Luke's dramatic unfolding of the faith of the early communities. *The New Community Bible* published in Asia translates: "As for his mother she kept all these things in her heart." If this verse recalls verse 19, verse 52 ("and Jesus increased in wisdom and in age and in grace with God and men [sic])," recalls verse 40. Luke seems reluctant to let go of these scenes in his story but his recalling previous phrases highlights the harmonies which are engrossing Mary's heart. Here Mary is sustaining in contemplation the marvelous event of finding Jesus in the temple, his questioning response to her question, the enigmatic words "the things of my Father," the sting of the "must be about." Now

she treasures "all these events" in her heart. With the perspective of plot and reader response, the Christian reader glances ahead to the days when Jesus is indeed among the teachers in the Temple (19:28-21:38). The dialog in the temple precincts involves five questions of which four are asked of Jesus and he asks the final one, 20:41 about the son of David. Without questions, nothing of insight is gained. There in Jerusalem, will his relationship with the Father not only be further elucidated but the dialogue of salvation, afloat in the necessity of God laid upon his life, will be embodied in a strategy of denial and betrayal.

Luke may have seen Mary as a companion to the Christian reader but will the treasures of her heart sustain readers who endure the third Passion prediction in 18: 31-34? Or is the apostles' opaqueness contagious? "The apostles could make nothing out of this; the meaning of these words remained a mystery to them and they did not understand what he said?" Mary's treasury of insights will not exclude her from similar questioning. Perhaps her treasures make the questions all the more poignant and personal. So, then, not exempting Mary from questions, we turn to another Lucan vignette seeing her as a genuine disciple caught in the dialogs of the heart!

Third Vignette

Simeon's words to Mary are troubling and so too is the way that the text has been translated. *The New Community Bible* reads as follows "Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother. 'Look this child is destined to cause the rise and fall of many in Israel. He will be a sign that is spoken against, so that the secret thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. As for you, a sword shall pierce your heart too,'" (2: 34-35). In this translation, the two parts of verse 35 have been transposed and the word heart has been used instead of soul.

Another translation from the old Confraternity of Christian Doctrine used in the lectionary of 1970 reads: "this child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed-and you yourself shall be pierced with a sword- so that the thoughts of many hearts may be laid bare." This is closer to the original; the mention of Mary is therefore between the reference to a sign that will be contradicted and the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. "You yourself" is a laudable translation of "your soul" and correctly the reference to heart is found in the revelation of the thoughts of many hearts. Is Mary's heart included in the hearts of the many whose troubles will be revealed?

"Troubles" and "thoughts" are ways in which the word used here in the text has been translated. A range of meaning having to do with reasoning and design might be preferable. Literally the word comes from the verb to dialogue. This use may not be justified here; however, the idea of discernment might be seen in Mary's own questioning when she reflects back and forth what the greeting of the angel might mean (1:29). If dialog and especially how we use it today in terms of the dialog of salvation may be a fuller sense, surely we are warranted to hear the text in terms of the many uses that Luke makes of the word to indicate struggle amidst interpretation of religious experience (24:38 where "in your hearts" occurs; see the theme of debate in verses 4,11,17,41, all of which are captured in v. 38).

To hear the text of Simeon is this way: "struggle amidst the interpretation of religious experience," adds considerable depth to the discipleship of Mary and the humanity of the heart that she brings to Jesus. Since the text is often used in reference to the Immaculate heart of Mary, this reading would redefine "immaculate" less as "without stain" and more in terms of Mary's heart of sustainability. She is sustained in her trust that all that God promised would be fulfilled. Mary is not now the victim of a sword's thrust. Mary is one with other disciples in her struggle to believe. Thus, we return to a cherished meaning of treasured as sustaining. Evoking the title of "Mary Mother of the church," she may be said to sustain the community in its effort to find the harmonies of God in the daily living of human life out of Christian faith.

With the use of the word "revealed" one is justified in seeing an apocalyptic scenario and a vision of the sufferings that will mark the final times. Mary as the woman of the Apocalypse is not removed from this struggle (Revelation 12) but rather her discipleship models what the believer needs to confront the evitable eschatological struggles which characterize all times and are exhausted by no one time.

Fourth Vignette

Through mention of the apocalyptic scenario, we are led to consideration of the fourth Lucan vignette, "They all gave themselves to constant prayer with one mind, together with some women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers." (Acts 1:14) Luke's transforms the end time expectation of the community in Jerusalem to one awaiting the promise of the Father, (24:49/ Acts 1:4) for missionary activity. He honors the desire for the coming of the Kingdom but the time of its coming is not the disciples' to know. Now is the time for mission. So it is time for the preparation to receive the Spirit. Mention of who is present in the room upstairs in prayer for the Spirit climaxes in reference to Mary: Why Mary?

Much could be said on the basis of Luke's plot why Mary should be presented as praying with the community for the Spirit. The contemporary devotee of devotion to the hearts of Jesus and Mary may choose to recast the question in liturgical terms. Mary's prayer is an epiclesis, a calling down of the Spirit! We have been blessed in modern times with the restoration of the epiclesis to the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. For centuries and for reasons too wide for discussion here, the role of the Spirit was understated in our prayer, even eclipsed in favor of an apologetic theology of sacrament which favored for instance, the narrative of the Last Supper over the calling on the Spirit. In returning to the sources at Vatican II, this grave omission in liturgy was addressed. In fact the restoration has not only introduced the epiclesis over the bread and wine at the Eucharist but the further epiclesis that those who partake of the bread and wine become the body and blood of the risen Lord will now become the missionary body of Christ in the world. The structure of epiclesis is also to be found in the reformulation of the other sacraments. The Catechism of the Catholic Church addresses the restored epiclesis a number of times.

To speak of Mary as involved in the first epiclesis of the Christian community is truly delightful. Her heart is suffused with the waves and waves of harmonies that come to expression in the calling on

the Spirit. Obviously the dialog of the heart that she shared with Jesus explored and celebrated the emerging harmonies of all God's designs that come to fruition in the heart of Jesus but which can only be discerned heart to heart. Her Magnificat celebrates these contrary to expectation harmonies. The Eucharist upon which she called down the Spirit cannot be disconnected from the harmonies of her Magnificat. ..however disruptive and earth shattering they may be.

Conclusion

With the zeal of the apocalypticist and the compassion of a heart, well cared for, the dialog of salvation advances slowly but surely. Interreligious dialog has to be of life, of action, of religious experience and of experts. The driving force is the dialog of action. But it is not going anywhere without a dialog of hearts. The hour calls for integration, interiority and endurance. This is a road better not taken unless there is a corresponding commitment to spirituality. That takes heart and that takes devotion and the devotion of which we speak takes an enthrallment with harmony and beauty. A social analysis of what is bad will not move people to dare action together. Sharing a vision of the good in its beautiful demand upon us will move us out of safe quarters to risk doing a new thing for the Lord. This is where action needs devotion gestated in a dialog of hearts. In the workshop I proposed the beautification of slums as a way to embrace the ugly, promote harmonization, evoke visions of beauty but strenuously appeal to the power of the human heart to make the necessary connections. Two thirds of the world's population will live in cities by 2050 and two thirds of that urban population will live in slums. Transformation of the slum, not its removal, has worked best but the story of beautification each time is told in terms of human hearts. For the Christian, that dialog of heart always involves the hearts of Jesus and Mary... in their search for beauty and a reparative embrace of the ugly!

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