

I. HEART TROUBLE

It's hard to love. These days it doesn't seem to come naturally anymore—if it ever did. As our Lord warned us, towards the end evil would be so rampant charity would grow cold.

More or less we have all become spiritual cardiacs, our every move conditioned by the dread possibility of imminent heart failure. Loving in the face of the malice confronting us at every turn is such uphill work, so great a strain, only the force of a divine command driving us from behind could keep us at it. Reason alone would tell us to relax. Lots of us have, and that hasn't helped our environment.

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength” (*Deut. 6:4-5*).

To refuse to love is to disobey God. *Thou shalt love*, or else. The crisis of faith in our thinking today manifests itself as a crisis of love in our wills. Not believing, we can't love; not loving, we stop believing. All God's lesser prescriptions depend on His command to love. To disobey it disqualifies us for all other tests, whereas obeying it automatically leads us to do everything God wants us to do, and to avoid everything He doesn't want us to do. It eliminates all quibbling, dispels all minor confusions and hesitations. It makes life rough, but exceedingly meaningful.

The vast majority of us give up. “For the Lord tries you, that it may appear whether you love him with all your heart, and with all your soul—or not” (*Deut. 13:3*). For those who don't give up, suddenly everything is relevant. If we persist, we find boredom is a luxury we can't afford. There isn't time.



Whoever says loving is easy either lies or hasn't tried it, or both. It's the most difficult achievement that man in his fallen state could possibly tackle, yet his life depends on it. It's so difficult God himself had to come down eventually and show us how, because we hadn't the heart for it. As things developed, He had to give us that too. And that wasn't easy for Him either.

If loving is hard, allowing himself to be loved seems to be even harder for modern man. He finds it almost impossible to believe he is loved, that anybody really wants him. This requires faith, he discovers. His receiving mechanisms are so deranged he cannot humbly and gratefully accept the free gift of love even when it is offered. Psychiatrists' offices are filled with people who sincerely feel themselves so rejected—even when they are not—they can no longer function as healthy human beings.

Who can blame them? From the cradle we're told we're a nuisance, some of us by our very mothers, who look upon our birth as little more than an obstacle to self-fulfillment in a brave new world. Others have fathers who resent having to support them. Nursery schools and academia are thronged with young outcasts.

Even so, these are the lucky ones, created through the happy conjunction of sperm and ova aggressive enough to have successfully run the gauntlet of contraceptive traps, slaps, loops, jellies, misinformation and propaganda. Somehow they were spared the ministrations of assorted vasectomists, abortionists, zero population planners, programmed gynecologists, and fetal researchers who had (like God) only one message to deliver, but in reverse: "We don't want you. Maybe a few selected others, but not *you*."

They are quite specific in any given case. It's personal, and we take it personally. Not only we don't want you, we are told, but ideally, we don't want you even to *be*, not for one moment. Abortions are messy. Contraception is the real answer, because we don't want you to have life at all. WE HATE YOU! And we hate irresponsible people who clutter the world with you.

As we know, by now millions of us are gifted only briefly with life. Discarded as embryos in the laboratory, perhaps in the course of experimentation, we never get so far as a bassinette, to

be hated there by those who should love us. We are dismembered in the womb, cradled piecemeal in a rolling garbage can by hands which will only rock the world. Who reaches maturity must face other tests. They must survive child engineering of all descriptions, perverted history texts and scientism, impure sex education, volleys of adult literature and art, mutilated worship—and already, in dark corners, sterilization of the unfit and euthanasia, all implemented by the technological craft harnessed to the goals of the concentration camp.

That our neighbor doesn't love us is only too evident in the vast majority of our human encounters, but this is the lesser blow to our hearts. There are crazed philosophers and divines who labor to acquaint us with what, down deep, we are bitterly tempted to suspect: that God doesn't want us either. Could a God who loves us make us live in such a world? He must hate us!

That's silly, they tell us. How could God hate you? God is dead! Whether He loves us or not is academic, because He doesn't exist, and never did. He was invented by us, you idiots. He is us. Why don't you grow up and admit it? Be mature. Stand on your own feet for a change.



Only God could help at a time like this. Only He can tell us He is alive and loves us, because at this point in history we don't dare believe anyone else. We have been so fed on lies, so betrayed by those responsible for us, no one less than God could restore our faith, not only in Him but in ourselves. Our trust in man is gone. The credibility gap devours everything he tells us. He's too treacherous, too unreliable. We're exhorted on all sides to "open ourselves to one another in mutual trust," but we who have been betrayed know better. We are "closed" and wary. We wouldn't trust our own grandmothers, in some cases with very good reason.

Well, let's not feel guilty about it. While on earth, God himself reached the same conclusion, and said so to his disciples:

Beware of men, for they will deliver you up in councils (parish? national? ecumenical?), and they will scourge you in their synagogues ... Brother shall deliver brother to death, and the father the son: and the children shall rise up against their parents and shall put them to death (*Matt 10:17,21*).

Like us, God has been rejected. When He was born as man there was no room for Him at the inn in Bethlehem, and in His maturity He was snubbed in His own temple in Jerusalem, eventually put to death outside its walls. Before that had come a time when He could no longer walk openly among His own people (*John 11:54*). Often He had to hide, as He does even now. He “wouldn’t trust himself to them, because he knew what was in man” (*John 2:23-25*). He told us plainly, “One is good: God” (*Matt. 19:17*).

In the final analysis the only man who can be trusted is in fact God, and He must be trusted and believed in utterly. “You believe in God, believe also in me ... And where I go you know, and the way you know” (*John 14:1,4*). “Follow me!” (*Matt. 16:24*).

Patiently He explained the outrageous task that lay before us, how all the while never trusting man, we must nevertheless love him—to the point of laying down our life for him. All the while being wise as serpents, we must be innocent as doves, prepared to forgive him seventy times seven times for what he does to us, will continue to do to us, and will do to us ever more viciously the more perfectly we follow Christ. What’s hard about liking people who like us? As He himself noted, that’s easy.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” as well as you can.

Or, as W.H. Auden put it, you shall love your crooked neighbor with your crooked heart. Whether we like it or not, “On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets” (*Matt. 22:37-40*). Luckily, love isn’t a function of the feelings, for God never commands the impossible. Love is an operation of the will, directed by the intellect. The feelings can

go along or not as they please. If they do, so much the better; if not, too bad for them, not us. Wanting to love, doing the works of love is to love.

In order to show us exactly how this is done in real life, God led us personally, step by step, from Bethlehem to Egypt to Nazareth, to Calvary and to heaven. “Learn of Me,” He said, “because I am meek and humble of heart” (*Matt. 11:29*). “As I have loved you, you also love one another” (*John 13:34*).

This, knowing what we do about Calvary and all that led up to it, is preposterous! Especially for people with heart conditions! You’d have to have the heart of God to do that sort of thing, *really* to do it.

And that’s the heart of the matter.

That’s why He promised us centuries ago through His prophet Ezechiel that in the last days He would replace our calcified hearts with a heart of flesh in order to love so impossibly. He knew we didn’t have the heart for it, that we would have to have a brand new one:

“And I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh” (*Ez.36:26*).

Ezechiel couldn’t have known what we know now, that the heart of flesh God intended to give us was nothing less than His own. With God’s heart in our breasts we can love as God loves, and do His will.