

The Heart in the Heartless World? Struggles for What is Central in Human Life

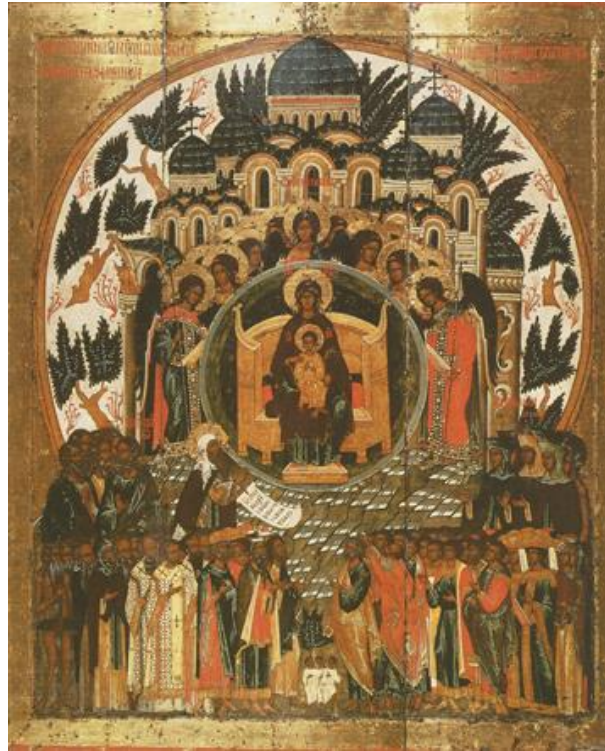
Ivana Noble: Introduction

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Russian icon, "All of Creation Rejoices in Thee"



Heart in the Heartless World

Karl Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”,
in Marx and Engels, *On Religion*, London – New York: Harper & Row, 1957, 42.



Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of people. The abolition of religion as illusory happiness of people is required for their real happiness.

Adolf von Harnack

and his language of “essence” as the kernel in *What is Christianity?* (*Das Wesen des Christentums*, 1900), Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978, 191 .

The Gospel did not come into the world as a statutory religion, and therefore none of the forms in which it assumed intellectual and social expression—not even the earliest—can be regarded as possessing a classical and permanent character. . . . Not only can it so exist—it must do so, if it is to be the religion of the living and is itself to live. As a Gospel it has only *one* aim—the finding of the living God, the finding of Him by every individual as *his* God, and as the source of strength and joy and peace.



Fr Lev Gillet (A Monk of the Eastern Church)

In Thy Presence, Crestwood NY: SVSP, 1977, 71-72.



So then, Lord, it is this? It is truly this? It is only this? This is the whole law and all the prophets? To love with one's whole heart...To love Him who first loved us, to love everything that He loves, all men, all women, all creatures...Yes, my child, that is it, and that is all. Everything "else" has value only inasmuch as it is the expression, the carrying out - under so many various forms - of that initial impulse which is my limitless Love....The heart transplants, which in our day have become possible, are a wonderful sign of a spiritual reality. To give one's heart to another, to accept the heart of another...It is the parable of limitless Love's triumph...

Two problems:

An illusory heart - and an essence that can be isolated from the rest

One cannot live with an illusory heart.

- Much work has been done on where Marx's critique of religion has been right and where wrong.
- The problem of separating the interior (spiritual) life - and the exterior (social, economic, political) life remains; it is not resolved by ascribing what is central to what was underplayed in the previous paradigm.

Not even the commandment of love is a kernel that can be isolated like a stone from a plum.

- Who decides what is central and on what grounds?
- Even after critiques of reductionism and individualism in religious matters, discernment between what is central and life-giving and what is not remains important.

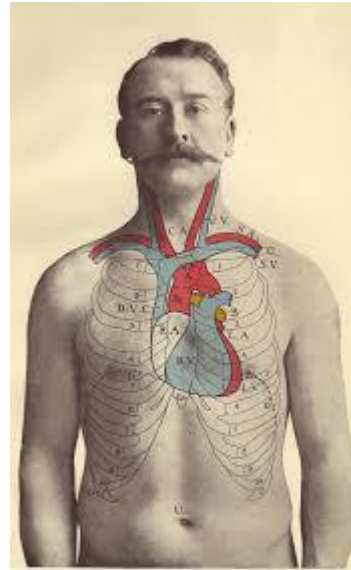
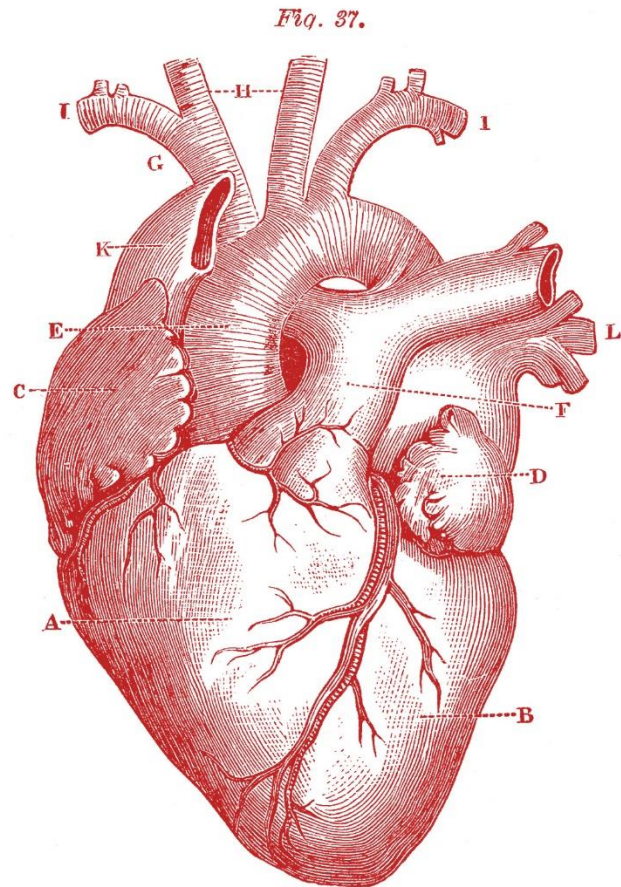
Metaphor and Examples of Its Physical Meanings

Geographically – the heart of the city



Metaphor and Examples of Its Physical Meanings

Biologically – the heart sustaining life in the body

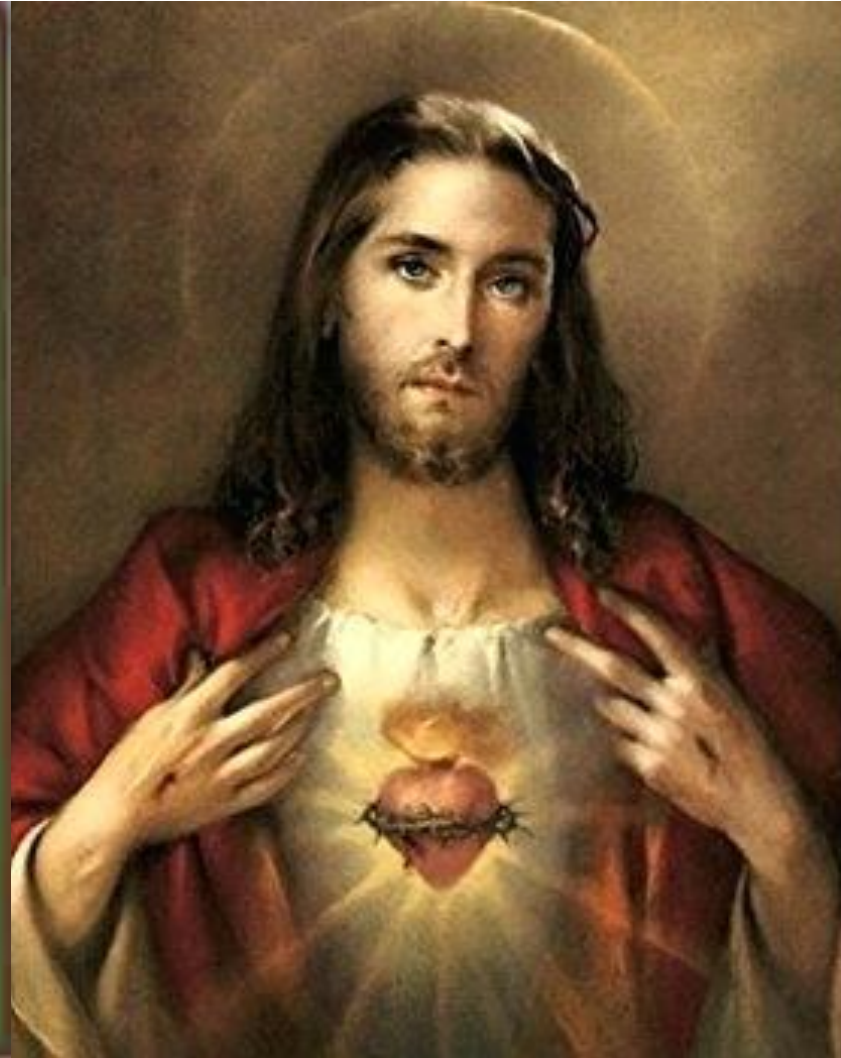


Metaphor and Examples of Its Physical Meanings

Spiritually – the centre out of which love comes

Seven Arrows or Icon of the Mother of God, Softener of Evil Hearts

The Sacred Heart of Jesus – The Immaculate Heart of Mary



André Scrima

Hesychasm – heart as the inner kingdom of stillness, where the image of God resides

Apophatic Anthropology Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016, 160,161.



However, “in order to reach the hidden image of man, we must go first through his exterior expression”, according to Scrima, but not to get stuck at the material aspects of life, not to be blinded by their radiance and turn them into idols. The true light leads into depth, which is the most concrete level of our being. There, relationship to God emerges as an ontological necessity. For this relationship to emerge and grow, we need to descend “toward the depths of the heart, where the image of God in us resides.”

IS THE WORLD A HEARTLESS PLACE, THEN?

Marc Chagall, Moses

Deuteronomy 28:6-9 Blessed shall you be when you **come in**, and blessed shall you be when you **go out**. The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways. The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns, and in all that you undertake; he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways.



The World

Different experiences, notions and projections of the whole

World both as the physical reality and metaphorical reality – how on the basis of what we know and experience we imagine the whole

- **Natural physical reality / metaphorical reality**

- Reductionist understanding of creation over-theologizes this aspect at the expense of others
- Enlightenment rationalism – natural world disenchanted and placed in the position of machinery or a slave
- Romanticism – the beauty and power of nature
- Ecology - being part of the natural whole as central

- **Social/Political physical reality / metaphorical reality**

- In Marx's time dominant view of the world – alienation of the working class
- In our time?

- **Cultural physical reality / metaphorical reality**

- Culture not as a collection of human artefacts or as an entertainment industry
- Culture's potential to cultivate – to mirror God's creative acts

What is Central in Human Life?

Paul Klee, Kettledrummer



After our last two conferences - one on holiness and the other on discernment - we want to continue our theological anthropological investigations, starting from one of the strongest modern challenges to theology: Karl Marx and his notion of religion as the opium of humankind, as the heart of the heartless world, offering a competing paradigm to Christianity, and yet not challenging the separation between human interiority and exteriority, which has led to further alienations.

- I. The ongoing problem of separation between human interiority and exteriority
- II. The heart and mediations of the common good
- III. The role of the ritual and symbolic traditions
- IV. Hermeneutics of a place