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## S U P P L E M E N T



***“The Heart of Man and the Heart of God”***

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**FOR INTERNAL USE**

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# THE HEART OF MAN AND THE HEART OF GOD

Given its central position in the human body, the heart is the vital engine of the circulatory system. Throughout history, it has also been considered the center of human spiritual and emotional life, the seat of sensitivity and feelings, of desire and will.

The theme of Pope Francis' encyclical letter, *Dilexit nos*, published on October 24, 2024, is the *Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ*. This document offered me the opportunity to delve deeper into the theme of the "heart" starting from the Word of God. In the Bible, the word "heart" appears a remarkable 814 times. Unable to recall all these biblical references, I will limit myself to those that illustrate the stages of our journey: the heart of man and the heart of God (supplement 1); the heart of Jesus and the heart of the believer (supplement 2).

## I - The Heart of Man.

God created the first man and woman endowed with a heart, an indispensable organ for living, reacting, and loving. Without this organ, man would be stillborn or a man without a heart.

## A -An Equal Beginning for All: A Wonderful Creature.

In Genesis 1-3, we do not find the word 'heart,' but rather the Creator's intimate reaction: "God saw that it was good" (1:10, 12, 18, 21). After creating man in His image and likeness, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (1:31). The Creator, loving His creature in a preferential way, said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (2:18). How beautiful those happy moments when God "walked - with Adam and Eve - in the garden with the breeze of the day" (3:8). Created free, our ancestors unfortunately took advantage of this freedom to gamble it

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away. And when “*they heard the sound of the Lord God walking*” (3:8), their hearts stopped beating from fear, and they hid among the trees. Not only was their nature disturbed, but also their minds and their hearts; they began to accuse each other.

From that moment, the history of humanity began, organizing itself into families, groups, tribes, and ethnicities. Each ethnicity forged its own culture and found ways to express itself through words, symbols, and religious rites. “*In the past, God spoke to our ancestors (through the prophets) at many times and in various ways*” (Heb 1:1).

## **B - Ancient Cultural Influences.**

In prehistoric times, our distant ancestors identified the heart as the primary organ of life. Numerous depictions show animals with a spear precisely aimed at the heart, or even the heart itself struck by a spear, javelin, or arrow. Striking the heart meant certainly bringing down the animal.

The heart was also considered by almost all primitive people as the seat of courage (= to have heart), passions, and, above all, spiritual life. Ancient human sacrifices among the pre-Columbian civilizations of Latin America bear witness to this. Among the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, the heart was considered the vital organ par excellence and the seat of intelligence, such that any form of mental disturbance was interpreted because of an alteration of the heart. The ancient Egyptians also saw in the heart both the seat of physical life - defined as ‘that which does not stop’ - and the seat of spiritual life, which is why it was the only internal organ left in the body of the deceased during the embalming process. In the ancient cultures of Greece (10th-9th century BC), the heart, in addition to being a vital organ, was also the seat of passions and feelings, while the diaphragm was the seat of courage. In Homer, the hero throws himself into battle driven by the diaphragm, while it is the heart that barks vengeance in Odysseus’s chest upon his return to Ithaca (Odyssey 20:13).

The Hebrew people were a Semitic people in contact with other Semitic peoples; they enriched each other with their own understandings and expressions. The Hebrew

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people, having long dwelt among the ancient Egyptians and absorbed Mesopotamian culture during the deportation to Babylon or during the colonization of Galilee, absorbed deviant customs, practices, and ways of thinking. The Sages and Prophets had to work tirelessly to purify popular expressions and destroy idols inconsistent with faith in the living God, great in love and rich in mercy.

## C - Hebrew Tradition.

In the Old Testament, the word “LEV,” translated as “heart,” refers only to the human being. It therefore goes beyond the simple physical organ. The LEV is seen as the center of emotions, pure and true feelings, the mind, the will, and love. *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them... You shall bind them as a sign on your hand... You shall write them on the doorpost...”* (Dt 6:5-9). This is the daily prayer for every Israelite; it is their response to the Lord’s boundless love.

The Gematria value of heart (LEV) is 32, like “the paths of wisdom” and the number of our teeth<sup>1</sup>. Just as these grind and transform our food, so a HEART OF FLESH transforms our egoic thoughts (self-worship and narcissistic, refined self-satisfaction with one’s person and qualities), transforming them into pure feelings such as sweetness, appreciation of good, acceptance of diversity, compassion, and mercy.

What relevance does the Bible attribute to Lev from a purely physical aspect? Nabal, Abigail’s husband, after coming into conflict with king David, organizes a feast and does not listen to his wife’s advice to avoid revenge from the king. *“...his heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk... then his heart died within him, and he became as a stone”* (1 Sam 25:36-37).

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1) The Hebrew word for “heart” is *lev* (לֵב), and its value in Gematria is 32—with lamed (ל) equal to 30 and bet (ב) equal to 2. This number, 32, also appears in Jewish mystical teachings, especially in the *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Formation), which speaks of the “32 paths of wisdom.” This connection between the heart and the paths of wisdom is meaningful.

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Abigail, a wise, prudent, and capable mediator, fails to counteract the wickedness and avarice of Nabal, whose heart is closed and rigid.

In the 6th cent BC, Ezekiel insisted on the urgency for Israel to renew its spiritual life. The Lord takes the initiative: *“I will take you..., I will gather you..., I will bring you..., I will sprinkle..., I will cleanse you..., I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh”* (Ezek 36:24-26). In the same period, the author of the Book of Exodus recalled the epic of the plagues of Egypt, a negative consequence of a hardened (stubborn) and insensitive heart like that of Pharaoh, who did not listen to the word of the Lord (cf. Ex 7:13, 22; 8:15, 28; 9:7, 12, 35; 10:20). Praying with Psalm 51:12, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me,”* the psalmist asked to have pure feelings.

Jeremiah, a central figure at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the nation, continued to obey the Lord and carry out his mission despite persecution and discouragement. *“My anguish, my anguish! I struggle in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is pounding; I cannot keep silent, for I have heard the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war”* (Jer 4:19). For Jeremiah, the true prophet, unlike the false one, knows how to put his own health on the line: *“My sorrow is incurable, and my heart is faint within me”* (Jer 8:18). The true prophet groans under the assault of the word of God: *“My heart is broken within me, all my bones tremble...”* (Jer 23:9).

Having a new heart becomes an urgency. *“Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!”* (Ezek 18:31). *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh”* (Ezek 36:26). If the heart of man is an abyss (Ps 64:6), prone to evil (Gen 6:5; 8:21), hard (Ex 7:13-14), proud (Dt 8:14; 17:20), wicked (Jer 7:24), uncircumcised (Lev 26:4; Dt 30:6), double (Ps 12:3), it is primarily a gift from God because, if man wills, it is capable of unity (Jer 32:39), generosity (Ex 35:5; 2 Chron 29:31), wisdom (1 Kgs 3:12), purity (Ps 24:4; 52:12; 73:13), and righteousness (Dt 9:5; Ps 119:7).

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## II - The Heart of God

The Bible rarely speaks of the heart of God, but the few times it does, they are enough to convey a sufficiently accurate concept of the ineffable reality intended. God does not have a body or a heart like ours. Man uses anthropomorphic language behind which lies a profound reality and a progressively revealed truth.

God's is a **wise heart**; His intelligence is superior to all others, and no man can claim to scrutinize His designs. *"If one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him once in a thousand. He is wise in heart and mighty in strength: who has resisted him and remained safe?"* (Job 9:3-4). With Job, we are in the 11th-10th century BC.

God's is also an **afflicted heart**. Faced with the growing corruption of primitive humanity, the affliction of His heart was so great that He regretted having created man. *"The Lord was sorry that He had made man... and He was grieved in His heart"* (Gen 6:6). The Book of Genesis, redacted in the 6th-5th cent BC, is a reflection on the consequences of evil and catastrophes, natural and political, as a result of humanity's and the chosen people's infidelity to the covenant.

God's is above all a **compassionate heart**. In the 8th cent BC, Hosea meditated on the history of the people, exiled, sinful, idolatrous, perverse, killer of prophets, guilty, but still loved by the Lord. *"How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel?... My heart is turned over within me; all my compassions are kindled. I will not execute My fierce anger..."* (Hos 11:8-9).

God's is a **free heart**. Samuel rebukes Saul for his rashness and folly. *"The Lord has sought out for Himself a man (David) after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you"* (1 Sam 13:14). Likewise, He chose Jerusalem to dwell there, and His promise will not fail. *"I have consecrated this house which you have built by putting My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually"* (1 Kgs 9:3). Even when David's successors did not prove equal to their task, the Lord promises to give His people *"shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding"* (Jer 3:15). For *"the fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until He has performed and*



*carried out the purposes of His heart” (Jer 30:24).*

God’s is a **heart fully attentive**, solicitous, committed to carrying out His plan of love for man and all humanity. “*God spoke to the heart of all the Levites*” because they were willing to seek God (2 Chron 30:18-19, 22). Then our prayer will be an act of trust in God: “*My heart will utter straightforward words, and my lips will speak clearly*” (Ps 33:3).

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#### FOR REFLECTION and SHARING

1. I carry within me a cultural DNA transmitted by my family and in my mother tongue. Can I recall some popular expressions that speak of the heart?
2. What kind of heart do I have? A tender, sensitive, ardent, compassionate, heavy, hard, insensitive, fierce, cruel, barbaric, proud, joyful, stubborn, pacified heart...? Do I have a heart of stone, of rock, of a boulder, of ice (insensitive, ruthless)? Am I a heartless person (evil)? Do I have the heart of a tiger, of a beast (cruel)? Do I have a good heart (good, charitable...)?
3. What is my idea of God’s love? A distant and absent God (neo-Gnosticism) or a non-existent God (neo-Pelagianism)? An insensitive God or one great in love? A God present in my life, who comes to my aid like a loving father?



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*Bethany*