



# THE BIBLICAL DIMENSION OF THE HEART

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With regard to Sacred Scripture, Saint John Eudes proposes an ideal, which applies not only to priests and religious but to all the baptized: to be another Jesus on earth, Jesus, who is the Good News that comes from the Heart of the Father. This affirmation of Saint John Eudes makes clear two great truths: 1) the importance of the concept of the Heart in Eudesian thought, and 2) the deep connection that exists between the Heart and the Word of God.

The context is extremely broad, since Eudesian writings are overflowing with biblical echoes, so that having contact with them implies an inevitable encounter with Sacred Scripture, which has various modes of presentation: allusions, implicit quotations, and explicit quotations. Saint John Eudes is not a biblical scholar but a loving student of the Word of God, even more so a lover of the Bible, a lover of the Incarnate Word.

"Father, doctor and apostle of the liturgical celebration of the Sacred Hearts" and ardent lover of the Word of God, John Eudes becomes a spiritual master who knows how to lead us in this ocean of ardent love. We clearly understand his proposal that we all become a "living Gospel, a book written inside and out," which presupposes that our hearts burn in the furnace of love for the Heart of Jesus.

When reading the writings of Saint John Eudes, we are sensitive to the general context in which the doctrine of the Heart is developed. This con-

text reveals the fact that it initially focuses on the Heart of Mary and later passes to the heart of Jesus. One should not wonder then, from his thinking that the heart of Mary is Jesus. Advancing a little further, it is discovered that the foundation on which the spiritual construction of the Heart is built upon is the Word of God.

This leads us to take another step discovering that the Heart is the great symbol of God's love. Additionally, this illuminates the biblical panorama of the Heart concept since God "defines himself" in Sacred Scripture itself as love (cf. 1Jn 4,8). Since he uses the Latin Vulgate in his writings, Saint John Eudes does not make direct reference to the biblical terms that express the love of God in the Old Testament (emet, hesed, hen, rahamim, among others). Nonetheless, these realities can be perceived through their own language (voluntas, amor, caritas, mercy, Cor) in such a way that they come to concentrate on the word Heart.

To this, it is necessary to add another element, the fiery furnace, which also has inspiration from Sacred Scripture itself, thereby giving a specific shape to the Eudesian language of the heart that we all know: bonfire of love (fornax amoris). These are words that he had written on the official representation of the heart held in one hand in the well-known portrait painted during his life, as a symbol synthesizing his thought about this reality.

There are studies made by respected biblical scholars on the usage of the various biblical citations of Saint John Eudes in relation to the spirituality of the Heart (of love). In these studies, one you can find the explicit references, the most cited books, and the number of citations with their different contextual venues. The strong presence of the Word of God, which sustains his thought,

1. Oeuvres Complètes I 66

2. Cfr. O.C. VII 126-127

3. Translator's note. The Latin word cultus is not easy to translate in English. The word "cult" has very bad connotations in American English.

4. O.C. III 53



reveals a fabric of biblical ideas that take a very specific form in his doctrine on the Heart.

Beyond the concrete biblical terms that can serve as the basis for his doctrine, the strength of the internal dynamisms from the Word of God that come to permeate the maturity of the thought of Saint John Eudes is discovered: the mystery of the Trinity, the cosmological and ecclesiological perspective, Mariology, Christology, and salvation.

When the meaning of the word Heart is examined, in the use that Saint John Eudes gives to this term, the biblical dimension of the concept of Heart becomes evident. Indeed, each of the nine meanings is justified by a biblical text. One might wonder if such use of the Bible does not border on a certain fundamentalism, that is, trying to justify a meaning using a text taken out of context.

This question is resolved by looking precisely at the context of the heart concept in the saint's writings, which contains a cogency that, originating in the Word of God, "ignites" each meaning and its consequences. The basis is located in the great affirmation that God is love, the Trinity is love; the "occupation" ad intra of the Trinity is resolved in love, as well as its action ad extra, for which it comes to speak of the Heart of the Father, from whom springs the Good News that became man, from the Holy Spirit, as the heart of God and of the Divine Heart of Jesus.

In this context, it must be taken into account that the heart is the great symbol of love. It is clear to affirm that from the original love, that is from the

Heart of God, which is love (cf. 1Jn 4,8), comes all reality and all the force of the revelation, the creation and the historical manifestation of God and this comes, in a certain way, to be synthesized in the Eudesian doctrine of the Heart.

As an example of this, let's take a look at the different meanings of the heart concept presented in his book on the Heart of Mary. This is just one example, which clearly reveals the biblical dimension of the concept as such but is by no means limited to the text of the nine meanings

1. "It means the material and bodily heart that we carry in our chest, the noblest part of the human body, the beginning of life, first to live and last to die, seat of love, hatred, joy and sadness, anger, fear and the other passions of the soul. From this heart, the Spirit speaks: "Take care of your heart because from it comes life (Prov 4:23)."

2. "The word heart is used in Sacred Scripture to designate memory. In this sense Our Lord uses it when he says to his apostles: Put in your hearts not to premeditate the answers that you are going to give (Lk 21:14). That is, remember that when you are led, for my sake, before kings and judges, you should not worry about what you should answer."

3. "It also means the understanding by which we exercise ourselves in meditation when we reflect and mentally discuss God and his works. Thus, we persuade and convince ourselves of Christian truths. This heart is spoken of in these terms: The meditation of my heart is always in your presence (Ps 19:25). "My heart," that is, my understanding, is always occupied in meditating and considering your greatness, mysteries and works."

5. Fornax = furnace.

6. Cf. The presentation of Father Daniel Doré: "The Reception of Sacred Scripture in Book XII of The Admirable Heart, by Saint John Eudes", at the International Congress of the Theology of the Heart of Jesus, in Bogotá, from 15 to 17 October 2021.



4. "It also means the free will of the superior and reasonable part of the soul, which is the noblest of its powers, king of other faculties, root of good and evil, mother of vices and virtues. Our Lord alludes to this heart when he says: The good man from the good treasure of his heart brings out the good, and the bad man from the bad treasure brings out the bad (Lk 6:45). A good heart, that is, the good will of the just man is a rich treasure from which only all kinds of good can come; but from a perverse heart, that is, the ill will of a bad man, is the source of all kinds of evil."

5. "The heart is also called the supreme part of the soul that theologians call the tip of the Spirit, in which contemplation is verified, which consists of a very unique look and a very simple vision of God, without discourse or reasoning, or multiplicity of thoughts. The holy Fathers speak of this part when applying to the Holy Virgin these words of Scripture: I sleep, but my heart is awake (Song 5, 2). The rest and sleep of his body did not prevent, say Saint Bernardino of Siena and others, that his Heart, that is, the upper part of his spirit, from always from being united to God by the highest contemplation."

6. "He makes known to himself, on some occasions, the whole interior of man, that is, what refers to the soul and the interior and spiritual life, according to these words of God to the faithful soul: Put me as a seal in your heart, like a mark on your arm (Song 8, 6). It is like saying, print, by perfect imitation, the image of my inner and outer life on your inside and outside, on your soul and on your body."

7. "It also means the Divine Spirit who is the Heart of the Father and of the Son. They want to give it

to us so that it may be our spirit and our heart: I will give you a new Heart and instill in you a new spirit (Ez 36:26)."

8. "The Son of God is called the Heart of the eternal Father in the holy Scriptures. Indeed, from this Heart the Father God speaks to his divine Spouse, the most pure Virgin, when he says to her: You wounded my heart, my sister, my wife (Song 4, 9), or according to the Seventy: You have been the enchantment of me. In the same Scriptures this Son of God is called the Spirit of our lips (Lam 4:20), that is, our spirit, soul of our soul, heart of our heart."

9. "The noun heart means all the faculty and capacity to love that can be in the upper and lower part of the soul, both natural and supernatural; like both human and divine love, which can proceed from this faculty. And from this heart he says: You will worship the Lord your God with all your heart (Mt 22:37), that is with all the capacity to love that he has given you" (O.C.VIII 425-428).

It is clear that Saint John Eudes loves to make use of hundreds of biblical texts—a model of this reality can be his little book known as Rules of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary. What is the reason that so many ideas are expressed through biblical texts? The answer to this question is very simple: the Heart of Saint John Eudes is filled with the Bible and the Spirit of Jesus. The question is not in the abundance of biblical texts but in the cause of this profusion, who is the love of the Word of God and is the love of Jesus. Saint John Eudes knows very well that the Word is light, it is food, it is one of the great manifestations of God's love for us. The Holy Spirit acts in the Word; the Word is creative, innovative, and inexhaustible.



From this perspective we understand his writings, his activities, and his life. By giving us the Heart of Jesus as a legacy in his testament, he is also giving us as a legacy his love of the Word. Not in vain does he affirm that the Son is the Word that springs from the Heart of the Father. When considering the proposal to honor the Divine Heart of Jesus, the Incarnate Word (Verbum Incarnatum), we can obviously realize that the phrase so well known to all is clearly seen: From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (L 6.45).

