

By RAÚL QUIROGA

## Heart

## Religion



I remember two special prayer requests when I first began working as a pastor. First, I asked God that I would never be involved in a serious car accident or run someone over, least of all a child. Second, that I would never need major surgery. Until now, and I am ever so thankful, God has granted my first request, but not the second. In 2002, at the age of 46, my cardiologist told me that the constant palpitations and arrhythmias I was experiencing were the result of a congenital heart disease: a malformation called atrial septal defect (ASD). In order to resolve this condition, I underwent surgery in 2002, and again in 2011. Thanks to God and my team of cardiologists and surgeons, all is well with my “physical” heart.

#### Another Heart Condition

Yet earlier, in 1977, at the age of 20, God had performed surgery on my “spiritual” heart. I had met a young Adventist and had discovered Scripture. In due course I was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ as a sign of the forgiveness of my sins and my personal commitment to my Savior and His commandments. Scripture clearly calls us to practice “heart” religion and not just talk about it. In fact, the “heart” in the Bible seems to refer to one’s entire being, involving “spirit, soul, and body” (1 Thess. 5:23).

Seventh-day Adventists have a unique perspective in this respect. We recognize the importance of the physical aspects of life as well as its spiritual dimensions. We place

*Let the Master Surgeon do what He does best.*

great importance on proper care of the body as well as of the spirit and soul. “All your being” also includes the body. Modern medicine and science are very interested in the human body, often to the exclusion of religion and the spiritual needs of our existence. Often scientists are interested predominantly in the physical body and not in service to the God who made the body. On the other end of this continuum, many religions seem to preach that only the spirit and the soul are relevant for the kingdom of heaven, not the body. It sounds like an echo from Isaiah: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (Isa. 22:13).

The Bible includes quite a number of heart-religion theologians, foremost among them Moses, Solomon, Jeremiah, and Paul:

## The Bible's Heart-Religion Theologians

Moses	Solomon	Jeremiah	Paul
c. 1450 B.C.	c. 970 B.C.	c. 606 B.C.	c. A.D. 68
Deuteronomy 10:12, 16; 11:13	Proverbs 23:26; 2:1-3	Jeremiah 31:33	Hebrews 8:10; 10:16

All of these specialists in heart religion teach us that it is essential to have the tablets of God's law, the Ten Commandments written in stone, stored in the most intimate part of the sanctuary: the Most Holy Place. But they also warn us of the fact that our religion is in vain if we ourselves are not living sanctuaries with God's law written on the tablets of our hearts. According to the biblical heart specialists, the expression of God's character must be in the most intimate, most central part of our being—our hearts. If we do not heed their teaching, we worship by words only. It is wonderful to think that wherever God's living sanctuaries go, there He and His Word go also, represented in the heart's obedience to His commandments. We become a mobile blessing.

### Form and Substance

When we look back into history, including the modern era, we realize the prominence of outward form over substance or internal values. Religion and culture emphasized what could be seen—not what is invisible.

However, there seems to be a reversal in the postmodern era. People are more concerned about real issues and not about forms of religious and cultural expressions. Today it seems that people have a built-in sincerity detector. Postmoderns want to see consistency in what we say and what we do. This new cultural paradigm emphasizes authenticity. Postmoderns are genuine and sincere, both for good and for evil. They do not forgive hypocrisy, especially with regard to religion; much less if we profess loyalty to God and His principles yet deny Him in our behavior. Without a doubt, true heart religion would be the most effective mission tool to reach postmoderns and those looking for authenticity and genuineness.

All biblical theologians of true heart religion, throughout history, highlighted the importance of an undivided heart. Forceful Moses, wise Solomon, daring Jeremiah, and intrepid Paul, all called God's people in different periods to consider complete open-heart surgery by the Master Sur-

*“We need a transformed heart that is **sensitive** to God's Word and His law.”*

geon. What was true throughout history is still true today. We need transformed hearts that are sensitive to God's Word and His law. We need genuine heart transformation that will make sense to people who watch us and interact with us.

I am still grateful for my two heart surgeries that gave me a new lease on life. Yet, even more, I am forever indebted to God for my spiritual heart surgery, when God transformed a stony heart and made me part of a movement of believers awaiting (and preaching) His soon return. Looking back at that one moment in my life that changed everything, I realize that without God's skillful heart surgery everything else would have been meaningless. This transformation, as the many other transformations affected by our Celestial Surgeon, was part of God's “show-and-tell” to the people that surround us. This transformation is not a once-for-all surgery—it is a daily surrender to His influence and Spirit. ■



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