

Brief on Hard Hearts¹

By Richard Joseph Michael Ibranyi

“Blind the heart of this people and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.” (Isa. 6:10)

“And the prophecy of Isaiahs is fulfilled in them, who saith: By hearing you shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing you shall see and shall not perceive. For the heart of this people is grown gross and with their ears they have been dull of hearing and their eyes they have shut lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and be converted and I should heal them.” (Mt. 13:14-15)

“Therefore he hath mercy on whom he will; and whom he will, he hardeneth.” (Rom. 9:18)

Rom. 9:18. **He hardeneth:** Not by being the cause or author of his sin, but by withholding his grace and so leaving him in his sin in punishment of his past demerits and obstinately evil heart. Hence God hardens hard hearts; that is, hearts that have been given many graces and chances to repent but would not; and thus because of their obstinacy, God withdraws his grace and hardens their hearts even more:

“Great pains have been taken and the great rust thereof is not gone out, not even by fire. Thy uncleanness is execrable because I desired to cleanse thee and thou art not cleansed from thy filthiness, neither shalt thou be cleansed before I cause my indignation to rest in thee.” (Ez. 24:12-13)

“Hear, O foolish people and without understanding, who have eyes and see not; and ears and hear not. Will not you then fear me, saith the Lord, and will you not repent at my presence?” (Jer. 5:21-22)

“But the house of Israel will not hearken to thee because they will not hearken to me, for all the house of Israel are of a hard forehead and an obstinate heart.” (Ez. 3:7)

St. Paul warns God’s chosen people: “Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation in the day of temptation in the desert where your fathers tempted me, proved and saw my works... Take heed, brethren, lest perhaps there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief to depart from the living God. But exhort one another every day, whilst it is called today, that none of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb. 3:8-9, 13)

The danger of men with hard hearts is that God will pull all his grace from them and leave them in a graceless state until they die and thus they will end up in hell. If God takes away all of his grace from an obstinate (hard) heart, then that heart is as hard as it can get and thus cannot repent or do anything good with a good motive in such a condition unless God returns to it by bestowing his grace upon it. And if God lets a hard-hearted man die in such a state, then that is a sure sign that this man was an ultimately evil soul (of the reprobate), as known to God even before the world was created, and thus is justly damned to hell:

“I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with cruel chastisement; by reason of the multitude of thy iniquities, thy sins are hardened. Why criest thou for thy affliction? Thy sorrow is incurable; for the multitude of thy iniquity and for thy hardened sins, I have done these things to thee.” (Jer. 30:14-15)

¹ RJMI’s Briefs are Long Commentaries contained in the end of *The Catholic Bible*, revised by RJMI.

“He hath seen the presumption of their heart that it is wicked, and hath known their end that it is evil. (Eccus. 18:10) For all things were known to the Lord God before they were created. (Eccus. 23:29)”

Therefore, it cannot be said that God wants ultimately hard-hearted men (the reprobates) to be damned, as God wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4), but that God in his foreknowledge knows all things and thus knows who will cooperate with his grace and be saved and who will not. Above all, let no one say that God is unjust in anything that he does, even though we may not be able to comprehend all that he does because of our lowly knowledge and comprehension compared to God’s:

“In unnecessary matters be not over curious, and in many of his works thou shalt not be inquisitive. For many things are shewn to thee above the understanding of men.” (Eccus. 3:24-25)

Let us say with King David,

“Thou art just, O Lord: and thy judgment is right.” (Ps. 118:137)

St. Cyril of Jerusalem *First Catechetical Lecture*, Lecture 6, 4th century: “28. Then Manes answers him: ‘And what sort of God causes blindness? For it is Paul who saith, In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the Gospel should shine unto them.’ (2 Cor. 4:3-4) But Archelaus made a good retort, saying, ‘Read a little before: But if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that are perishing.’ Seest thou that in them that are perishing it is veiled? For it is not right to give the things which are holy unto the dogs. Again, is it only the God of the Old Testament that hath blinded the minds of them that believe not? Hath not Jesus himself said, For this cause speak I unto them in parables, that seeing they may not see? Was it from hating them that he wished them not to see? Or because of their unworthiness, since their eyes they had closed. For where there is willful wickedness, there is also a withholding of grace; for to him that hath shall be given, but from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.”

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, c. 180-199: “If, therefore, in the present time also, God, knowing the number of those who will not believe, since he foreknows all things, has given them over to unbelief, and turned away his face from men of this stamp, leaving them in the darkness which they have themselves chosen for themselves, what is there wonderful if he did also at that time give over to their unbelief, Pharaoh, who never would have believed, along with those who were with him? And for the reason that the Lord spoke in parables and brought blindness upon Israel, that seeing they might not see since he knew the spirit of unbelief in them, for the same reason did he harden Pharaoh’s heart.”²

St. Augustine *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 53 (Jn. 12:37-43), 413: “6. They could not believe as Isaiah the prophet foretold it; the prophet foretold it because God foreknew that such would be the case. But if I am asked why they could not, I reply at once, because they *would* not; for certainly their depraved will was foreseen by God, and foretold through the prophet by him from whom nothing that is future can be hid... For God thus blinds and hardens simply by letting alone and withdrawing his aid; and God can do this by a judgment that is hidden, although not by one that is unrighteous... This is a doctrine which the piety of the God-fearing ought to preserve unshaken and inviolable in all its integrity, even as the apostle, when treating of the same intricate question, says, ‘What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.’ (Rom. 9:14) If, then, we must be far from thinking that there is unrighteousness with God, this only can it be, that, when he giveth his aid, he acteth mercifully; and, when he withholdeth it, he acteth

² b. 4, c. 29, par. 2.

righteously; for in all he doeth, he acteth not rashly but in accordance with judgment. And still further, if the judgments of the saints are righteous, how much more those of the sanctifying and justifying God? They are therefore righteous, although hidden. Accordingly, when questions of this sort come before us, why one is dealt with in such a way and another in such another way, why this one is blinded by being forsaken of God and that one is enlightened by the divine aid vouchsafed to him, let us not take upon ourselves to pass judgment on the judgment of so mighty a judge, but tremblingly exclaim with the apostle, 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!' (Rom. 11:33) As it is also said in the psalm, 'Thy judgments are as a great deep.' (Ps. 35:7)"

For the glory of God; in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Michael, St. Joseph, Ss. Joachim and Anne, St. John the Baptist, the other angels and saints; and for the salvation of men

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