

Incarnations of the Heart

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Incarnations of the Heart

Poems and Prose Out of History

MARK S. MCLEOD-HARRISON

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INCARNATIONS OF THE HEART
Poems and Prose Out of History

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I dedicate this book to one who can no longer read it,
one who would now find it too challenging to read,
and one who will read it
and have a cry and a laugh or two.
In memory of Granny B.
(who fully entered the communion of saints at 93)
and for my Grannie at 101
(go, Grannie, go)
and my 80-year-old Mom
(who will be reading when she's 100).

The women in my family have great longevity genes.
At 57, I'm hoping I got them too.

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Foreword

A book of poems, by a philosopher? Dull reading . . . perhaps. Yet poetry and philosophy, for all their ancient debate, have much in common. Both are after the mystery. In my book *Apologizing for God: The Importance of Living in History* (Cascade Books 2011) I presented the centrality of history to developing a good philosophy. One's position in history is essential to understanding not just philosophy but the Christian faith. The Christian faith, as life lived in history, is an antidote to the extremes of relativism and cold objectivity, of postmodernism and modernism. (Please don't let those terms put off the potential reader of this book. I promise not to use them again.) That book could be called autobiographical philosophy or even storied philosophy. I say there that autobiography is largely biography. Much of its point depended on things I'd learned along the way from various people. This book continues that theme but with a slightly different approach, viz., poetry and a few short essays and creative nonfiction.

Another way of thinking can frame this work, however. Many years ago, I was introduced by my Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican friends to the notion of the communion of the saints. The doctrine has become central to my understanding of the Christian faith and our history with God. While I've tried in other venues to write something philosophically cogent about the doctrine, I've had little success. The communion is easier to see, hear, taste, smell or feel than to write about philosophically. Sometimes, indeed, the veil between this world and the next is lowered and the kingdom of heaven with all its saints can be seen directly. At least, that's been my experience. I can feel the communion all around me, at least on my good days.

Incarnations of the Heart

I've learned that the communion of the saints is the result of God's deepest love for us. Indeed, when more fully understood, the communion *is* God's deepest love for us. The poems and essays included here are the result of experiencing that love. Unfortunately, they do the communion poor justice. I apologize for getting things wrong when I have. But more importantly, I apologize for not getting the beauty of the communion portrayed in anything like its full glory.

Many people have pointed me toward the communion simply by being members of it. In fact, there's no way to write enough books or even poems and essays to honor every individual who has had an incarnate heart in helping me see God. Many of you know who you are, but perhaps many others don't—you've been lovers incognito, even to yourselves. But in the end, God not only knows who you are but God celebrates your lives. So do I celebrate your lives. But more importantly, the Holy Three will someday, if it hasn't happened already, welcome you fully into the perichoresis—the divine dance—that is God's love for all of us.

We are the second incarnations of God. As the body of Christ, we are the communion of the saints. As such, our names are written in the Lamb's book of life and because of that, perhaps I can be forgiven for not listing everyone who has had a hand and a heart in helping me know God better.

Preface

For hundreds of years, art of all sorts has been supported by the gifts of people other than the artists. This, too, is part of the communion of the saints and many of those saints remain hidden. When the gifts are anonymous, someone arranges for that support to be distributed. In this case, the distribution came through George Fox University. I thank Patrick Allen (retiring provost) and Linda Samek (interim provost), for scraping the bottom of the 2012–2013 funding barrel to arrange the finances enabling this collection to be published. And Patrick, you’ve been, as a philosopher/poet might say: the-best-of-all-possible provosts. Thank you.