

Eyes of the heart (Ascension) (Ephesians 1:15-23)

If we can be said to have them, we should at least want them to be opened.

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From my short-lived career as a praise band guitarist, only one song has really stuck in my memory: Paul Balloche's 2000 classic "Open the Eyes of My Heart."

I could write a list of the song's musical and theological defects and be convinced that I am right. But a song lingers for a reason, even if it is one of those reasons of the heart that reason knows not at all, as Blaise Pascal put it.

I suspect it has something to do with this curious phrase "eyes of my heart," which comes from the passage of Ephesians that accompanies the story of the ascension from Luke and Acts. "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him," Paul writes, "so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you."

It's a helpful echo of the problem of perception posed by the ascension itself. Christ is present, filling all things, but not visible to the eyes of his followers. The authority of the "heart" is familiar.

"You ask me how I know he lives," goes the praise-and-worship chestnut of an earlier age; "he lives within my heart." The personal experience of sentiment is, in its limited way, hard to argue with.

But the metaphor of “eyes of the heart” suggests more than the movement of sentiments and inner convictions. It suggests a yearning for perception of and insight into the world outside ourselves, analogous to but not constrained by the vision of our physical eyes.

In Søren Kierkegaard’s *Repetition*, an anonymous young man obsessively reads the book of Job by laying the book “as it were, on my heart” and reading it “with the eyes of the heart, in a *clairvoyance* interpreting the specific points in the most diverse ways.” Every word of Job, the young man says, is “food and clothing and healing for my wretched soul.” In a literary culture that identifies rigor with critical sterility, this may sound suspicious, as if the reader is merely finding what he needs in the text. But perhaps the hidden connections between the specific points of the story and the diverse perceptions of the reader are exactly why anyone bothers to write or read in the first place.

So what, then, about that “hope,” to say nothing of the “riches of [God’s] glorious inheritance among the saints” and the “immeasurable greatness” of God’s power that the Ephesians passage holds out as the things to be seen by the enlightened eyes of our hearts? Can they be known with more authority and reliability than that heart-sense in our songs and proverbs but less than actual vision? Or does the metaphor break free so that there is no measurement of one by the other, any more than the interpretation of Job by the scholar can be measured against the interpretation by an anxious and desperate soul looking for Job’s companionship?

Perhaps “Open the Eyes of My Heart” works because it phrases this kind of knowledge as a supplication. If we can be said to have eyes of the heart, we should at least want them to be opened. The desire to see the ascended Jesus and to know those riches of hope, power, and glory is powerful on its own. But like any heart’s desire, it needs to meet with something outside itself for assurance and the strength to persevere to its own fulfillment.