

Africa. The extreme racial segregation of apartheid lasted from 1948 to 1994 and included such restrictions as where people of certain races could live or own land, what jobs they could hold, and who could and couldn't participate in government.

2. Genesis 6:4
3. Ephesians 6 :11-12.

Ben Hopkinson is a priest, living in retirement in Northumberland. He was in the kindergarten of contemplation in 2019 and has still to enter the reception class.

Taking Heart: Experiences of spiritual searching, self-acceptance and journeying to the heart of faith

Fiona Gardner

Introduction by Jim Forest

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What a gift to read a book that takes us straight into the heart of matters. Fiona Gardner, a qualified psychoanalytic psychotherapist, spiritual director and former chair of The Thomas Merton Society, has written a short but rich book about the core of our spiritual journey and transformation. She uncovers the heart, the centre of all spirituality. This book is a wonderful brief account of the spiritual journey of true transformation in a contemporary and day-to-day situation, and a guide into the complexities of the emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects of our being. Gardner shows us the way to the core of our being. Starting from the motto of the book by Alexander Ryrie about our 'hidden secret place, the inner chamber of our hearts', through the thoughts of not only Thomas Merton but also Carl Jung and others, she penetrates into the deepest connection with Christ. Woven throughout the book are real life stories of four of her clients: their journeys, struggles, but more so their rebirth in freeing themselves from those psychological and spiritual mechanisms which keep us trapped. In doing so we meet, what Merton called, our 'Inward Stranger'.

Reading the book feels like walking a labyrinth. It brings us closer into contact with our hidden parts, and creates a sense of wholeness. Her gentle support lets us breathe in dialogue with the Breath of Life. Gardner

surely is what Jim Forrest calls her in his introduction to the book, 'a spiritual cardiologist'. She demonstrates the existential value of spiritual direction: to truly heal, opposed to the more common and broadly accepted cognitive-behavioural psychological approaches that aim to 'fix'.

Gardner's intellectual viewpoints are rather transparent. She often starts her chain of thoughts by starting at 'the church', then via Merton and Jung arriving at Christ. She can sometimes be polemical against the church, something like a 'free spirit' against a framework of an 'institutionalized spirit'. Staying close to the life stories of her clients and her own, for me personally, is enough to make her point.

Whilst reading, the following question kept coming to mind: who is she actually writing for? Writing on the subject of spiritual transformation and discovering the True Self is not original. We recognise the use of Merton and Jung's 'false self', and 'shadow work'. So, I wonder what would have been her aim in writing this book?

The answer had to come from the reading itself. I read the book commuting to work in the early hours of the morning. The writings nourished me, sustained my heart and soul and reconciled me with my own psychological and spiritual diversity and complexity. I also found her insights and thoughts resonating in the conversations I had with patients on the surgical, psychiatric, oncology and palliative care wards. Through the subtle and investigating mind of Gardner I heard more hidden emotions coming through. For me, as a hospital chaplain and spiritual director, it reawakened my inner ear. Therefore the wisdom that lights up through the whole of the book, the gems, were transferred into the patients' lives and sometimes helped lifting some of their spiritual and emotional suffering.

The originality of the book no doubt is the way Fiona Gardner explores the heart like an adventurer, familiar with the map but not numbed, to find unexplored tracks, cul-de-sacs, and sometimes hidden caves. *Taking Heart* lives up to the expectation included in the title: it is worth the effort to take heart because our spiritual journey, guided by a professional like Gardner herself, sets us free, and gives a deep sense of meaning and fulfillment.

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