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Author: Marija Pehar

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Abstract

Devotion to the Heart of Mary in the post-conciliar period is often considered sentimental and outdated. Some devotional practices may encourage this view. However, properly understood in the light of the Second Vatican Council, devotion to the Immaculate Heart calls the believer to a radical decision to follow Mary in her life's vocation and partake in the redemptive mission of Christ. Her pure heart shows us the power and unsuspected potential of every human heart that opens up and surrenders to God and his Son Jesus Christ as a return gift for his love.

Author

Marija Pehar is a corresponding member of the Pontifical international Marian Academy (PAMI) and a member of the Croatian Mariological Institute. As an assistant professor she teaches Trinitarian theology and Mariology at the Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb.

Devotion to the Heart of Mary: A Theological Interpretation in the Light of Conciliar Mariology

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Introduction

Serious theological thinking about Mary is usually based on Christology and is derived from it. This Mariological postulate was established by the early Church, classical and medieval theology insisted on it,¹ and contemporary Mariological statements (especially Conciliar and post-Conciliar Mariology) have stayed on the same line. However, this postulate is not valid only for the theological doctrine of Mary, but also for Marian devotion. None of the Marian dogmas were primarily Mariological but Christological in their theological foundation and content; therefore, the theological foundation and content of rightly perceived Marian devotion basically must be Christological and therefore point to the mystery of Christ. Through devotion to Mary, we worship Christ. In addition to this fundamental characteristic of Marian devotion, the Second Vatican Council stresses that beside a Christological foundation and orientation, there must always be an ecclesiological one. Mary is a member of the Church, and her devotion binds the Church to follow her in the saintliness of her life.

This is and should be recognizable in devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary (*cor immaculatum*), which derives its theological foundation and content from the theology of the Heart of Jesus and is located theologically in gracefully mediated motherhood and the virginal betrothal of the Church, its real symbol. In attempting theological interpretation of this devotion in the light of Conciliar Mariology, we are trying to follow the correct Mariological postulates, from Christological foundation to ecclesial presence. Specifically, within the theological content of the Heart of Mary, we seek the overall centeredness of her person to the person of her Son, i.e., his heart – the heart of Jesus.

¹ So, for example, Thomas Aquinas said that all Marian mysteries are included in a unique mystery of Christ, e.g. *Summa Theologiae*, III. q. 27, prol.



The theology of devotion to the Heart of Jesus

The term heart of Jesus encompasses Jesus' heart as a symbol of God's love, love for his Father who sent him to the world to give everyone who believed in him eternal life (Jn 3, 16) and Jesus' love as a Redeemer and Saviour of humankind, but also as a physical heart 'seen as a visible place of the invisible centre of Christ's love'.² The oldest roots of devotion to the Heart of Jesus have their dogmatic foundations in the theology of the Incarnation, especially in the Christological decisions of early councils, especially of Ephesus (431) and the Second Council of Constantinople (553), according to which we worship Christ in his two natures in one unique devotion.³ Devotion to the Heart of Jesus as a physical symbol of the humanity of Christ finds its foundation in honouring the mystery of the hypostatic union, the honouring of Christ's divine and human love oriented towards human redemption.⁴ This love is most powerfully expressed through the image of the heart.

The human heart of Christ is an expression of his entire life that has been exposed as divine and human love. That heart has shown Jesus' divine and human love towards his Father and his redemptive love towards human beings; therefore, his heart is the centre of his divine and human personality. It is no surprise, therefore, that many theologians demonstrate that devotion to the Heart of Jesus is integral to the most profound mystery of the Christian faith, and should be placed within the whole of Christology and Soteriology.⁵ The Church fathers wrote about the meaning of Jesus' pierced side and interpreted it in the light of baptism and

² Those are the words of Croatian dogmatic theologian, Jesuit, Rudolf Brajčić, *Teologija Srca Isusova*, in: Anka Petričević (ed.), *Gle ovo Srce. Konferencije o štovanju Presvetog Srca Isusova*, Split: Samostan Sv. Klare, 1986, 83-94, here 93.

³ Cf. Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (hereafter DS), Dakovo: UPT, 2002, 259 and 431.

⁴ Cf. Leo Scheffczyk, 'Herz Jesu. Herz-Jesu-Verehrung, II. Systematisch-theologisch', in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. V, Freiburg-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 2009, 53-4, here 53.

⁵ Especially the Rahner brothers. Hugo Rahner, 'Eucharisticon fraternitatis', in Johann Baptist Metz (ed.), *Gott in Welt 2, Festgabe für Karl Rahner*, Freiburg-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 1964, 895-99; Hugo Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche, Die Ekklesiologie der Väter*, Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1964, especially 177-235; Karl Rahner, 'Siehe dieses Herz. Prolegomena zu einer Theologie der Herz-Jesu-Verehrung' in *Schriften zur Theologie*, Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1956, III. 379-90; 'Einige Thesen zur Herz-Jesu-Verehrung', III. 391-415; but also 'Der theologische Sinn der Verehrung des Herzens Jesu', VII. 481-90; and article 'Herz', in: *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, vol 2, München: Kōsel, 1963, 328-36. Also, Annice Callahan, *Karl Rahner's Spirituality of the Pierced Heart. A Reinterpretation of Devotion to the Sacred Heart*, New York & London: University Press of America, 1985, and Joseph Ratzinger, *Schauen auf den Durchbohrten*, Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1984.

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the Eucharist.⁶ In the patristic period devotion to Jesus' pierced side signified the mystery of Christ's suffering and death as an expression of love, and there was an Easter devotion based on contemplating Jesus' open side (based on Jn 19. 34) as the symbol of his redemptive sacrifice and love. Christology was thus linked to pneumatology: the water of life that runs out of Christ's pierced side is the Holy Spirit (see Jn 7. 37-39) as the life source of the Church.⁷ The life of the Church as a bride was considered as love given towards Christ, her bridegroom, love that has been shown in his open side which represented the open gate of entering the Trinitarian life of God itself. That entering occurs by the water purification (sacrament of baptism) and the blood of redemption (sacrament of the Eucharist).⁸

It is essential to notice that theology does not understand the Heart of Jesus '*separately or apart from deity*', but as '*a heart of the Word with whom the deity is inseparably united*',⁹ and thus thinks of it as a symbol of God's love. Jesus, whom Tertullian calls 'firstborn from the centre of the Father's heart',¹⁰ with his incarnation, his whole person and life, reveals the love of his Father's heart and shows it as a passionate love not only to himself but for the entire world. In the incarnated Son and his physical heart as a centre of his personality, the Father's heart also becomes evident, that is to say, the unique mystery of the heart that is God himself. This is also confirmed in the theologically interesting encyclical *Haurietis Aquas*, promulgated by Pius XII in 1956, where the pope, after a period of time in which devotion to the Heart of Jesus had been neglected,¹¹ wanted to pay attention to it again and try to justify

⁶ Cf. Walter Kasper, *Milosrđe, Temeljni pojam evanđelja – ključ kršćanskoga života*, transl. Ivan Ivanda, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2015, 148-55.

⁷ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Schauen auf den Durchbohrten*, 42-3, citing H. Rahner.)

⁸ In the Middle Ages, developing piety around the Passion made a kind of turn away from contemplating this event of salvation and was redirected towards a more subjective experiencing of Jesus' suffering, and empathy for his redemptive pain. In that context, devotion to the Sacred Heart was characterized by affectivity and emotions, additionally enhanced with contemporary interpretations of the Song of Songs in a way that emphasized Christ's love for his Church. The words of the bridegroom for his bride in the Song of Songs were interpreted as words of Christ for the Church, and Christ's pierced side illustrated his wounds of love denoting his relationship to the Church. Turning from the Middle Ages to the early modern period, a certain shift occurred, from spirituality focused on redemption to devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and it developed as a contemplation of Christ's suffering endured for human sins and was directed to honouring Jesus' suffering and satisfaction. Developed in a way to enhance God's tenderness and mercy, devotion to the Heart of Jesus was employed to moderate the Jansenistic doctrine of severe divine justice and the predestination of humanity. Believers' attention was more focused on Jesus' physical pain, neglecting the heart as a symbol of Christ in his entirety.

⁹ Pope Pius VI, *Auctorem fidei*, 1974. DS, 2662-3.

¹⁰ 'Primogenitus... proprie de vulva cordis ipsius', *Against Praxeas*, cited in Alois Grillmeier, 'Theologia cordis', *Geist und Leben* 21, 1948, 332-351, here 335.

¹¹ Hans J. Limburg, 'Herz Jesu. Herz-Jesu-Verehrung, I. Geschichte', *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* V, 2009., 51-3., here 52.



it and theologically rethink its meaning.¹² He offers two reasons to honour the Heart of the Saviour: 1. The Heart of Jesus is hypostatically united to the divine person of the Logos, according to which we should honour and show reverence for God's Son; and 2. the divine Saviour's Heart is a natural sign or a symbol of his endless love for the human race.¹³ 'The heart of the incarnated Word' is considered 'an indicator and a symbol [...] of his divine love that he has given us along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, that is only in him who is the Word become flesh, shown through a temporary and weak human body'.¹⁴ Pius XII thereby sees, in the Heart of Jesus, the expression of the entire mystery of our salvation. God's incarnation reveals the marvelousness and greatness of God's triune love for which even human bodiliness is not an obstacle in creating true community between God and humanity. The calling of faith is finally reflected as an entering of humanity into a complete community of triune divine life as a life of love. Also, the true basis of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus consists in Christ's worshippers together with the whole Church praying to the '*sign and also trace of God's love*'¹⁵ that is our salvation. So, honouring the Heart of Jesus implies all the necessary elements of Trinitarian, incarnational, pneumatological, soteriological, ecclesial, sacramental and eschatological faith, all linked together in the person of the Word incarnate.¹⁶

From all of the above, it is evident that honouring the Heart of Jesus means the symbolic strength of the heart is recognized not only as a centre of sensibility and love, but also as a personal centredness of the human being in which all their abilities are gathered and from which they appear as spiritual strength, as 'a place of the highest concentration of human innerness and at the same time the most intense place of the conjunction of divine and human love'.¹⁷ This conception of the heart is in accordance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which, by citing the spiritual tradition of the Church, understands heart in a biblical sense as the depth of being in which a person decides for or against God.¹⁸ It is the centredness that in its inner hiddenness denotes an entire person and which God takes into

¹² DS, 3922-6.

¹³ DS, 3922.

¹⁴ DS, 3924.

¹⁵ DS, 3925.

¹⁶ Cf. Leo Scheffczyk, 'Herz Jesu, Herz-Jesu-Verehrung', 53.

¹⁷ Leo Scheffczyk, 'Herz Jesu, Herz-Jesu-Verehrung', 53.

¹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter CCC), Zagreb: Hrvatska biskupska konferencija, 368.

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consideration when judging, unlike humans, who judge other humans on the basis of exterior characteristics (see 1 Sam. 16.7). *Theologia cordis* is built upon this more integral conception of the heart. Unlike contemporary understandings that give the impression of a reduced symbolic nature of the heart, focussed on narrow-minded associations with superficial and often banal sentimentality, this conception is grounded in a systematic theological explanation of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Hence, theologically speaking, the secret of Jesus' heart is the secret of his integral person and his overall mission. Therefore, although the devotion to Jesus' Heart formally relies on some biblical statements that directly mention the heart of Jesus, such as John 7. 37 and 19. 31-37, where, at the cross, there is the radical giving (love) of Jesus for his Father and, at the same time, the giving (love) of the triune God to the people in Son,¹⁹ it is more important to read the mystery of Jesus' heart from the entirety of the Gospel. Only in that way can we discover the complete mystery of his person and actions that are inseparable from the unique love of his Father. Ignace de la Potterie, on the basis of the New Testament texts, tries to reach to the mystery of Jesus' person, his heart, and he comes to these three facts as the most relevant in the Gospel: 1. The announcement of the Kingdom of God; 2. life in total obedience to the Father; and 3. the consciousness of being God's son. Potterie's thought we could summarize as follows: Jesus announces the Kingdom of God with great authority and messianic awareness, according to which he identifies himself with that kingdom. The Jewish tradition's references to God's kingdom, Jesus now refers to himself. In doing so, his life is completely faithful to God's will. The Father shows him his will because of his love (see Jn 5. 20). His obedience is the obedience of the Son who, till his death on the cross, mediates God's love to human beings. He is in fact the realization of God's love for the world.²⁰

¹⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, by describing the passionate love of God, reflected throughout the history of his people as forgiveness, cites the prophet Hosea who says that God's 'heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused' (Hos. 11. 8-9). And the highlight of that passionate love he sees in the incarnation and Jesus' death on the cross. In this way Jesus' pierced heart reflects the highlight and fulfillment of Hosea's address on God's love. Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 10. Since the biblical prophecy of Jn 7.37-39 in connection to Jn 19.34 points to the gift of the Holy Spirit who, as living water, runs out through Jesus' stabbed side, his pierced heart becomes the path by which believers come to look at the mystery of 'God's endless triune love'.

²⁰ Ignace de la Potterie, 'Die biblische Grundlage der Theologie des Herzens Christi. Die Souveränität Jesu, sein Gehorsam dem Vater gegenüber, sein Sohnesbewusstsein' in Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger et al., *Entwicklung und Aktualität der Herz-Jesu-Verehrung*, Aschaffenburg: P. Pattloch, 1984., 45-79.)



Following this mystery of Jesus' person in our further interpretation, we will try to grasp what is the theological foundation and content upon which devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is based, since the foundational Mariological postulate is her connection to the mystery of the person of her son, which is the mystery of his heart.

The theological content of devotion to the Heart of Mary

Although the devotion to the Heart of Mary is based on the same theology of hearts as in the case of devotion to the Heart of her Son, nevertheless we should distinguish the two devotions from one another. When we honour the Heart of Jesus, it is about a human conjunction with the Heart of the eternal divine Logos/Word, while in Mary's case, it is only a human heart, although shaped by God's grace in a unique way.²¹

In understanding the heart as the most intimate source and ground of feeling and acting in the human personality, which is in line with the biblical understanding of the heart, and the crucial focal point at which the intimate encounter with God occurs, the early Church especially appreciated Mary, mother of Jesus, for whom the New Testament witnesses, concerning the events related to Jesus, that she 'treasured them up and pondered them in her heart' (Lk. 2.19, 51). The early Church's understanding of Mary's significance was based primarily on her faith, which was exactly linked to the heart as the deepest definition of her personality, in which the intimate contact with God and commitment to him occurred. Mary's deeply intimate faith, marked as the faith of the heart, was the precondition for her being the God-bearer, and, according to Augustine, she was more blessed for giving birth to a Saviour with her heart than with her body.²² In the faith and acceptance that came from Mary's heart, post-patristic theology observed the beginning of the saving of the world. Moreover, it was

²¹ A. Grillmeier, for example, observes the entire path of God towards humanity and the path of humanity towards God, so the entire history of salvation appears as a path from God's heart, through the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary, to the heart of every person, who again returns love by love to God. Grillmeier, 'Theologia cordis: Das Herz in Glaube und Frömmigkeit', *Geist und Leben* 21.5, 1948, 332-51.

²² 'Felicius gestavit corde quam carne'. Augustinus, *De s. Virginitate*, II, 3 (PL 40, 398).

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said that two altars were connected on Golgotha by the same oblation, the altar of Jesus' body and the altar of Mary's heart.²³

Mary's heart is completely connected to Jesus and his heart, and to his person and salvific action, with the Paschal Mystery as a particular focal point (as in the prophecy of Simon in Lk. 2.35). Primarily, the starting points of theological thought about the Heart of Mary were biblical texts, especially Luke 2.19 and 51 and 2.35, but also Matthew 11.29, which speaks about the meekness and humility of the heart of Jesus which Mary imitated. Besides these texts, devotion to the Heart of Mary was also anchored in other texts which reflect Mary's inclination towards her Son's heart, and which show love for God, Christ and humanity. Examples include her *Fiat* (Lk. 1.18), *Magnificat* (Lk. 1.46-55), and the short but substantial words of the dying Jesus directed to his mother from the cross (Jn 19.26).²⁴

Originally, the object of devotion to the Heart of Mary was not just Mary's corporeal heart. Still, with time and following devotion to the Heart of Jesus, it was obvious that this devotion could not only be focused on the corporeal heart or its symbolic meaning, but on the understanding of the heart, in line with biblical revelation, as a centre of the entire personality, sense and will, spirit and emotions, and as the bearer of the inner relationship with God. Therefore, it can be said that devotion to the Heart of Mary was more and more directed to what was central to Mary's life, her saintliness and perfect love for God and people, concretely manifested through her acceptance of her vocation of betrothal, childbearing, marriage and motherly care,²⁵ which were expressions of her complete personality.

The decree of the Congregation for Rites of 4 May 1944 clarified the content of devotion to the Heart of Mary: 'Under the image of the Heart the Church honours Mary's

²³ Arnold of Bonneval, *De septem verbis Domini in cruce* (PL 189). In the background of the language of two altars are Old Testament references, namely, the altar for sacrificing animals (Exod. 27.1) and the altar for burning incense (see Isa. 30.1). See Manfred Hauke, 'Die Weihe der Welt und die Gottesmutter Maria', *Sedes Sapientiae: Mariologisches Jahrbuch* 14.2, 2010, 117-168, here 126-127, 135.

²⁴ Beside these links, devotion to the Heart of Mary was derived from the patristic and medieval commentaries on the Song of Songs, which were interpreted in the sense of a connection of love between Christ and Mary (for example Song 4.,9; 5.2; 8.6). Cf. Johannes Stöhr, 'Herz Mariä, III. Dogmatik', in R. Bäumer & L. Scheffczyk (eds.), *Marienlexikon*, vol.3, 1991, St. Ottilien: EOS-Verlag, 167-169. From the webpage:

https://www.heiligenlexikon.de/Literatur/Herz_Mariae_im_Marienlexikon.html (accessed accessed 13.1.22).

²⁵ Cf. Franz Dander, *Das Herz der Jungfrau-Mutter: Zur Begründung der Verehrung des Unbefleckten Herzens*, Freiburg: Verlag d. Paulusdr, 1944, 26.



unique saintliness first of all, her devoted love for God and his Son Jesus Christ, as well as her motherly concern about the salvation of humanity redeemed by divine blood.²⁶ From this short text it is clear that the Church, in framing the theological content of this Marian devotion, gives first place to Mary's holiness, expressed through her love and devotion to God, and that dimension which we can call the virginal dimension of Mary's faith is regarded as a sign of her radical trust and surrender to God.²⁷ Only in the second place, which emerges from the first one, comes Mary's motherly concern about human salvation, in her role as a mediatrix and an advocate for all humanity. The statement that humanity has already been redeemed by divine blood implies that Mary's mediation stands within the unique mediation of Christ, to which it is connected.

The same dual emphasis can be seen in the encyclical *Haurietis Aquas* of 1956, where devotion to the Heart of Mary arises from the closest connection of the love and pain of the Mother with the love and suffering of Jesus Christ, by which we receive salvation.²⁸ Thus it is demonstrated that Mary's love and suffering should not be regarded only as a personal connection of Mary with Christ, but as an example of the intimate bond between the Church and Christ, which stands beside the example of Mary to encourage believers' imitation of the heart of Mary. Thus, we are approaching, not only in time but also in terms of content, the Mariology of the Second Vatican Council and its guidelines.

Conciliar Mariology and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

In the eighth chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), which speaks of Mary, it may seem at first sight that there is no direct mention of the Heart of Mary. Nevertheless, by reading in greater detail, one may notice some important theological statements. So, when first mentioning Mary, in *LG* 53, her profound and intimate

²⁶ Congregation for Rites (4.5.1944). These words were repeated and updated by pope John Paul II in his speech on 22 September 1986: 'Thus it can be said that our devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart expresses our reverence for her maternal compassion both for Jesus and for all of us her spiritual children, as she stood at the foot of the Cross.' (https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/september/documents/hf_jpii_spe_19860922_simposio-maria-gesu.html) (accessed 4.1.21).

²⁷ Here, under the term *virginal*, we think not only of the physical integrity but of the complete surrender to God and complete reliance on God of the integral human personality.

²⁸ DS, 3926.

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faith is highlighted. This faith which is the deepest centre of human personality is described in terms of Mary's heart; Mary accepted God's word and gained the dignity of becoming the Mother of God and the Mother of the Redeemer: 'The Virgin Mary, who at the message of the angel received the Word of God in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world, is acknowledged and honoured as being truly the Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer.'²⁹ Mary's profound faith and her pure heart will also be pointed out in *LG* 56, where it is said of Mary's consecration in the work of redemption and her inclusion in it: 'Thus Mary, a daughter of Adam, consenting to the divine Word, became the mother of Jesus, the one and only Mediator. Embracing God's salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin,³⁰ she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under Him and with Him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption.' The Council stresses the aspect of faith by referring to Mary's heart which denotes the exceptional dimension of that faith. This is shown in presenting the walk to the cross as a 'pilgrimage of faith' (*LG* 58) on which her motherly heart became more and more like the heart of her Son. Mary's faithful relationship to the divine and salvific role of her Son makes it clear that her heart was shaped according to the model of her Son's Heart and, in that shaping, Mary's exemplarity for all believers is revealed.³¹

In considering the human heart of Jesus, according to the words of the Council in *Gaudium et Spes* 22: 'He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin', we are able to say that the Council text implicitly concludes that Jesus' heart was also under the influence of Mary's heart, as an impact of his mother upon him. This natural shaping of Jesus' heart starts in the first moments of the mystery of the Incarnation, when the heart of Jesus is formed under the heart of Mary and when Mary in the intimacy and the exchange transposes everything that a mother usually gives to the child that is carried under her heart. Based on the same natural order, we can conclude that Mary as a mother testified with her life and consigned the attitude of her heart

²⁹ 'Virgo enim Maria, quae Angelo nuntiante Verbum Dei corde et corpore suscepit et Vitam mundo protulit, ut vera Mater Dei ac Redemptoris agnoscatur et honoratur.'

³⁰ 'Pleno corde et nullo retardata peccato'.

³¹ In the Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, believers pray for exactly that transformation of their own hearts (personalities) which accords to Jesus' Heart: 'Touch our hearts and make them like your own'.



to her son -her own faith, love and devotion to God - and in that faith raised Jesus, God Incarnate, and shaped his heart as well. In that context, we are able to regard Mary's heart as an example for all believers as brothers and sisters of her Son, and observe it as a fundamental part of her maternal role. It begins in the role of mother in the life of her firstborn, but later it is transferred according to the will of her Son from the cross (see Jn 19. 26-27) providentially for all of those who belong to her Son by faith. Mary was invited to transfer the testimony of faith and the devotion of her heart to all the members of his community, just as she had bestowed them on her child, and in that way form the hearts of his brothers and sisters just as she formed the heart of her child. In that exemplarity, providing a model for imitation, we find her most important salvific task for believers. The Council explicitly emphasizes the maternal role of Mary, and it becomes clear in terms of her care for her Son's brethren since it 'lasts until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation.' (*LG* 62).

It is also important to note that, when considering the natural relationship between Mother and Son, it is essential to return to the starting point of the relation between mother and son from which the Council commences: the greatness of Mary's heart lies in the fact it is shaped by the heart of Jesus. Therefore, we need to underline what is not a part of the natural relation between mother and child, and that is the fact that she not only shaped and taught the heart of her Son, but was the novice of meekness and humility in accordance with his heart (see Mt 11.28). And since the heart of Jesus was primarily focused on the Father, the relation of the hearts of mother and Son has always stood in collectively serving the intra-divine relation of the Son and his heavenly Father, that is, Jesus' obedience to the will of heavenly Father. At the wedding ceremony in Cana of Galilee, it was obvious that Jesus' Heart's first impulse did not consist in concrete desire or will, nor the suggestion of his mother (even if it was a good one and responded to human wishes), but the will of his Father. 'Woman, why do you involve me?' (Jn 2.4-5). The first impulse according to which Jesus shapes and permanently directs his heart is his Father's will. Even Mary herself had to learn, painfully and very early, that the true home of her Son was not her Nazarene house, but 'the

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house of his Father',³² and that his primary life space was not his mother's lap, but under the aegis of his heavenly Father.³³ In that way theocentricity, the primary life orientation towards God's will as a centre and aim of life, is shown as foundational and as the most important quality of both Jesus' and Mary's hearts, as their mutual communion.³⁴ This theocentricity of Mary's heart is, on the one hand, transferred to her Son by natural motherhood and her Jewish faith (her *Fiat* by which she accepts the will of God and which is a reflection of her entire life attitude to God and complete confidence that for God nothing is impossible). 'We can say that the mystery of Incarnation was shaped under the heart of Virgin of Nazareth in the moment she said her "fiat".'³⁵ On the other hand, her Son's focus on the Father, even at those times when that seems unusual, is something she learns from and accepts, shaping her heart towards her Son's which has already been shaped by his Father's will. The Son's *Fiat*, by which he accepts the Incarnation and complete will of the Father directed to saving the world, and later, in Jesus' earthly life, in the obedience till death, Mary also accepts, in that way following the 'Heart of Jesus, obedient to death'.³⁶ Love, trust and obedience to the will of Father are thus sources of the deepest mutual connection of the hearts of mother and Son.³⁷ By not sufficiently considering this theocentricity, the believer's devotion to the Hearts of Mary and Jesus runs the risk of turning into a mere projection of the affectivity of the human

³² Lk 2.48-50: 'When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him: 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.' 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he was saying to them.'

³³ Jn 1.1: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'; Jn 1.18: 'No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.'

³⁴ This kind of communion is also visible in the covenant between God and his people. Pope St. John Paul II mentioned this connection as a covenant of two hearts several times. See his speech to participants of the Study Week of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in Fatima, 26 September 1986 (http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1986/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19860922_simposio-maria-gesu.html) (accessed 19.2.21), as well as his Angelus message of 15 September 1985 (http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1985/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19850915.html) (accessed 19.2.21).

³⁵ Pope St. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* 22.

³⁶ Invocation from the Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

³⁷ It is interesting to note here that the Croatian Blessed, Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, while interpreting the Litanies of Heart of Jesus mentioned this exact natural-supernatural correlation between the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of his mother. From the closest relation between the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of his Virgin Mother, Jesus received, according to the cardinal's words, sensibility for the poor and sinners, sensibility for human physical misery, and the rush to cure them with miraculous healings. The heart of the Virgin-Mother was in a moral and transcendental way a reflection of the Heart of the Son of God, His living image. Juraj Batelja, 'Analiza propovijedi blaženoga Alojzija Stepinca o Presvetom Srcu Isusovu', *Obnovljeni život* 63.3, 2008, 301-19, here 317-8.



heart, without the real believer's strength that is reflected in listening to the Word of God and living by it so that it shapes one's heart.³⁸

The Fathers of the Council were obviously very eager to propagate Mary's personality as a believer as a model for the personality of every member of the Church, to ensure that her Son 'is rightly known, loved and glorified and that all His commands are observed' (*LG* 66). It is not surprising, therefore, that immediately after emphasizing the motherhood of Mary in relation to her Son, they point out the 'intimate union of the Blessed Virgin with the Church', and this union consists not only in Mary's divine motherhood, but also in Mary as a type of the Church 'in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ' (*LG* 63). Seeing Mary as a type of the Church should be expressed by every believer in their devotion to the Heart of Mary (to her love and fidelity as a centre of her personality), as imitation of virginal integral faith, hope and love, and as the motherly bearing of God's children into a new and immortal life (*LG* 64). We can rightfully claim that the image of the 'Immaculate Heart' is the most direct way of figuring the virginal and motherly Church. In *LG* 65, we read that the Church in the Blessed Virgin 'has already reached that perfection whereby she is without spot or wrinkle' (Eph. 5. 27). The real symbol of the Church is thus the Heart of Mary, both as a corporeal heart and as an expression of the spiritual love of the Church towards God and humanity, the love that is at the same time virginal and motherly.

Hence the entirety of the Marian mystery could be seen under the symbol of the heart and its significance for the Church. In that context believers' devotion to the Heart of Mary should be manifest in a permanent imitation of the complete mystery of the heart of Mary, which is all in the service of her Son's mystery and his service to the salvific intention of his Father. From the above-mentioned texts of the Council, we are able to conclude that the Council, when treating Marian devotion whose expression is also devotion to the Heart of Mary, is promoting imitation of her heart in terms of the love and complete devotion to God that comes from trust in His word. It is significant to mention here an earlier lecture of Karl Rahner, in which he interprets dedication to the Heart of Mary not just as the directing of a person's heart to Mary and her heart (which can be understood at the level of the emotions), but as directing humanity to God himself (which we can call the level of true faith). At the

³⁸ See Lk 11.28 where Jesus is taking to the woman who calls his mother blessed: 'He replied, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.'

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same time, he understands the Heart of Mary as a term which signifies that her love for God is made eternal, that it is a symbol of the inner integrity of that love. By personal dedication to her heart, we connect ourselves with her, according to Rahner.³⁹ She, more than any other creature, was the bearer of inner love for God, and, by our dedication to this, we too become involved in that eternal dynamic of love in her heart. Not long after the Council, the concept of Mary setting an example was also emphasized by Pope Paul VI in his apostolic letter *Signum Magnum* of 13 May 1967, published on the fiftieth anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Fatima, when the Heart of Mary was emphasized for believers as an example of perfect love for God and people. The sign of the perfect childlike love of Christians for their heavenly Mother was, according to the pope's words, supposed to be the imitation of her motherly example in the everyday life of faith, and every believer should, like her, give his or her life to be directed according to God's will more and more, day by day.⁴⁰

If we understand Mary's love for God as virginal (in the sense of radical commitment), and her love for people as motherly (because she gives birth to the Saviour of the world), we can say that the Council offers both the virginal and motherly dimensions of Mary's heart as exemplars. On many occasions, Pope John Paul II referred back to Conciliar Mariology concerning these two dimensions of her heart. First of all, he did so in the encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, early in his papacy (1979). From the moment when the mystery of Redemption was shaped in the heart of the Virgin of Nazareth, her heart which, according to the pope's words, is 'virginal and at the same time motherly' and is under 'the special influence of the Holy Spirit, always pursues the work of her Son and goes to meet all of those for whom Christ cares and whom he permanently embraces by his everlasting love'. The pope especially emphasizes the motherly dimension of that love, as a maternal intimacy with humanity, and it is interesting that this motherly dimension is put forward for the heart of the Church to follow and so imitate the loving Mother. 'The Church, which looks to her with altogether special love and hope, wishes to make this mystery her own in an ever deeper manner. For in this the Church also recognizes the way for her daily life, which is in each

³⁹ Karl Rahner, 'Über die religiöse Weihe', *Geist und Leben* 21, 1948, 407-18, here 418.

⁴⁰ *Signum Magnum* 24/25. Cf. Karl Wittkemper, *Marienverehrung und Herz-Jesu-Frömmigkeit*, in Heinrich Petri (ed.), *Christsein und Marianische Spiritualität. Mariologische Studien VI*, Regensburg: Pustet Verlag, 1984, 191.



person.⁴¹ Later the same pope, in the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* (1980), spoke about the sacrifice of Mary's heart by which she 'made possible her own participation in the revelation of God's mercy' that she had experienced. She is, in the pope's words, the participant 'in the revelation of divine mercy, and the entirety of God's faithfulness to his love' for people. By participating in that messianic mission of her Son, Mary is 'in a special way assigned to bring people that love which he came to reveal'. In disclosure of that merciful love, according to the pope's words, her motherly heart had a special part. Hence this revelation is especially fruitful because it is 'based upon the unique fact of her maternal heart, on her particular sensitivity, on her particular fitness to reach all those who most easily accept the merciful love of a mother'.⁴²

Conclusion

In the practiced devotion to the Heart of Mary, especially in popular piety, various difficulties are in evidence which are also found in devotion to the Heart of Jesus. Namely, the theological reduction of the symbolic power of the heart that we see reduced only at the level of virtue and spirituality, besides propensity to sentimentality and personal affection. This kind of praxis is evidently in a significant disjuncture with the Mariological accents of the Council, and there is an obvious discrepancy between this kind of piety and life of the Church, as well as those recognizable elements in those believers who represent the strength for moving this world towards the light of the Gospel and its values. Although many Marian shrines are much frequented, and the devotions, among which is devotion to the Heart of Mary, are quite widespread, it is noticeable that, in time of need and crisis, believers' devotion is more interested in mediatory, advocatory, and compassionate aspects of Mary's heart

⁴¹ *Redemptor Hominis* 22. Commenting on these words of the pope, the well-known Croatian Bible scholar B. Duda says: 'The pope wants us – like Mary, with her heart and soul – to develop that kind of care and love that the Church and every believer for the sake of their loyalty to Christ, the Saviour of the world, owes to humankind and every person.' Cf. Bonaventura Duda, 'Novi naglasci u Redemptoris mater' in Adalbert Rebić and Jakov Mamić (eds.), *Blažena Djelica Marija u kršćanskoj duhovnosti: Zbornik radova s Radnog sastanka Hrvatskog mariološkog instituta i Instituta za kršćansku duhovnost Katoličkog bogoslovnog fakulteta u Zagrebu održanog 15.-20. veljače 1988. u Zagrebu*, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost-Hrvatski mariološki institut-Institut za kršćansku duhovnost KBF-a Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1991, 8-16, here 9.

⁴² *Dives in Misericordia* 9.

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(Mary – the mother who loves, hence helps in trouble, helps in special needs, mediates physical or spiritual healing, rescues from poverty, saves life),⁴³ while more complex dimensions of believers' imitation of Mary's heart as an example of the integral love and devotion of the human heart to God and human being as a radical request of the Gospel are lacking. Believers' prayers for grace and advocacy need a theological foundation, according to which they can understand devotion to the Heart of Mary in connection with approaching Jesus (his Heart) in a manner that is humanly and faithfully fruitful and contemporary with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. In that sense, Mary's motherly heart's most influential advocacy consists in redirecting people to her Son, who helps them overcome the threat of evil that burdens the modern world and blocks the way into the future.⁴⁴ All this is possible if the devotion is transformed into an imitation of that gentleness and flexibility with which Mary's heart was directed by the will of the heavenly Father and the Heart of his Son. The substantial criticism of superficial admiration is the same as that which Christ makes of the Pharisees and his apostles. It can be understood as criticism of Christianity itself, as well as criticism of postmodern times, in which religion is often hardness of the heart, sclerokardia (see Mt 19.7: Mk 10.5; 16.14) or slowness of the heart (see Lk 24, 25), that is, hardness and coldness that prevent the understanding of the true God's plan of love for that which is human.

This criticism concerning the incompatibility of the Council's Mariology with a certain kind of devotion to Mary's Heart should not bring into question the necessary and needed integration of the subjective and emotional elements in this, and in every other devotion. Moreover, the devotion that accents the heart actually accents the authenticity of God's Incarnation and the reality of his suffering for our salvation. In getting closer to that mystery of God's love, man is, according to Joseph Ratzinger, climbing the ladders of body and senses to find a way in which faith calls him.⁴⁵ Hence the heart of the believer must be a human

⁴³ For more about popular Marian piety and devotions as a significant characteristic of the Catholic Church, see the scientific analysis of the Croatian sociologist of religion, Željko Mardešić, *Rascjep u svetome*, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2007, especially 730-794.

⁴⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Speech to participants of the Study Week of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in Fatima, 26 September 1986.

⁴⁵ Joseph Ratzinger accentuates the importance of the heart and senses in human relations with God because these are concerned with the human response of love to the divine love that was given us long before. In the Church after the Council, Ratzinger noticed that there has been a certain contempt for the emotional in devotion, and, according to him, that contempt for feeling has led to its pathologization instead of a much



heart, the heart of flesh (see Ezek. 36.26). If we return to the definition of the heart as the centre of the personality and of the encounter between God and the human person, the reaction of the believer's heart to God's encouragement should not be cold or impassive. This refers not only to devotion to the Heart of Mary, but also to Mariology and to any theology at all, since theology should not omit the reaction of the heart as a response of the integral human personality. For, if we want to reflect theologically on devotion to the Heart of Mary, we must take into account the voice that comes out from the human heart amid the awakening of emotion, being careful, of course, to distinguish the authentic voice of the heart that responds to the initiative of the spiritual realm from those temporal tones that are often a product of our restless subjective emotionality.

In that sense, a devotion to the Heart of Mary that is developed on the basis of the relation Heart of Mary / Heart of Church, should be able to correct the widespread misconception of the Church as only an institutional reality that is not capable of love or of being loved easily. On the contrary, if we regard the Church in the light of the Council as incarnate in the person of Mary, and Mary as the virginal-motherly heart, centre of the living Church, then devotion to the Heart of Mary could and should lead to a conception of the Church as a living body, sensitive to and interceding for the needs of all in a motherly way. From the perspective of the Heart of Mary as the centre and heart of the Church, the Church would more easily succeed in avoiding the trap of spiritual rationalism and lifeless ideology that lead nowhere and contradict the Gospel of Incarnation. The Council insists on the relevance of Marian devotion to the Church.

Besides needed human affection, the Council demands believers' affectivity and consistency in living Marian devotion. In conclusion, we can agree with words of Cardinal Schönborn: 'Not subjective sentimentality, but touching and affection of a Lady that is the mother of Jesus, are objective foundations for wakening the *affectus cordis* that seeks its expression.'⁴⁶ This kind of theology of the heart emerges from our human intimacy and

needed integration into the wholeness of human existence and relationship with God. J. Ratzinger, *Schauen auf den Durchbohrten*, 46, 51.

⁴⁶ Christoph von Schönborn, *Maria: Herz der Theologie - Theologie des Herzens*, in Walter Baier (ed.), *Weisheit Gottes. Weisheit der Welt: Festschrift für J. Kard. Ratzinger zum 60. Geburtstag*, vol. 1, St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1987, 575-589, cited in Johannes Stör, *Sapientia cordis. Theologische Überlegungen zur Weiheingabe*, 97-98, available at <http://www.teol.de/sapientia-cordis.PDF> (accessed 13.1.22).

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closeness to Mary's heart, and that kind of closeness is directing our cognition that we ought to love and believe in the way that Mary loved and believed. 'Create in me a pure heart, O God' (Ps. 51.12). Her pure heart shows us the power and unsuspected potential of every human heart that opens up and surrenders to God and his Son Jesus Christ as a return gift for his love. Her heart offers a prospect of the heart of the whole Church in every member. The Council insists on it when placing Mary and her heart's inner harmony as an example to the Church, protecting Marian devotion from fruitless and temporal expressions of sensibility and vain gullibility, and directing it towards acknowledging the sublimity of God's Mother, so encouraging us in the child's love for the Mother and in the imitation of her virtues (see *LG* 67).