

Marzena Górecka

**“WITHOUT A HEART IT IS IMPOSSIBLE.”
THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF DEVOTION TO THE HEART OF JESUS
IN THE LIGHT OF POST-CONCILIAR
CHURCH TEACHING**

INTRODUCTION

“Without a heart it is impossible.”¹ At the time of the Second Vatican Council, which lasted from 11 October 1962 to 8 December 1965, the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (SHJ), which had its origins in the early Middle Ages [Drozdowicz 2017; Romanowski 2012, 2-4] and its roots in the Bible itself and the original tradition of the Church [Bainvel 1934, 194-98; Drażek and Grzebień 1983, 11-20], found itself in a certain crisis [Królikowski 2014, 1]. The issue did not receive much attention during the Council and, as a result, it was not included in the Council documents, which automatically implied a lowering of the status of this truth of faith in post-conciliar theology. Although the Council participants unanimously acknowledged that there was a place for various traditional devotions in church worship, none were explicitly mentioned or singled out. A key role in the revival of devotion to the Sacred Heart of the Divine Redeemer and the restoration of its rightful place in the Church was played by three

PROF. DR. HABIL. MARZENA GÓRCKA – The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin; correspondence address: Al. Raławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland; e-mail: mgorecka@kul.pl; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7503-2814>

¹ This is the title of an article by Henryk Zieliński [Zieliński 2021].

post-conciliar popes: Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.² Each of them emphasised other important aspects complementing the teaching of their predecessors, in particular those of Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII, whose personal contribution to the promotion of the devotion to the SHJ, especially in encyclicals entirely devoted to this subject,³ cannot be overestimated.

1. PAUL VI – THE HEART OF JESUS AS INSPIRATION, STRENGTH AND INSTRUMENT OF THE CONCILIAR RENEWAL OF SPIRIT AND MORALS

Paul VI, who ascended to the Petrine See in the second year of the Council, namely on 21 June 1963, was not only aware of the marginalisation and undervaluation of the devotion to the SHJ, but was also deeply moved by it. He was convinced that this devotion had to occupy a place of priority, and for this reason, from the very beginning of his pontificate, he pointed out the need to develop and spread it. The clearest expression of this are two apostolic letters published in the last year of Vatican II: *Investigabiles divitias Christi* (6 February 1965) and *Diserti interpretes* (25 May 1965).

The former letter, commemorating the bicentenary of the establishment of a liturgical feast in honour of the SHJ by Clement XIII [Poleszak 2006, 16-17], was intended to dispel the doubts of some conciliar theologians as to the possibility of reconciling the veneration of the Divine Heart with liturgical renewal. In it, the pope first expressed his regret that this cult, which was an eminent and tried form of devotion, confirmed by Jesus himself in the visions of the humble nun of the congregation of the Visitation Sisters, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), which took place in Paray-le-Monial between 1673 and 1675, “has somewhat weakened in

² The article did not include John Paul I due to his very short pontificate of just over a month.

³ These are the following encyclicals: *Annum sacrum. On the Consecration of the Human Race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus* by Leo XIII (20 June 1899); *Miserentissimus Redemptor. On Reparation to the Sacred Heart* by Pius XI (8 June 1928) and *Haurietis aquas. On the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus* by Pius XII (15 June 1956).

many.”⁴ He went on to urge the entire community of the faithful to give the Divine Heart the veneration due to it on this special day, and to do so every day by adapting their entire – individual and social – lives to the demands of fraternal love. Recognising adoration of the Heart of God as “the most fitting way to honour Christ”⁵ in accordance with the Council’s recommendations, Paul VI made this devotion the inspiration, strength and effective instrument of the conciliar renewal.

Paul VI’s most significant achievement in the cited letter is the close association of the cult of the SHJ with “the greatest gift of this Heart”⁶ – the Eucharist, which the Council unequivocally placed at the centre of Church life. “For in the Eucharistic sacrifice”, the Pontifex writes, “he gives himself as a burnt offering to the Father and at the same time gives himself to us as the same Saviour whose Heart, opened by the soldier’s spear, has poured out on the whole human race a stream of most precious blood and water, ‘because he always lives to intercede for us’ (Heb 7:7-25).”⁷ In view of this, participation in the Eucharist, which is “the lofty summit and centre of all the sacraments, where we can taste spiritual sweetness at its very source and where we venerate the memory of that most wonderful love which Christ showed to us in his passion,”⁸ is, in the opinion of St. Peter’s Successor, the most perfect form of veneration of the SHJ. In this way, Paul VI recalled an essential feature of this devotion and linked it explicitly to the conciliar spirit, thus giving it new impetus to be appropriately updated in the life of the Church [Królikowski 2014, 2].

Paul VI linked the cult of the SHJ even more closely with the spirit of the conciliar renewal in a letter addressed to six superiors general of religious congregations – Heinrich Systemanns SSCC, Leonardo Carrieri MSSCC, Josef van Kerckhoven MSC, Josef de Palma SCI, Armand Le Bourgeois CIM and Pedro Arrupe SJ – basing their mission and spirituality on veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Here, the pope explicitly expressed his conviction that love “towards the Heart of the Divine

⁴ Paul VI, *List apostolski Investigabiles divitias Christi o kulcie Najświętszego Serca Jezusowego*, in: *Serce Jezusa w dokumentach Kościoła. Dokumenty Magisterium Kościoła o Najświętszym Sercu Pana Jezusa od Klemensa XIII do Benedykta XVI*, ed. L. Poleszak, Wydawnictwo Księży Sercanów, Kraków 2006, p. 185.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

⁷ Ibid., p. 184-85.

⁸ Ibid., p. 185.

Redeemer and the eternal mysteries of His love”⁹ is an inspiration, a strength and an effective help in the realisation of the Council’s hoped-for renewal of spirit and morals, as well as in the revitalisation of ecclesiastical institutions and the increase of their effectiveness: “The Council, desiring [...] a comprehensive renewal of Christian life, both public and private, sought to illuminate adequately the wonderful mystery of the Holy Church. This mystery, however, cannot be properly understood without reference to the eternal love of the Incarnate Son, of which the wounded Heart of the Saviour and the “blood and water” flowing out of it are the outstanding symbol. [...] Indeed, from the Saviour’s pierced Heart the Church was born and from there she draws her nourishment, for Christ ‘gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her body by the washing with water through the word’ (Eph 5:25-26).”¹⁰

Later in the letter, the Holy Father pointed out that devotion to the Sacred Heart is still valid and necessary: “For in the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the origin and source of the sacred liturgy, since it is ‘the temple of God’ (Heb 7:25).”¹¹

These two documents alone make it clear that Paul VI saw in the cult of the SHJ a particular and manifold spiritual potential. By relying on His veneration, in the pope’s conviction, the work of renewal advocated by the conciliar writings can be genuinely realised. A factor that makes this possible is correlating this great and difficult work with the mystery of Christ’s love. There is a certain novelty in the statements quoted above in relation to the earlier pre-Vatican II teaching of the Church on the SHJ. Janusz Królikowski summarises it as follows: “It is given a clearer and more obliging ecclesial dimension – the Heart of Jesus allows both a deeper understanding of the mystery of the Church as a mystery of Divine love, and the orientation of its mission in such a way that, drawing strength and nourishment from Divine love, the Church is to become an ever-clearer sign and instrument of that love in the modern world. [...] The wounded Heart of the Divine Redeemer was thus incorporated into the spirit of the conciliar renewal as the key to an authentic understanding of the Church

⁹ Paul VI, *List apostolski Diserti interpretes o kulcie Najświętszego Serca Jezusowego*, in: *Serce Jezusa w dokumentach Kościoła...*, p. 186.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

and to the fulfilment of its salvific mission: the Heart of Jesus is simply to be seen and lived as the Heart of the Church” [Królikowski 2014, 2].

Ten years later, Paul VI, referring to the social theme sustained for two centuries in the cult of the SHJ, which should become the school of a more humane world, formulated a concrete postulate of the Church’s activity for a world built on the civilisation of love. As indispensable components of such a world, the sovereign of the Vatican State pointed to “justice, truth, freedom and solidarity, i.e. the values which, to the highest degree, appear in the mystery of the Incarnate Word and radiate to the whole world through His Sacred Heart” [ibid.]. With this, Paul VI confirmed the previously deepened multi-faceted theological search for the social meaning of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus, and at the same time gave it a direction closely related to the spirit of Vatican II.

2. JOHN PAUL II – THE HEART OF JESUS AS A REVELATION OF GOD’S MERCIFUL LOVE

To the Polish pope, the mystery of the Heart of Christ appealed – as he himself confessed during a general audience on 20 June 1979 – from “his youthful age”¹² [cf. Drażek 1998, 179]. This fact is corroborated by numerous biographical data, first and foremost by the act of personal devotion to the SHJ, by his own handwriting and folded into a square found after his death, which reads as follows: “I, Karol Wojtyła, dedicate and devote to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ my person and my life, my actions, my concerns and sufferings, not wishing henceforth to use any part of my being but to venerate, love and glorify that Heart. I have an unbreakable will to belong completely to Him and to do everything out of love for Him, renouncing with all my heart everything that could be displeasing to Him. I therefore choose Thee, Sacred Heart, as the sole object of my love, as the Protector of my life, as the warranty of my salvation, as the remedy for my infirmities and instability, as the remedy for all the errors of my life and as the safe refuge at the hour of my death. Be Thou therefore, Heart full of goodness, my forgiveness towards God the

¹² John Paul II, *Nauczmy się odczytywać tajemnicę Serca Chrystusowego. Audienca generalna* (20.06.1979), in: *Serce Jezusa w dokumentach Kościoła...*, p. 197.

Father and turn away from me the arrows of His righteous wrath. O Heart full of love, in Thee I place all my trust, for I fear everything from my weakness and anger, while I expect everything from Thy goodness. Destroy, therefore, everything in me that may displease or oppose Thee. May Thy divine love penetrate so deeply into my heart, that I may never forget Thee, nor be separated from Thee. I implore Thee, through Thy infinite goodness, may my name be written in Thee, for I desire that all my happiness and my highest glory may be to live and die as Thy faithful servant. Amen. All for Thee, Sweetest Heart of Jesus.”¹³

The Heart of Jesus, however, was not only the programme of St. John Paul II’s personal life and the secret of the spiritual strength that flowed from it. The pope proclaimed the theology of the Divine Heart tirelessly throughout his pontificate – which lasted 27 years and was thus the third longest – to all the faithful entrusted to his ministry. It would not be an exaggeration to say that no pope has spoken as much about the cult of the Heart of Jesus as the pope from Poland.

The richness of John Paul II’s teaching on this issue surpasses in scope all previous statements of the Church’s Magisterium [Poleszak 2006, 21]. The most comprehensive Polish compendium of John Paul II’s doctrinal statements on the SHJ to date, compiled by Leszek Poleszak, accounts for 123 of the most important – shorter and longer, fully or fragmentarily published – statements, including speeches and homilies delivered in Rome and during his numerous apostolic journeys, encyclicals (*Redemptor hominis*, *Dives in misericordia*), apostolic exhortations (*Familiaris consortio*, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, *Pastores dabo vobis*, *Vita consecrata*, *Redemptionis donum*), letters to priests and to the superiors of religious congregations on the spirituality of *Cordis Jesu*, as well as 33 meditations before the Angelus dedicated to individual invocations of the Litany of the SHJ [ibid., 195-524].

From the multitude and multifaceted statements, only the most significant lines of the Polish pope’s teaching on the SHJ can be indicated within the framework of this article. As a starting point, it should be taken as a general statement that in his theological reflections on the Divine Heart, John Paul II upheld and developed the previous teaching of the Church,

¹³ See <http://nspj.jezuici.pl/akt-osobistego-poswiecenia-sie-bl-jana-pawla-ii/> [accessed: 25.02.2024].

while at the same time deepening the statements of his predecessors by referring to psychology, anthropology and the latest exegesis, which partly generated other important emphases [Drażek 1998, 178].

For John Paul II, the inspiration and key text for theological reflection on the devotion to the SHJ is the Gospel pericope about the soldier piercing the side of Christ with a spear, from which blood and water flowed (Jn 19:34). The Pope explained this scene in a virtuoso manner for the first time during the aforementioned general audience on 20 June 1979. Recalling the words from John 19:31-34, he said: “Not a word about the heart. The evangelist speaks only of the piercing of the side with a spear, from which blood and water flowed. The language of the description is as if medical, anatomical. The soldier’s spear undoubtedly pierced the heart to see if the Condemned One had already died. This heart – this human heart – had stopped working. Jesus had ceased to live. At the same time, however, this anatomical opening of the Heart of Christ after death – despite all the historical ‘coarseness’ of the text – stimulates us to consider it also on a figurative level. The heart is not only an organ that determines the biological vitality of the human being. The heart is a symbol. It speaks of the whole inner man. It speaks of the spiritual interior of man. And tradition immediately read this meaning of St. John’s description. [...] ‘They will look on the one they have pierced’ (Jn 19:37; Za 12:10). This is in fact how the Church looks; this is how humanity looks. And here, in the piercing of the soldier’s spear, all generations of Christians have learned and are learning to read the mystery of the Heart of the Crucified Man, who was and is the Son of God.”¹⁴

Already this laconic, yet eloquent commentary on the climactic event at Calvary reveals the three most significant, intertwined and complementary features of the Holy Father’s teaching on the SHJ: Christocentric-salvific, ecclesiological and missionary [Nowicki 2011, 400-403]. The first resounds most fully in the 1979 encyclical *Redemptor hominis* [*The Redeemer of Man*], which constitutes the programme for the entire pontificate of John Paul II. In the ninth point of the encyclical we read: “The redemption of the world – this tremendous mystery of love in which creation is renewed - is, at its deepest root, the fullness of justice in a human Heart – the Heart of the Firstborn Son – in order that it may become justice in

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Nauczmy się odczytywać...*, p. 198.

the hearts of many human beings, predestined from eternity in the First-born Son to be children of God and called to grace, called to love.”¹⁵

In the last sentence of this paragraph, the pope states clearly and emphatically that the revelation of love, which is also called mercy, in human history “has taken a form a name: that of Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ In a straight line, the event at Calvary leads from the mystery of Christ to the mystery of the Church. Drażek summarises it as follows: “From the Saviour’s Heart pierced on the Cross, from which flowed ‘blood and water’ – symbols of the sacraments – the Church takes its origin. [...] The Church was born from the pierced Heart of Christ – the second Adam – when He ‘bowed His head’ (Jn 19:30) and died” [Drażek 1998, 180].

At the hour of Christ’s death, His heart began to beat in His Church, His heart became the heart of the Church. Thus, the Church is not only born of the Heart of Christ, but also takes its life from Him. Therefore, the Christian who wishes to understand the mission of the Church and his own mission in the Church must, in the opinion of John Paul II, constantly gaze at the pierced Heart of Christ and learn to read this Mystery of the Heart of the Crucified Man who was and is the Son of God. The love of God, which Christ reveals and communicates to the world in the mystery of his Heart, is the key to understanding Christianity and “the inspiration for human hearts,”¹⁷ and thus a call addressed to man to respond to God’s love with his whole life.

The mature fruit of authentic devotion to the SHJ is thus an ever more perfect knowledge of the loving personal God and an associated witness to his merciful love in a modern world which leaves so little room for evangelical values and, under the banner of progress and rationalism, seeks to relegate faith to the sphere of privacy. In an address delivered on 5 October 1986 in Paray-le-Monial, the Polish pope made a direct appeal to authentically imitate the holiness of the Heart of Jesus, to “everywhere, in society, in our villages, in the neighbourhoods of our cities, in factories and offices, in encounters between peoples and races, the ‘heart of stone’, the hardened heart [...] be transformed into a ‘heart of flesh’, open to the

¹⁵ Idem, *Encyklika Redemptor hominis o odkupieniu i godności rodzaju ludzkiego*, <https://adonai.pl/jp2/pliki/rh.pdf> [accessed: 10.03.2024].

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Serce Boże jest natchnieniem ludzkich serc. Anioł Pański* (24.06.1979), in: *Serce Jezusa w dokumentach Kościoła...*, p. 203.

brothers, open to God’.”¹⁸ For the Polish pope, a profound veneration of the Heart of Jesus is the only antidote to social healing and thus the foundation for building a civilisation of love in today’s world ravaged by hatred, injustice and violence – the culture of death.¹⁹

John Paul II’s great merit is to link the cult of the SHJ with the cult of Divine Mercy, to show Christ’s Heart as the revelation, source and mediator of God the Father’s mercy. John Paul II not only perceived but also emphasised the mutual relationship, indeed the mutual complementarity of these two cults, claiming that it is not a matter of two separate forms of worship, but in fact of one cult in whose forms of expression the theological accents are just differently distributed. In his opinion, the concurrence of the two forms of worship is clearly indicated by their history in the universal Church, for in the devotion to the SHJ one can easily and extensively find numerous contents which today are just somewhat more clearly stressed in the devotion to the Divine Mercy. In the teaching of John Paul II, one can find a whole series of statements reflecting the mutual penetration and complementarity of these two mysteries [Królikowski 2014, 170-1]. Their synthetic connection was emphatically stressed by the Pope during the canonisation of Sr. Faustina Kowalska at the Vatican in 2000, saying: “Through the heart of Crucified Christ, God’s mercy reaches people [...] Christ pours out this mercy upon all humanity through the sending of the Spirit, who in the Trinity is the Person-Love. And is not mercy the ‘second name’ of love (cf. *Dives in misericordia*, 7), capturing its deepest and most moving aspect [...]”²⁰ It is only in a mutual connection, a complementary synthesis, an intrinsic interchangeability that guarantees its ecclesial authenticity that these two forms of worship can contribute to the renewal of Christian love and to the awakening of hope in today’s world.

¹⁸ Idem, *Dam wam serce nowe i ducha nowego tchnę. Homilia wygłoszona podczas Mszy św. Przed bazyliką w Paray-le-Monial we Francji*, in: *Serce Jezusa w dokumentach Kościoła...*, p. 338.

¹⁹ Idem, *Bóg objawia swą miłość w Sercu Chrystusa. Orędzie Jana Pawła II na stulecie poświęcenia ludzkości NSPJ (11.06.1999)*, in: *Serce Jezusa w dokumentach Kościoła...*, p. 484-85.

²⁰ Idem, *Dar Boży dla naszych czasów. Homilia podczas uroczystości kanonizacji Faustyny Kowalskiej*, https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_pawel_ii/homilie/kanonizacja_30042000 [accessed: 23.03.2024].

3. BENEDICT XVI – THE OPENING OF GOD’S HEART IN THREE PARTS

Benedict XVI can undoubtedly be called the theologian of the Heart of God. He had already dealt with the theological depth of the mystery of the Divine Heart before he was elected pope. The culmination of his scholarly inquiries is an article entitled “The Mystery of Easter as the deepest content and basis of the devotion to the Sacred Heart”, written and published on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of Pius XII’s encyclical *Haurietis aquas* [Ratzinger 1994, 47-68]. This spiritual journey began with a simple prayer that Ratzinger, as a seven-year-old boy, expressed in a letter written before Christmas to the Infant Jesus, asking in it three things: “Dear Infant Jesus, you are about to come down to earth. You want to bring joy to children. You will also bring me joy. I would like to get a Volks-Schott (Latin-German folk missal), a green chasuble and a Heart of Jesus. I always want to be good. My warmest greetings to you, Joseph Ratzinger” [Ratzinger 2022].

From the entire scholarly and pastoral legacy of the Bavarian pope, alongside the key thesis of the interrelation and complementarity of faith and reason, a chord resounds emphatically that the essence of Christianity is the heart of God [Pagacz 2020, 69]. Benedict XVI made this assertion the key thought and title of his pivotal encyclical *Deus caritas est*, promulgated on 25 December 2005, which is the culmination of his entire profound dogmatic theology. In it, the Holy Father virtuosically demonstrates that love is the most important of the concepts forming the image of God and defining the core of the Christian faith, and that the fullest expression of God’s love for man created in his image and likeness is precisely his Heart.²¹ Throughout the history of salvation, the loving Heart of God has been revealed in the pope-theologian’s view in three guises – as the open Heart of God, the pierced Heart of the Son of God and the beating of the Heart of God in the hearts of Christians.

²¹ Benedict XVI, *Serce Odkupiciela. Rozważanie przed modlitwą Anioł Pański* (05.06.2005), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Polish ed.) 26 (2005), no. 7-8, p. 31, no. 25.

3.1. The open Heart of God

Benedict XVI sees the whole history of God with human beings as one great poem of love for man born in God’s heart. In his view, this love is already documented in the books of the Old Testament, in particular the book of the prophet Hosea.²² In Chapter 11, the inspired author describes the greatness of the love with which God turned to Israel at the dawn of history: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. [...] taking them by the arms [...] it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them (Hos 11: 1-4).”

However, the chosen people responded to God’s love with indifference and even ingratitude and the breach of the Covenant, so that God Himself had to admit: “But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. [...] My people are determined to turn from me. Even though they call me God Most High, I will by no means exalt them” (Hos 11:2.7). In this situation it would seem, writes the pope, that “God should have judged his people and renounced them”²³ [Ratzinger 1994, 60]. But this is not the case: God was not discouraged by Israel’s unfaithfulness, nor did he abandon them, but showed feelings of selfless love, infinitely surpassing the aspect of gratuitousness, explaining it as follows: “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? [...] My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man — the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities’ (Hos 11: 8-9)” (ibid., no. 10).

Benedict XVI is convinced that Hosea reveals the highest dimension of God’s love for man – *agápē*, a universal love, given completely selflessly and unconditionally, without any prior merit and existing regardless of the situation. The forgiving love of Yahweh for his people who, by breaking the Covenant, had committed adultery, the Holy Father does not hesi-

²² Special attention was paid to this Old Testament passage earlier by Pius XII in *Haurietis Aquas*, the content of which was repeatedly invoked in Benedict XVI’s teaching [cf. Pagacz 2020, 70].

²³ Benedict XVI, *Encyklika Deus Caritas est o miłości chrześcijańskiej*, in: *Serce Jezusa w dokumentach Kościoła...*, p. 526.

tate to call it a passionate, persevering and forgiving love, concluding that “it is so great that it turns God against Himself, His love against His justice.”²⁴

3.2. The pierced Heart of the Son of God

By revealing God’s incomprehensible love for Israel, the Old Testament prepares and opens us to receive the greatest expression of God’s Love, whose fullness was realised in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption. The Book of Hosea most fully outlines the mystery of the Cross, where God came out of hiding, allowed himself to be seen and even touched, showed his living heart and revealed his uninterrupted love for man in a real, tangible way [Ratzinger 1994, 61]. The literal fulfilment of Hosea’s prophecy of the fluttering Heart of God burning with love for man, which “through compassion overthrows its own justice, and precisely by this it remains just” [ibid.], is the pierced Heart of the Son of God incarnate in the womb of Mary and crucified on Golgotha, documented in the pages of the New Testament. It reveals that the fluttering of the Heart of God the Father consists in the fact that He now suffers Himself in His Son, takes upon Himself the fate of destroyed love, takes the place of man who has turned away from Him and, by giving it back to the Son substantially united to Him, makes it free again, and not only for Israel, but for all nations, for all people. “God loves man so much that, having become man himself, he accepts even his death and thus reconciles justice with love.”²⁵ This was most adequately expressed by the Evangelist John in his First Epistle, where we can read: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10). Therefore, to venerate the SHJ ultimately means “to venerate that Heart which, having loved us to the end, was pierced with a spear and from the height of the Cross flowed blood and water, the inexhaustible source of new life.”²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., p. 528.

²⁵ Ibid., no. 10.

²⁶ Benedict XVI, *Serce Odkupiciela...*, no. 31.

3.3. The beating of the Heart of God revealed in the Divine Saviour in the hearts of Christians

The Heart of Jesus pierced on the Cross, the embodiment of the eternal plan of the Heart of God for all humanity, is, according to Benedict XVI, “the heart of Christianity.”²⁷ For here, once and for all, everything has been accomplished and everything has been said, namely, that God has remained faithful to his love for man, that his love has not been extinguished or diminished, but on the contrary – it has been intensified and consummated. The human heart of Jesus Christ has not ceased to beat since the Resurrection and makes itself felt in the sacraments. Thus “love from the Heart of God through the Heart of Jesus Christ by his Spirit pours out into the world and renews everything.”²⁸

The Christian cannot respond to such a great love except with an open heart, ready to love one another, to love others in a spirit of authentic brotherhood. In the pope’s conviction, the whole of the Christian faith boils down precisely to this one act of love, involving God and people, as expressed in the fundamental commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and [...] Love your neighbour as yourself” (Mt 22:37-39). The Divine-human Heart of Jesus, in which God and man are united in a perfect way, without separation or confusion, calls upon the heart of man, impels him to go beyond himself and make of himself the gift of boundless love. The poem of love for man, born in the heart of God and made real in the Heart of Jesus, thus demands reciprocity – the Christian, gazing into the Heart of Jesus, must constantly direct the gaze of his heart towards His Heart, form his heart in imitation of that Heart and conform himself ever more to Him as a man possessed by love and, testifying to that love by his actions, draw his neighbour to it.

In his letter to the superior general of the Society of Jesus on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Pius XII’s encyclical *Haurietis aquas*, Benedict XVI is unanimous with his predecessors, stating: “Whoever accepts inwardly the love of God – is shaped by it. The love of God is experienced by man as a ‘call’ to which he must respond. [...] The gifts received from

²⁷ Idem, *Chrystus – Serce świata. Rozważanie przed modlitwą Anioł Pański* (01.06.2008), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Polish ed.) 7-8 (2008), p. 43.

²⁸ Idem, *Serce Jezusa mówi o miłości Boga do ludzi. Rozważanie przed modlitwą Anioł Pański* (25.06.2006), “L’Osservatore Romano” (Polish ed.) 9-10 (2006), p. 52.

the open side, from which 'blood and water' flow (cf. Jn 19:34), make it possible for our life to become for others a source from which 'streams of living water' emanate (Jn 7:38). The experience of love drawn from the worship of the Saviour's pierced side protects us from the risk of turning in on ourselves and makes us more available to live for others."²⁹

United with the Divine Heart and open to fellow human beings, the human heart is an extension, a continuation of the beating of the Heart of Yahweh revealed to the Heart of His Son Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

All three post-conciliar popes – Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI – were ardent devotees and apostles of the SHJ, considering this cult to be both very timely and necessary. Drawing attention to the partly different essential aspects of this mystery, they unanimously taught that the Heart of Jesus, manifesting the Heart of God Himself, is the most succinct and eloquent summary of Christianity realised by the Church, that this form of devotion contains, as it were, the sum, substance and norms of a truly Christian life, and that it is precisely this devotion that leads best to knowledge and love of the triune God revealed in Christ, and consequently to a more perfect imitation of Him in individual and social life. Without Christians' hearts shaped after the example of Jesus, it is impossible to bring about a moral renewal of the modern world, which is in great crisis and even stands "on the brink of extinction" [Seewald 2021, 6, 387]. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the antidote to the ailments and problems of today's secularised world and the resulting faded or even denied love for God. Statements by post-conciliar popes show that the time of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is not over. In fact, it is from this form of devotion that they unanimously expect a true revolution of love, which on the ruins of the old world will build a new world and a new civilisation born of the love of the Saviour's Heart.

²⁹ Idem, *Poznawać miłość Serca Jezusa i świadczyć o niej wobec ludzi. List z okazji 50-lecia encykliki Haurietis aquas Piusa XII*, in: *Serce Jezusa w dokumentach Kościoła...*, p. 535.

REFERENCES

- Bainvel, Jean V. 1934. *Kult Serca Bożego. Teoria i rozwój*. Transl. by Kazimierz Dembowski. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księży Jezuitów.
- Drażek, Czesław. 1998. “Tajemnica Serca Chrystusa w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II.” *Ethos* 1/2:177-86. http://dlibra.kul.pl/Content/29833/16_tajemnica_serca_chrystusa.pdf [accessed: 11.03.2024].
- Drażek, Czesław, and Ludwik Grzebień, eds. 1983. *Bóg bliski. Historia i teologia kultu Najświętszego Serca Jezusa*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy.
- Drozdowicz, Tadeusz. 2017. “Krótki szkic historyczny.” https://wydawnictwowam.pl/sites/default/files/78082_skrot.pdf [accessed: 26.03.2024].
- Królikowski, Janusz. 2014. “Źródła «cywilizacji miłości».” *Nasz Dziennik* 19 December 2014. <https://naszdziennik.pl/mysl/119451,zrodla-cywilizacji-milosci.html> [accessed: 20.02.2024].
- Nowicki, Andrzej S. 2011. “Symbolika serca w teologii Jana Pawła II.” *Śląskie Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne* 44, no. 2:397-405.
- Pagacz, Małgorzata. 2020. “Tajemnica serca Jezusa istotą chrześcijaństwa według Benedykta XVI.” *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 33, no. 1:69-83.
- Poleszak, Leszek. 2006. *Serce Jezusa w dokumentach Kościoła. Dokumenty Magisterium Kościoła o Najświętszym Sercu Pana Jezusa od Klemensa XIII do Benedykta XVI*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księży Sercanów.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. 1994. *Tajemnica Jezusa Chrystusa*. Transl. Jolanta Płoska. Kielce: Jedność.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. 2022. “Nieznane fakty z życia Benedykta XVI.” <https://pch24.pl/nieznane-fakty-z-zycia-benedykta-xvi-jako-male-dziecko-j-ratzinger-poprosil-pana-jezusa-o-mszalik-zielony-ornat-i-jego-serce/> [accessed: 25.02.2024].
- Romanowski, Andrzej. 2012. “Kult Serca Pana Jezusa, historia i natura”. <http://www.fzspolska.pl/formacja/Kult%20Serca%20Pana%20Jezusa.pdf> [accessed: 26.03.2024].
- Seewald, Peter. 2021. *Benedykt XVI. Życie*. Transl. Wiesław Szymona. Kraków: Znak.
- Zieliński, Henryk. 2021. “Bez serca się nie da”. *Idziemy* 23 (2021). <https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/P/PR/idziemy202123-serce> [accessed: 05.03.2024].

“Without a Heart it is Impossible.” The Personal and Social Significance of Devotion to the Heart of Jesus in the Light of Post-Conciliar Church Teaching

Abstract

The article illuminates the significant development of the devotion to the Sacred Heart as a result of the teaching of three post-conciliar popes: Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. All three, while constantly referring to the writings and speeches of their predecessors, in particular Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII, whose personal contribution to the promotion of the cult of the Sacred Heart cannot be overestimated, they

permanently deepened and adapted it to the ever-new needs of the post-conciliar Church since the “old” and the “new” are always profoundly united.

Paul VI saw in the cult of the Heart of Jesus manifold spiritual potential and made the Heart of Jesus the inspiration, strength and instrument of the conciliar renewal of spirit and morals. John Paul II, to whom the mystery of the Heart of Christ appealed from an early age, proclaimed the theology of the Divine Heart tirelessly throughout his pontificate, emphasising its Christocentric, ecclesial and missionary dimensions. It is to the great credit of the Polish Pope that the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is closely linked to the cult of Divine Mercy and that the former is shown as the revelation, source and mediator of the mercy of God the Father. In his rich scholarly and pastoral legacy, Benedict XVI made it clear that the loving Heart of God has revealed itself throughout the ongoing history of salvation in three guises: as the open Heart of God, the pierced Heart of the Son of God and the beating of both in the hearts of Christians.

Keywords: cult of the heart of Jesus; post-conciliar teaching of the Church; heart of God; Paul VI; John Paul II; Benedict XVI; civilisation of love.

„Bez serca się nie da”. Personalne i społeczne znaczenie kultu Serca Jezusa w świetle posoborowego nauczania Kościoła

Abstrakt

Artykuł naświetla rozwój kultu Najświętszego Serca Jezusa w wyniku nauczania trzech posoborowych papieży: Pawła VI, Jana Pawła II i Benedykta XVI. Wszyscy trzej, nawiązując stale do pism i przemów swoich poprzedników, w pierwszej linii Leona XIII, Piusa XI i Piusa XII, których osobisty wkład w propagowanie kultu NSJ jest nie do przecenienia, permanentnie je pogłębiali i dostosowywali do nowych potrzeb Kościoła posoborowego, zgodnie z dewizą, że w dziejach Kościoła „stare” i „nowe” zawsze są ze sobą głęboko zespolone.

Paweł VI upatrywał w kulcie Serca Jezusa wieloraki potencjał duchowy i uczynił Je inspiracją, siłą i narzędziem soborowej odnowy ducha i obyczajów. Jan Paweł II proklamował teologię Boskiego serca niestrudzenie przez cały swój, uwypuklając w nim wymiar chrystocentryczny, eklezjalny i misyjny. Jego wielką zasługą jest ścisłe powiązanie kultu Jezusowego Serca z kultem Bożego miłosierdzia i ukazanie pierwszego z nich jako objawienia, źródła i pośrednika miłosierdzia Boga Ojca. Benedykt XVI w swojej bogatej naukowej i pastoralnej spuściźnie unaoczniał, że miłujące Serce Boga objawiło się w całej trwającej historii zbawienia w trzech odsłonach: jako otwarte Serce Boga, przebite Serce Syna Bożego i bicie obydwu w sercach chrześcijan.

Słowa kluczowe: kult serca Jezusowego; posoborowe nauczanie Kościoła; serce Boga; Paweł VI; Jan Paweł II; Benedykt XVI; cywilizacja miłości.

Informacje o Autorze: PROF. DR HAB. MARZENA GÓRECKA – Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II; adres do korespondencji: Al. Raławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Polska; e-mail: mgorecka@kul.pl; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7503-2814>