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# The Fleishy Heart of Jesus

Simonetta Marin

This article examines the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and its contested beginnings in Italy. The Sacred Heart cult also provides a focus for the analysis of Catholic uses of imagery and representations of the sacred during the Enlightenment. The cult, which is one of the most widespread devotions in the modern Church, was the subject of fierce debate in the second half of the eighteenth century. Both in its representations and in its theological significance, the Sacred Heart was highly controversial.<sup>1</sup> As soon as the devotion started to spread and a variety of images of the Sacred Heart circulated, two opposing factions clashed. On one side, linked to the Jansenists, were those who attacked the devotion, while on the other side were those who sympathized with the Jesuits and supported the devotion. The Italian scholars Mario Rosa and Daniele Menozzi have analyzed developments in the debate about the devotion of the Sacred Heart from a political perspective.<sup>2</sup> Rosa in particular associated the Sacred Heart with the combined efforts of the papacy and the Jesuits to relaunch a Counter-Reformation in the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup>

In this study, the Sacred Heart will serve as a focus for a discussion of the dynamics of Catholic uses of imagery.<sup>4</sup> An episode that took place in Bergamo reveals what took place during the making (and the attempted unmaking) of this devotion. The image of the incarnate divine heart generated a significant discussion about sacred representations that has been largely overlooked in modern historiography.<sup>5</sup> Both theologians and art historians did not fully recognize how the representations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in this period represented a watershed in the way Christ has been depicted since the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The Sacred Heart remains in fact the last depiction that Christian artists have produced to date

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<sup>1</sup> The bibliography on the Sacred Heart is immense; I will refer here to the most comprehensive studies and later to additional works on specific themes. See Daniele Menozzi, *Sacro cuore: un culto tra devozione interiore e restaurazione cristiana della società* (Roma: Viella, 2001); David Morgan, *The Sacred Heart of Jesus: the Visual Evolution of a Devotion* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008); and Jon L. Seydl, "The Sacred Heart of Jesus: Art and Religion in Eighteenth-Century Italy" (Ph.D diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> See Menozzi, *Sacro cuore*; Mario Rosa, *Settecento religioso, politica della ragione e religione del cuore* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> For France, the topic was investigated in a thorough study by Jonas Raymond, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: an Epic Tale for Modern Times* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2000); see also Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 230-36.

<sup>4</sup> On the interaction between religion and politics in the Italian peninsula, see Marina Caffiero, *La politica della santità: la nascita di un culto nel secolo dei Lumi* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1996); Marina Caffiero, *Religione e modernità in Italia* (Pisa-Rome: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2000); Massimo Cattaneo, *Gli occhi di Maria sulla rivoluzione: miracoli a Roma e nello Stato della Chiesa (1796-1799)* (Rome: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani, 1995); Massimo Cattaneo, "Santi e miracoli nell'Italia in Rivoluzione: il caso napoletano," in *Patrioti e insorgenti in provincia*, ed. Angelo Massafrà (Bari: Edipuglia, 2002), 105-33; and Pasquale Palmieri, *La santa, i miracoli e la Rivoluzione: una storia di politica e devozione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Art historian Jon L. Seydl constitutes an important exception: Jon L. Seydl, *The Sacred Heart*; and Jon L. Seydl, "Contesting the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Late Eighteenth-Century Rome," in *Roman Bodies: Antiquities in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Hopkins and Maria Wyke (London: The British School in Rome, 2005), 215-27.

<sup>6</sup> See Yvonne Zu Dohna, "Figure di Dio nell'arte del XVII secolo: il volto artistico della modernità," in *L'uomo moderno e la Chiesa: atti del Congresso 16-19 novembre 2011*, ed. Paul Gilbert (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2012), 329-48; Gabriele Finlandi, *The Image of Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); and Helen De Borchgrave, *A Journey into Christian Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

for the faithful to focus upon while worshipping Jesus. Moreover, and most importantly, this article emphasizes the reasons for this Christological shift in devotional practices and imagery in the age of the Enlightenment.

### **The unsettling power of images: a shaky theology?**

Popular piety in Italy was, according to the erudite Ludovico Antonio Muratori, overly inclined toward external and excessive manifestations of religious enthusiasm: it was an emotionally charged piety that easily slid into superstition.<sup>7</sup> Among the multiple ways in which the faithful articulated their beliefs and lived their daily religion, their approaches to representations of the sacred were certainly the most objectionable. The people's reverence for images was unabashedly attacked by Muratori as idolatry and misguided piety rather than representative of true acts of devotion. He and others then called for reform within the Church. Though images were considered necessary for commoners to understand and memorize the basics of Catholicism (this was a long-established principle and a method that had been employed since the first centuries of Christianity), these were also deeply disturbing because they raised the not-so-simple-question of what was actually being worshipped. Was it what the image represented, or the image itself? In other words, the concern was that believers often conflated the image with the subject of their devotion.<sup>8</sup> We will see how this position was indeed an idealistic projection of Muratori the scholar, which did not correspond to a far more complex social and cultural reality.

After the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church reaffirmed the positive function of religious art in devotion and, at the same time, warned against misuses of images and idolatry.<sup>9</sup> These issues were at the core of the Reformation. However, the Council of Trent addressed the issue of images with some circumspection and vagueness. There were no specific or detailed instructions about pictorial themes or representations of the sacred, nor was any censorship directed at already existing artworks. The appeal to tradition was implemented through the local Church hierarchy, namely the bishops, who supervised artistic productions in their own dioceses and became the judges of religious art. But guidelines were vague, suggesting only that a general decorum be followed. Thus common sense shaped and informed by the past became the main guide in episcopal supervision.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Paola Vismara's studies on devotion in Lombardy, which show that popular attachment to religion, the quest for miracles, and the rise of confraternities were indeed strong throughout the eighteenth century. In particular, see Paola Vismara, *Miracoli settecenteschi in Lombardia tra istituzione ecclesiastica e religione popolare* (Milan: Istituto Propaganda Libreria, 1988); "Attraverso il libro, oltre il libro: letteratura di pietà tra Sei e Settecento," in *Libri e altro: nel passato e nel presente*, ed. Grado G. Merlo (Milan: Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, 2006), 207-21; and "Confraternite e devozioni nella Milano del Settecento," in *Confréries et dévotions dans la catholicité moderne (mi-XV<sup>e</sup>-début XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, ed. Dompnier Bernard and Paola Vismara, (Rome: École française de Rome, 2008), 260-84.

<sup>8</sup> Ludovico Antonio Muratori, "Dalle lettere al Segneri," in *Ludovico Antonio Muratori: opere*, ed. Giorgio Falco and Fiorenzo Forti (Naples: Liguori, 1996); and Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Della regolata divozione de' cristiani* (Trent: Giambattista Parone, 1748), 299.

<sup>9</sup> For an exhaustive excursus of the Church's texts on the regulation of images, see Daniele Menozzi, *La Chiesa e le immagini: i testi fondamentali sulle arti figurative dalle origini ai nostri giorni* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan: Edizioni San Paolo, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, to deal with this lack of "instructions," in the aftermath of the Council of Trent several works were published to fill this theoretical vacuum. Bishop Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597), for example, offered some directions and his own interpretation on the matter. However, in his famous *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*

The significant utilization of images and sacred representations in Catholicism continued during the Counter-Reformation. The Jesuits, who were the most important and militant order during and after the institution of the Catholic Reform, also began to use images. Instilling piety and moving people by means of “affective art” became an important aspect of the Jesuit program.<sup>11</sup> However, scholars have demonstrated that images played a significant role in shaping, inspiring, and transforming Christian spirituality well beyond the activities of the Jesuits. In a recent study, Ottavia Niccoli has shown that, between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries in Italy, domestic icons and holy images became common furnishings, protecting the house and educating children about piety. They were cherished figures that helped shape an imaginative religious mindset, and they conveyed a sense of intimacy and familiarity with the supernatural world. Images were kissed, revered, worshipped; acts of reverence were shown toward them, and a whole liturgy in which the devotee became engaged with the sacred representation was learned in childhood; this then played an important role later in life, including adulthood, in social as well as religious settings.<sup>12</sup> Paper holy cards were the common companions of nuns in the solitude of their cells and, in fact, everyone owned them.<sup>13</sup> Images were worn, attached to walls, mounted behind doors, placed inside blanket chests and in trunks, and set over bed headboards. They were displayed (and stored) in any number of places, and even put on ailing bodies to help them to heal.<sup>14</sup> Such was everyday devotion in early modern Italy.

### **The history of the heart: from metaphor to cult**

The trope of the heart runs deep in Christian tradition. The act of “writing on the heart was a frequent and vivid image in medieval literature and art.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in the Middle Ages the book of the heart was a specific trope in introspective writing. The heart was the literal site of

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(1582), Paleotti mainly identified what a painting should not be, rather than what it should be. Pictures should not be “rash,” “scandalous,” “erroneous,” “suspect,” “heretical,” “superstitious,” or “apocryphal.” See Gabriele Paleotti, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, trans. William McCuaig (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust/ Getty Research Institute, 2012), 160-76; and, on the topic of Paleotti and the artists, see Ilaria Bianchi, *La politica delle immagini nell'età della Controriforma: Gabriele Paleotti teorico e committente* (Bologna: Compositori, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Evonne Levy, *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Jeffrey Chipps Smith, “Sensuous Worship, or a Practical Means to a Spiritual End,” in *Sensuous Worship: Jesuits and the Art of the Early Catholic Reformation in Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 29-55.

<sup>12</sup> Ottavia Niccoli, *Vedere con gli occhi del cuore: alle origini del potere delle immagini* (Milan: Laterza, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> The production, distribution, and sale of cheaply made devotional booklets were widespread. Street sellers, peddlers, charlatans, and preachers diffused this basic library that only recently has become an object of study. See the works of Laura Carnelos, which are tremendously important for further research on the field: Laura Carnelos, “*Con libri alla man: l'editoria di larga diffusione a Venezia tra Sei e Settecento*” (Milan: Unicopli, 2013), and *I libri da risma: catalogo delle edizioni Remondini a larga diffusione (1650-1850)* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Far beyond Vatican Council II, the images of the Sacred Heart, as well other holy cards, were easily found in Italian domestic spaces and were disseminated throughout people’s houses—in the dining room, kitchen, bedroom, and in drawers; they were also used as bookmarks, kept in wallets, and placed close to the dearest family portraits. They were not mere Christian amulets or lucky charms but rather were everyday relics to keep away misfortune, diseases, and accidents. Images and representations of Christ, as David Morgan has argued in his numerous studies, have also played an important role in molding American Christianity in a more comprehensive sense beyond its Catholic component. See David Morgan, “The Look of the Sacred” in *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 296-318.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.

memory, understanding, and imagination, as well as the traditional locus of emotion.<sup>16</sup> St. Paul and St. Augustine each contributed elaborate metaphors for the heart to patristic and medieval culture. St. Paul endowed introspective writing with a haunting corporeality, while St. Augustine made the heart the center of his inner self, a tablet on which God wrote with “words like arrows.”<sup>17</sup> The trope of writing on the heart was taken literally in medieval saints’ legends that described martyrs receiving divine inscriptions on their hearts, which were later read by others. In the fourteenth century, the Dominican Heinrich Seuse described this sacred activity in gruesome detail, reporting the act of self-inscribing God’s commands on one’s own body with a sharp stylus.<sup>18</sup>

In secular literature, a different sort of passion was inscribed onto lovers’ hearts, as twelfth- and thirteenth-century lyrics and romances reveal.<sup>19</sup> The vividness of these works was so realistic and personally meaningful that, by the late fifteenth century, the books of the heart evolved into actual visual images and into real representational objects. Artisans produced heart-shaped manuscripts and books, and embellished these with images representing books of the heart. These constituted self-referential symbols of the literary *topos*.<sup>20</sup> Thus the trope was taken to a different level, since introspective writing turned into exterior representation that continued to refer to interior expression.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore possible to see that the heart, as a metaphor and an image, entered medieval devotional literature during the patristic period and subsequently acquired several layers of added cultural meaning during the medieval centuries.<sup>22</sup>

Along with these images, the heart of Jesus as a metaphor for Christ was also developing. This image was meant to be venerated, mostly behind the closed doors of cloisters. The fascination with the heart was linked to a development in the cult concerning Christ’s wounds. The wound on Christ’s side became the doorway to Christ’s heart and to human salvation. The roots of this devotion go back to the thirteenth century, when it was practiced in the convents of Saxon nuns and Flemish holy women.<sup>23</sup> Soon, the cult of the heart became a much cherished and ubiquitous devotion. With its emphasis on hearts—not only the heart of the Savior but also that of the saved, and also the heart of the lover—this Christian tradition was a constant inspirational

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 4-10.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Newman, “Henry Suso and the Medieval Devotion to Christ the Goddess,” *Spiritus* 2, no 1 (2002):1-14. Ignatius of Antiochia, from the Golden Legend, also had the name of God written in golden letters on his heart (ibid., 16). This motif resounded so deeply that female mystics in orders of sanctity were inspected *post mortem* to see if they bore this miraculous inscription on their hearts.

<sup>19</sup> For a study of the complex interconnections between philosophy, spirituality, and eroticism in medieval metaphorical language, see Elena Lombardi, *Wings of the Doves: Love and Desire in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Jager, *The Book*, 137.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 17-26.

<sup>22</sup> Aside from literature, poetry, and mystical writings, the heart was also a powerful symbol in magic. As Guido Ruggiero has shown, animal hearts were used in brews and potions, while wax hearts, when pierced with needles, were intended to punish enemies or reluctant lovers. This ritual emerged as a profane reenactment of Christ’s Passion (the pierced heart of Jesus being one of the most dramatic representations of the new devotion). See Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 120-24.

<sup>23</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 55-6. Jeffrey F. Hamburger’s study on the art of female monasticism shows that the imagery of the sacred heart had a long history. See Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: the Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

source for male and female mystics, as well as would-be saints and actual saints of many orders, places, and times.

Thus the trope of the heart was already long established in European culture when in 1685 the French Visitandine nun Marguerite Mary Alacoque revealed her mystical visions by providing sketches of them. From this, her particular devotional form sprang. She drew on those images to convey both her love for Christ and Christ's affection for her. Marguerite's spirituality was shaped by her adoration of the Eucharist. Her first mystical experience occurred when she was praying before the Blessed Sacrament. The strong connection between the Eucharist and the devotion of the heart has its origins in twelfth-century female mysticism.<sup>24</sup> Marguerite also followed the mystical tradition in her self-mortification, which contained a strong component of eroticism. The pain she endured as soon as she committed herself to the heart, which was manifested in instances of physical debasement, was never separated from the pleasure that those practices brought to her. Pain and pleasure were the two sides of her vow to Christ. In her encounters with Him, their respective hearts passed from one to the other, and their relationship was thereby consummated, so to speak. Although this exchange also had its root in older traditions—Saint Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi, for example—Marguerite made the heart the center of her new devotion both visually and theologically.<sup>25</sup> Thus, in her visions, Marguerite incorporated the multiple layers of Baroque piety regarding the heart, merging in her devotion its symbolic meanings of romance, affection, tender intimacy, and eros. Jesus came to her to remind her first, and the world after, how His own sacrifice had been forgotten. Hence mortification and annihilation were key aspects of “Alacoque's erotics of pain.”<sup>26</sup>

During the first half of the eighteenth century, the Sacred Heart was transformed from a symbolic image to a graphic representation of a fleshy, muscular pump. That image reignited the argument against religious imagery. Marguerite's engravings represented the heart on a throne of flames, encircled with a crown of thorns and surmounted by a cross. This was an emblem that soon was placed on top of altars beside the crucifix; it was also worn by her, as well as by her convent sisters and other devotees.<sup>27</sup> The heart was still a metaphorical image during her lifetime, but in one of her writings Marguerite referred to it as a “heart of flesh,” taking the first step in the shift from a simple image to an anatomical picture. It was Joseph Gallifet who took this allusion and promoted the materiality of Alacoque's visions.<sup>28</sup> In his *De cultu S. Cordis Jesu* (1726), the heart no longer appeared in stylized form, but was shown as in an anatomical manual. This was what ignited the virulent attacks on the devotion throughout the remainder of the century.<sup>29</sup> The harsh polemic against the Sacred Heart focused on its fleshy, carnal, material, and

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<sup>24</sup> While this was largely associated with women, by the thirteenth century the devotion had spread to many mendicant orders. See Wendy M. Wright, “A Wide and Fleshy Love: Images, Imagination and the Study of Christian Spirituality,” *Christian Spirituality Bulletin: Journal of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality* 7:1 (Spring 1999): 1-12; and Wendy M. Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart: the Salesian Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Anna Scattigno, “Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi,” *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani: Enciclopedia Treccani*, vol. 70 (2008). Accessed February 28, 2014, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/maria-maddalena-de-pazzi-santa\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/maria-maddalena-de-pazzi-santa_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 117. See also Anna Scattigno, “Jesus as Mother and Abbot As Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 70, no. 3/4 (October 1977): 257-84.

<sup>27</sup> David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 13-14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Gallifet rejected the empirical view and reaffirmed that the heart was the organ of sensible affections: Seydl, *The Sacred Heart*, 32-34. See Scott Manning Stevens, “Sacred Heart and Secular Brain” in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies*

graphic representation. The images that were widely circulated in the eighteenth century were not at all like a flat heart pierced with darts, i.e. something that might resemble a modern Valentine's card, but a rather bloody, disturbingly realistic anatomical representation of a human heart (indeed it has been suggested that an ox heart may have been used as a model).

The devotion was first celebrated officially in France in 1765.<sup>30</sup> In 1856, Pope Pius IX extended the devotion throughout the Church. The supporters of the devotion did not necessarily associate the origins of the cult with Alacoque, but preferred to trace the deeper roots of the heart in Christian tradition. This not only conferred a different sort of legitimacy to a cult believed to be as old as other devotions to Jesus Christ; it also moved the devotion (at least ideally) away from the luxuriant imagery and descriptions that Marguerite had lavished on it in her visionary accounts, which had not yet received Church sanction.<sup>31</sup>

### **Controversy over the Sacred Heart of Jesus: Jansenists vs. Jesuits**

The dispute over the Sacred Heart was part of the broader and enduring dissension between the Jesuits and the Jansenists. Though the Jesuits were not the only ones who favored the devotion, they were the first to promote it. Indeed, the cult of the heart was quintessentially Jesuit. The potent imagery and metaphors, which so heavily relied upon and inspired empathy between the faithful and Christ in His Passion, became enormously influential tools in the Jesuits' hands. The Jansenists' disregard for external manifestations of religious piety was more than an ideological opposition to the Jesuits. Advocates of inner spirituality, the Jansenists positioned themselves on the other side of the devotional spectrum from the Jesuits, rejecting the Jesuits' methods to inculcate the doctrines and lore of Catholicism. The Jesuits' uses of theatre, dramas, images, music, and sacramentals to indoctrinate and obtain conversions among the populace deeply offended the Jansenists' rigorous sensibilities.<sup>32</sup>

As Alain Besançon has noted, the Jansenists "were iconoclastic by instinct, by temperament and in practice."<sup>33</sup> Nigel Aston points out that although not intrinsically anti-art, Jansenists were "distrustful of the misuses of imagery by the uneducated."<sup>34</sup> The mingling of texts and images was a source of errors, sensual thoughts, and emotional reactions.<sup>35</sup> At best it was a distraction from the path of real communion with God; at worst it was a sure way to elude grace. Grace

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*of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), 264-284; see also Jean- Félix-Henri de Fumel, *Il culto dell'amore divino ossia la divozione al S. Cuor di Gesù opera di monsignore Gian Felice Enrico di Fumel tradotta dal francese in italiano e corredata di copiose ed interessanti annotazioni* (Bologna: n.p., 1782), 82 and *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> Aston, *Religion*, 50.

<sup>31</sup> In 1903, Pope Leo XIII identified St. Francis de Sales as the originator of the cult. Michel P. Carroll, *Catholic Cults and Devotions: a Psychological Inquiry* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 1989), 134.

<sup>32</sup> The Jansenists accused the Jesuits of reviving the Pelagian heresy that had been thoroughly condemned by Augustine. Jansenism in turn was condemned as heretical in several papal bulls, most notably by Innocent X in 1643 and by Clement XI in his *Unigenitus* in 1713. See Nigel Aston, *Art and Religion in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 11, 61-4, 244-48.

<sup>33</sup> Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: an Intellectual History of Iconoclasm* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 193.

<sup>34</sup> Aston, *Art and Religion*, 247.

<sup>35</sup> Jansenism was not completely free of spectacular religious phenomena: in Paris, by the end of the eighteenth century, Jansenist convulsionaries took "the theme of suffering to bizarre extremes." This "underside" of Jansenism shows how problematic it is to define not only a Jansenistic aesthetic but also a Jansenistic piety. See Brian Strayer, *Suffering Saints: Jansenists and Convulsionnaires in France, 1640-1799* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 1.

became an important issue when the Jesuits championed the optimistic view that human beings possessed free will, while the Augustinian Jansenists held a pessimistic notion of human willpower. The devotion of the Sacred Heart, which was often combined with frequent communion and was encouraged by the Jesuits to satisfy the offence of sin, became in the eyes of the Jansenists a method to mechanically usurp divine grace.

Politically, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century controversy between the Jesuits and Jansenists involved control of the French Church.<sup>36</sup> This was a matter of the state control versus papal control. The Jansenists, who never accepted the infallibility of popes and denied papal power over kings and bishops, embraced a triple Gallicanism: episcopal, royal, and parliamentary.<sup>37</sup> Not only did the Jansenists play a major role in the process of “desacralization” of the monarchy (both before and during the French Revolution), but also in the suppression of the Jesuits entirely—even beyond France’s borders.<sup>38</sup>

When Pope Clement XIV banished and disbanded the Jesuits in 1773, they did not simply and suddenly disappear; many ex-Jesuits were absorbed into other religious institutions. This particular circumstance, in which both Jesuits and Jansenists acted from within the Church, changed the dynamics of the debate over images and the devotion of the Sacred Heart. The Jansenists and Jesuits blamed each other for their marginalization; meanwhile, their ideological opposition by necessity became more subtle and surreptitious, since both sides had to act mostly in disguise. This was particularly the case in Italy, where for a long time it was believed that Jansenism had a very limited, marginal influence. Italian Jansenists, if any existed, were deemed to be isolated figures who could not seriously affect the dominant panorama of theological and religious discussions.

But the situation was in fact more complex. Even though the Jansenists did not have as much success in Italy or as strong a grip on culture there as they had in France, this did not mean that their influence was of no consequence. Influential Italian Catholics could be, and sometimes were, suspected of exhibiting Jansenist opinions. Even Muratori’s writings showed at least some affinities with the principles of Jansenism, if not an open affiliation with the Jansenists. He was not alone. Many important figures were marked as closet Jansenists; some admitted to having adhered to those ideas later in life.<sup>39</sup> But there were also those who openly professed to being Jansenists: Giuseppe Maria Pujati (1733-1824) was one such figure. Born in the Patria of Friuli, Pujati was first a Somascan Father, and then a Benedictine who became a theologian, a philologist, and an influential and fierce polemicist. In 1772, when he was already in his forties, he began teaching Sacred Scripture at the University of Padua. His arguments against what he

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<sup>36</sup> For an extensive account, see Dale K. Van Kley, “Jansenism and the International Suppression of the Jesuits,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660–1815*, vol. 7, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 302–28.

<sup>37</sup> See Mario Rosa, “Gesuitismo e antigesuitismo nell’Italia del Sei-Settecento,” *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 42 (2006): 247-81; Mario Rosa, *La contrastata ragione: riforme e religione nell’Italia del Settecento* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2009); Sabina Pavone, *Le astuzie dei gesuiti: le false istruzioni segrete della Compagnia di Gesù e la polemica antigesuita nei secoli XVII-XVIII* (Rome: Salerno, 2000); and Niccolò Guasti, *L’esilio italiano dei gesuiti spagnoli: identità, controllo sociale e pratiche culturali* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> See Enrico Dammig, *Il movimento giansenista a Roma nella seconda metà del secolo XVIII* (Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1968); Alberto Vecchi, *Correnti religiose nel Sei-Settecento veneto* (Venice-Rome: Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1962); and the most recent study by Pietro Stella, *Il giansenismo in Italia*, vol. 3, *Crisi finale e transizioni* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007). See also the interesting nineteenth-century study by Cesare Cantù, *Gli eretici d’Italia: discorsi storici*, vol. 3 (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1866), 374-98.

<sup>39</sup> See Vecchi, *Correnti religiose*.



perceived to be distorted devotional practices, as well as against the Jesuits who promoted them, made him fall out of favor in a city that hosted many Jesuits and embraced their sumptuous and exuberant spirituality.<sup>40</sup> His consequent unpopularity condemned Pujati to a less public role as a scholar and turned him into a wandering Jansenist, in search of more congenial and receptive milieus.

The devotion of the Sacred Heart, with its highly controversial imagery, became the theme around which Pujati articulated and explained his position on representations of the sacred, as well as the specific base from which he launched his wider attack against images. His involvement in the Sacred Heart debate was defended in his *Riflessioni sopra l'origine, la natura e il fine della devozione al Sacro Cuore di Gesù*, published in Naples (and anonymously in Venice) in 1780.<sup>41</sup> Pujati was deeply committed to the reform of popular devotion, which he saw essentially as a matter related to external manifestations of piety. He was the inspiration for the Synod, which was the most famous, undisguised, and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to assimilate Jansenist ideas into Catholicism. The Synod of Pistoia, held in September 1786, was promoted by Bishop Scipione de' Ricci. Strongly inspired by Jansenist doctrine, it was condemned by Rome in the Bull *Auctorem Fidei* of 1794.<sup>42</sup> The Synod was a fascinating chapter within Italian religious history, showing – despite its (apparent) failure – how Jansenist ideas were deeply held by many high-ranking members of the Church.<sup>43</sup> Although Pujati traveled widely in the northern and central Italian states, proselytizing, writing books and pamphlets, promoting his ideas, advising bishops, counseling governments, and fostering the Jansenist cause, he made his home in the Venetian cities of Padua, Venice, and Bergamo.<sup>44</sup>

### **Bergamo: a microcosm of religious turmoil**

Bergamo provided fertile soil for the fostering of both Jesuits and Jansenist ideologies.<sup>45</sup> When Pujati moved to this city, after his many “pilgrimages” back and forth from the Republic to other Italian states, he took refuge in the monastery of San Polo. He immediately found supporters of his Jansenist ideas in the Father Inquisitor and the most important clerics of the city. Since he was notorious for his Jansenist leanings (at the time he was a virtual fugitive, protected by powerful patrons and hiding from the public), Pujati had to act behind the scenes. Others,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Rosa, *Settecento religioso*, 43.

<sup>42</sup> For an overview on the subject, see *Il Sinodo di Pistoia del 1786: atti del convegno internazionale per il secondo centenario, Pistoia-Prato, 25-27 settembre 1986*, ed. Claudio Lamioni (Rome: Herder Editrice Libreria, 1991). Interestingly enough, the liturgical reforms that the synod proposed were not significantly different from those approved by Council Vatican II from 1962-65 and later implemented. See Keith F. Pecklers, *Worship: a Primer in Christian Ritual* (London: Continuum, 2003), 83-5, 109.

<sup>43</sup> See the insightful work by Enrico Dammig, *Il movimento giansenista a Roma nella seconda metà del sec. XVIII* (Rome: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1968), in which he traces the hidden Jansenist inroads into the cardinals' palaces in Rome; and Stella, *Il Giansenismo in Italia*. However, Catholic elites were not the only supporters of Jansenism: parish clergy were often supporters as well. Don Carlo Pezzagna, the priest of a village on the Venetian mainland, who left a rich memoir about his ministry, was a strong defender of the Jansenist creed. See Andreina Rigon, “Un parroco riformista nella campagna veneta del secondo Settecento: Don Carlo Pezzagna,” *Ricerche di storia sociale e religiosa* 41 (1992): 129-43.

<sup>44</sup> See Vecchi, *Correnti religiose*, 465; and Giovanna Troisi, “Giuseppe Maria Pujati ed il giansenismo veneto,” in *Archivio storico lombardo*, CXIII (Bologna: Cappelli, 1987), 101-61.

<sup>45</sup> Giuseppe Pignatelli, “Giovanni Paolo Dolfin,” *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani: Enciclopedia Treccani*, vol. 40 (1991). Accessed February 28, 2014, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-paolo-dolfin\\_\(Dizionario\\_Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-paolo-dolfin_(Dizionario_Biografico)/).

however, were ready to fight openly for the ideas he espoused. General antagonism between his followers and opposing factions boiled over into a local and specific controversy about the devotion of the Sacred Heart.

While Pujati attacked the Sacred Heart with fairly sophisticated theological arguments, the controversy at the local level unfolded in the form of satire and involved secular authorities. The animosity between the Jansenists and the Jesuits in Bergamo extended beyond the walls of the religious institutions. Humorous and witty pasquinades were disseminated throughout the city, the territory, and the whole of the Republic. Satirical pamphlets and sonnets against the new devotion and its supporters were circulated, some vitriolic in tone.<sup>46</sup> Priests who supported the Sacred Heart were publicly ridiculed. They were labeled the most ignorant of all priests, barely able to speak in the vernacular, let alone Latin.

### **The two canons of the cathedral**

While the supporters of the devotion were the objects of relentless satire, the canons of Bergamo Cathedral, Benedetto de Passi and Francesco Sonzogno, brought the issue to the institutional level. By informing the Inquisitors in Venice, they were calling on secular authorities to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs.<sup>47</sup> They also drew the complacent bishop of Bergamo, Giangirolamo Dolfin, into the controversy without directly blaming him. Dolfin, in fact, happened to be not only the head of the diocese and their superior, but also the main supporter of the devotion. The Inquisitors, in turn, ordered the *podestà e capitano in loco*, Girolamo Ascanio Zustiniani, to look into the affair.

De Passi and Sonzogno wrote two letters: a short one addressed to the Inquisitors and a long one addressed to the bishop. The latter was also attached to the report they sent to the Inquisitors. They were well aware that the bishop openly favored the new devotion of the Sacred Heart; therefore they conceived the letter for him as a theological manifesto against it. With no possibility whatsoever to confront their own bishop successfully regarding the matter, the two men approached the issue more strategically. While in their letter to the Inquisitors they explicitly identified the ex-Jesuits as the behind-the-scenes rabble-rousers and indirectly accused Dolfin of being an accomplice, in their letter to Dolfin they artfully dropped every contingent detail in order to focus only on the cult itself, bringing to Dolfin's attention theological and devotional issues. When combined with their theoretical manifesto, the shorter missive sent to the Inquisitors was much more efficacious as well as telling. The "worshippers" of the heart, also derisively called *Cordicoli* to emphasize their idolatrous attitude, were introducing dangerous innovations in piety, along with "disturbing new images that enticed less devotional than sensual thoughts," lamented De Passi and Sonzogno in their letter.<sup>48</sup> Controversial paintings lay at the

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<sup>46</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), Inquisitori di Stato, Lettere dei Rettori di Bergamo, b. 13, 1781-1782, c. 697 and following.

<sup>47</sup> The Inquisitors of State, one of the most powerful Venetian magistratures, were set up to protect the state. Their power was very broad-based, as they could participate in any investigation of interest to the security of the state. They were directly appointed by the Council of Ten and their limited number (three) allowed them to be secretive, efficient, and quick in their decisions. Their cognizance was almost unlimited, and they were feared for the enormous power they wielded. When unanimity could not be reached, matters went back to the Council of Ten for a final decision. For a recent study of the Venetian secret services, see Paolo Preto, *Servizi segreti di Venezia: spionaggio e controspionaggio ai tempi della Serenissima* (Milan: Il Saggiatore Tascabili, 2010), 51-82.

<sup>48</sup> *Cordicoli* in Italian or *Cordicoles* in French, from the Latin *cordia-latras*, meant literally "adorers of the heart" and was used in a disparaging way to identify those who supported the devotion. See Thomas Williams, *A View of*

core of their condemnation. The heart hovering in the middle of a canvas alone looked as though it had just been ripped out of Jesus' chest and was "represented" as well as "described" as an organ (Fig. 1). Sometimes the heart, the two canons complained, was included in biblical settings as a real persona (Fig. 2) and, at other times, it was painted along with Jesus, who was depicted as an emasculated, effeminate man, languorous if not sensuous in giving his heart away.<sup>49</sup> Flaming hearts hanging on church walls were another part of the unsettling story the two canons relayed to the Venetian Inquisitors. Whatever the pictorial narrative, De Passi and Sonzognò argued that these representations had no biblical foundations. The new devotion was a modern invention, at once unnecessary and undesirable.



Fig. 1: Devotional copper engraving representing the hearts of Jesus and Mary, 18th century, Italy. Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni, *I cuori della Madonna: il simbolo del cuore in oggetti e immagini della devozione mariana dal Seicento alla prima metà del Novecento* (Ravenna: Essegi, 1997), 37

The devotion to the heart of Mary developed alongside the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Although this practice did not attain the same significance, popularity, and place in Catholic devotion, it enhanced the feminine aspect of the devotion to heart of Jesus, namely the motherly and all-embracing quality of it. This image shows their two hearts together. These are depicted in their most impressive naturalistic form, namely as human organs, with the veins and arteries depicted visibly and with as much detail as in an anatomical study.

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*Religions: a Dictionary of All Religions, and Religious Denominations* (London: F. Westley, W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, and W. Baynes and Son, 1823), 89. See also Jonas, *France and the Cult*, 139.

<sup>49</sup> This is a reference to Pompeo Batoni's *Sacred Heart*, a painting created in 1767 for the altar in the northern side chapel of *Il Gesù* in Rome. See David Morgan, "Rhetoric of the Heart: Figuring the Body in Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus," in *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, ed. Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 98, 105.



Fig. 2: Sacred Heart with Crown of Thorns, painting, Radio Spada iconographic gallery dedicated to the cult of the Sacred Heart. Accessed February 27, 2014, <http://radiospada.org>

They explained that the new devotion was aggressively penetrating the religious landscape: indulgences were granted, confraternities were formed, and new prayers, orations, and rituals were either added to the old ones or else completely replaced them.<sup>50</sup> Even the old liturgy was giving way to new and unsettling ceremonies. Leaflets and devotional books containing images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus were being published and distributed within as well as outside of new religious groups; convent choruses were adorned with statues devoted to the new cult; and nuns' cells were filled with devotional objects carved in the shape of hearts. These ways of introducing new iconographical motifs into the catalogue of religious imagery were unprecedented and unsettling.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, dividing “the indivisible divine body of Christ” had not only iconographical but theological implications. The devotion and its representations undermined the unity of Christ's person, the teaching of the Trinity, and the one and indivisible nature of the Christian godhead. The cult of the Sacred Heart, De Passi and Sonzogno feared, was as much a threat to the universal body of the Church as to Christ's body. Indeed, the adorers of the sacred heart set themselves apart as a separate congregation in the midst of the overall religious community. Tracing a parallel between the devotion *to a part* rather than to the whole, on the one hand, and the urge the devotees felt to differentiate themselves within the body of believers, on the other,

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<sup>50</sup> Indulgences and confraternities were a significant source of revenue. All the priests who instituted the devotion in their parish were united in denying the existence of confraternities linked to the devotion, pointing out that there was no payment or money involved with the devotion, but only free alms from the devotees. See ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, letters from different parish priests, dated May and June 1781, c. 698 and following.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. Despite what the clergy who were promoting the cult maintained, the Sacred Heart was becoming a new source of revenue. Although no direct statement was ever made about revenues, this was certainly an issue at stake, as can be seen in the collateral documentation collected by the Inquisitors.

the canons linked the obvious risk of idolatry with the dreadful menace of a fracture within the Church congregations, thus making themselves in effect a separate part of the greater whole of the Church—and mirroring their exclusive “worship” of a single privileged part of Jesus with their own effective separation. In fact, they repeatedly used the more ominous term “schism,” revealing their fear (or the fear they hoped to evoke) that a religious fissure within the Church was possible, provoked by the virulence of the controversy over the new devotion.

The two canons took up their iconoclastic stance on the grounds that what they saw constituted an all-out assault on Catholicism. The new devotion, they argued, was like a plague, a form of idolatry that was infecting the believers and jeopardizing the older feasts, which were “most holy and safer”:

Such is the feast of the Most Holy Sacrament, observed every third Sunday in every parish with solemn processions and frequent Communion. Such is also the holy Mass, attracting everybody not only in the city but in the countryside. Such is the practice of meditating about the life, the Passion, the death, and the resurrection of the Savior in every parish and every family, by reciting the rosary every night. These and other pious and authorized practices are in danger of being suffocated by the new devotion. The abuses in the devotion should call for the respect of the true rule, as we have seen in the diocese of Brescia, where cardinal Querini replaced the expensive and extravagant processions involving sacred statues, more adorned and pompous than devout, with the more decent devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament, brought to the sick and the dying.<sup>52</sup>

Some of these celebrations, they continued, had taken root only after bishops had strenuously supported and encouraged them amongst the believers for years. Lastly, the Sacred Heart involved a new feast, thus undermining the most recent Venetian policy to restrict drastically the number of saints’ feasts.<sup>53</sup> De Passi and Sonzogno could hardly conceive that the Republic, after years of contentious debates within the Venetian patriciate and within the Church to abolish (or at least curb) religious holidays, was now ready to allow a new one. The letter

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<sup>52</sup> ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, Bergamo, June 3, 1780: “[t]al è quella del SS.mo Sagramento onorato particolarmente ogni terza domenica in tutte le parochie con solenne processione e con frequenti comunioni. Quella della santa messa che quasi da tutti non solo in città, ma ancor nelle ville ogni giorno si ascolta. Quella di meditar la vita, la passione, morte e risurrezione del Salvatore che si pratica nelle parochie e nelle private famiglie in recitando ogni sera il rosario. Ora questa ed altre pie ed autorizzate pratiche corron il pericolo d’esser come soffocate dalla nuova divozione. E laddove gli abusi e le disorbitanze nel divin culto dovrebbero richiamare alla vera norma, come nostra edificazione veggiamo essersi fatto nella vicina diocesi di Brescia, dove mediante specialmente la pastoral sollecitudine del fu Ecc.mo Cardinal Querini alle solennità e dispendiose processioni che far sole ansi in onore di sagre statue più ricche e pompose che divote si è sostituita maggior decenza e divozione al SS.mo Sagramento portato agli infermi. Noi all’incontro abbiamo tutto il motivo di temere che la nuova divozione soffochi le antiche più sode e più sicure e venga introducendo nuovi abusi e nuovi errori.” This statement was also an overt declaration of Jansenism, because Jansenists believed that ornaments of the church were an insult to the poor and an ostentatious display of money used unwisely. See Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, 192.

<sup>53</sup> See Simonetta Marin, ed., *Il culto dei santi e le feste popolari nella Terraferma veneta: l’inchiesta del Senato veneziano 1771-1772* (Vicenza: Angelo Colla Editore, 2007); and Simonetta Marin, “Negotiating the Sacred: Spirituality and Reform in the Age of Enlightenment in the Republic of Venice” (PhD diss., University of Miami, 2014), chapter 1, in which I examine the abolition of saints’ feasts in the Republic of Venice in its various stages.

asserted that the devotion to the sacred heart was rotten to the core.<sup>54</sup> The two authors of the letter proclaimed their “faith in [Bishop Dolfin’s] wisdom and his ability” to eradicate the devotion.<sup>55</sup> Thus they ended their manifesto by antagonizing the bishop who, as they and everyone else knew perfectly well, was a major advocate of the cult.

## **Bishop Dolfin**

Despite the fact that even in their letter to the Venetian authorities the two canons never explicitly mentioned the Bishop’s influence on the increasing importance of the devotion of the Sacred Heart in the religious life of Bergamo, Brescia, and the surrounding villages, it was common knowledge that the Bishop himself was behind this renewed religious enthusiasm.<sup>56</sup> When the devotion of the Sacred Heart was introduced in Bergamo in 1778, Dolfin promoted it in an “almost pontifical Mass.”<sup>57</sup> In his pastoral letter dated 1779, the Bishop urged his flock to embrace this devotion that excited believers’ hearts, making them feel that Jesus’ love was unconditional. Furthermore, in a public edict he had openly and publicly fostered the devotion of the Sacred Heart, promising indulgences for those who embraced its cult. In a private letter to the nuns of his city’s convents (which immediately became public), he urged them to continue undisturbed their devotion of the Sacred Heart by all means possible, even at the cost of their spiritual isolation. In fact, whenever a confessor called the devotion into question, the nuns were to leave the room immediately and cut off any relationship with him. Confronted with criticism and harsh reactions by those clerics of the city who opposed the Sacred Heart, the Bishop reinforced his episcopal authority over the convents and invoked his personal connection with the nuns.

As soon as Passi and Sonzogno involved the Venetian authorities, Dolfin felt compelled to respond to the open accusations. He set the tone of his reply by indirectly accusing the enemies of the Sacred Heart of iconoclasm. Not only had books and representations been removed from nuns’ cells, but images of the heart had been removed from churches and erased from paintings.<sup>58</sup> The devotion of the Sacred Heart, Dolfin claimed, had already been introduced by his predecessors, practiced by many saints, suggested by many important authors in the past, authorized by the popes, protected and defended by sovereigns in every part of the Catholic world, supported by bishops, and even embraced by many dioceses in the Venetian Republic. He thus claimed that he was following in the steps of many before him. Last but not least, he argued

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<sup>54</sup> ASV, Inquisitori di Stato: “V. Ecc.za Rev.ma mediante un maturo e posato esame di questo affare consocerà non solo col suo discernimento e colla sua capacità il marcio di questa divozione.”

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> In Brescia, the nearest city to Bergamo in Lombardy, the devotion of the Sacred Heart had already become a common practice as early as 1746, when Cardinal Angelo Maria Querini obtained indulgences for the confraternities of his diocese. ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, Letter of June 30, 1781.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Letter by Zustiniani, May 16, 1781. A Pontifical Mass was a solemn Mass celebrated according the ceremonies prescribed in the “*Cerimoniale Episcoporum*.” See *Cerimoniale Episcoporum* (Venice: Ufficio Liturgico-Curia Patriarcale di Venezia, 1984), 140-142.

<sup>58</sup> The indulgences that Bishop Dolfin had obtained for his diocese entailed a pilgrimage “to the image of the heart displayed on some altars.” This statement implied two things: first, once the images were removed or erased, as had occurred in Bergamo, the celebration of the Sacred Heart was put at risk and undermined, as the devotion was linked to the exhibition of and visits to the image; second, the representations of the heart were movable images that could be temporarily arranged during the time of orations, indulgences, and novenas, in sum, celebrations for the devotion, and then taken away. See ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, Letter by Gianfrancesco Canini, Bergamo, June 30, 1781.

that upon his own request the Holy See had granted him and his diocese indulgences for the cult. This was his final word on the theological issue.

In addition to being an apologia for the devotion, Dolfin's letter was a *j'accuse* against the high-profile Jansenist Pujati, the instigator of the religious crisis in Bergamo and in the Republic, depicting him as a troublemaker trying to undermine the Catholic faith from within. What irritated Bishop Dolfin was the fact that Pujati, "a simple monk" who was clearly a Jansenist, an enemy of Catholic orthodoxy, and not entitled to criticize episcopal resolutions and decisions in matters of faith and devotion, was attempting to undermine his authority. In his counterattack, Dolfin asked the Venetian authorities to support his request that the secular arm expel from his diocese and from the Venetian territories these enemies of the Catholic hierarchy "who were disturbing the tranquility of his people." Pujati was not the only one to be discredited and accused.<sup>59</sup> The two canons and the Inquisitor of Bergamo, Bandiera, were also blamed: Dolfin asked for all of them to be expelled from the Republic.

### **The *Consultore in Jure***

The *podestà* Zustiniani confirmed the involvement of the bishop in promoting the devotion in Bergamo and the surrounding territories, while pointing out that indulgences for those who practiced the devotion of the Sacred Heart were granted by the Pope upon Dolfin's petition. The Inquisitors of State asked the *consultore in jure* his opinion, and the latter took the matter into his own hands.<sup>60</sup> Before analyzing in detail the issues at play, Giovanni Battista Bilesimo emphasized how "there are always two sides to every story." Insofar as the Bishop had simply neglected to present or consider one of them, Bilesimo would provide a brief summary of the ongoing dispute. Interestingly, the other side of the story had been offered, in detail, by De Passi and Sonzogno; but the *consultore* wanted to make a point about the Bishop's agenda. In his report, Bilesimo underscored how the whole question had become an issue only when the devotion turned into a public affair. "The numerous confraternities, the solemnity of the devotion, the rituals and specific practices had brought the cult to the attention of some theologians," Bilesimo observed, "who, after having thoroughly and rigidly examined it, at first disapproved of it, and then condemned it." The cult of the heart, continued Bilesimo, was rejected because it "is childish, superstitious, and tends toward Nestorianism."<sup>61</sup> However, this devotion—Bilesimo noted almost in passing—had been instituted by the Jesuits some time before. Thus, in a short paragraph so condensed that it leaves no doubt about his attitude towards the issue, the *consultore* summarized the history of the devotion. Since the Jesuits had to be credited for the institution of the devotion, it did not make much sense in his opinion to delve

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<sup>59</sup> ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, Letter by Dolfin, n.p., n.d.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Legal opinion by Bilesimo, n.p. The *consultore's* report is also not dated. The *consultori in jure* were in charge of disentangling difficult issues when religious concerns were at stake and, as often happened, intertwined with secular issues.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Legal opinion by Bilesimo, n.p., n.d.: "[I]a divozione al Cuor di Gesù fu instituita già tempo dai Gesuiti. Finché si trattene fra privati e dentro certi limiti non ebbe contradditori e avversarij, ma prodottasi poi in pubblico con numerose associazioni di divoti, con pompa di funzioni, con riti, e pratiche particolari trasse a sé l'attenzione di alcuni teologi che esaminatala in tutto il suo complesso la disapprovarono prima, poi si diedero a combatterla colla voce e colle stampe fino a condannarla nel modo che vien praticata, come contraria allo spirito della chiesa, puerile, superstiziosa, e tendente al nestorianismo e pelagianismo." Nestorianism stressed the distinction between the human and the divine in Christ to such a degree that it considered the "two persons" of Christ, one human and the other divine. It was considered a heretical doctrine and was condemned in the fifth century. See Ted A. Campbell, *Christian Confessions: a Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1996), 25, 43-44.

into other details, and therefore he failed to mention Mary Margaret Alacoque, the mystics, and the saints who were the founders of the devotion. Bilesimo did not bother to conceal his condescension toward what he considered a frivolous case and a frivolous plea. However, what emerges even more strikingly from the dismissive tone of the *consultore* was that the short paragraph describing the issues emphasized the deep contradictions engrained in the history of devotion; that is, the Sacred Heart was *de facto* a cult, even though it had been considered by theologians to be an essentially futile devotion with heretical undertones.

The *consultore* did not want to examine (and be dragged into) the ongoing—and wearisome—disputes concerning the Sacred Heart. He therefore avoided the topic. His solution was to let things quiet down by imposing silence on both parties. He recommended removing all the books on the matter, while forbidding the circulation of new ones. The devotion of the Sacred Heart could not be condemned, Bilesimo noted, as it had been endorsed with papal approval in the form of indulgences, and fostered through Masses and offices. Nonetheless, what he called “the accessories” around which the polemics swirled, namely associations, offices, prayers, devotional booklets, paintings, and images should all conform to “the rules of *purity, gravity* and *decorum* required by the Catholic religion” (my italics). Bilesimo added that “the bishop *should* be the one in charge of such responsibility, not the Venetian tribunal.” In other words, Dolfin was to regulate piety in his diocese, rather than asking the secular authorities to do so.

Bilesimo was unequivocal about the Bishop’s responsibility as the primary guardian of the faith. More precisely, the *consultore* pointed out how the Bishop was not carrying out his role as a pastor. With this he finished his report, leaving the Inquisitors with the feeling that he was not at all sympathetic to what he considered a trivial ecclesiastical matter about a questionable devotion. *Purity, gravity, and decorum* were the guidelines Bilesimo emphasized for regulating piety, as per Muratori’s directives. These three terms constituted a *trinity*, as congenial to the Jansenist’s sensibilities as it was incompatible with the sensuous and emotional religiosity of the disgruntled ex-Jesuits. Bilesimo’s reticence in dealing with the issue should not be misunderstood: he could barely hide his personal conviction that the secular institutions had to withdraw before the Church’s authority. The devotees of the heart were pursuing a devotion that was not in tune with the Catholic *Aufklärung*, but the Church had favored it in many instances. However, as it turned out, that support was ambiguous, to say the least.

### **Rome: an ambivalent Church**

#### **A process of enforcement, resistance, and compromise**

Bergamo was an exceptional and belated example of the ways in which the conflict over the devotion was unfolding between proponents and opponents in Italy. The city in many ways represented a microcosm of the wider debate that had begun in the first half of the seventeenth century, as the devotion spread beyond the closed doors of convents and monasteries. Eighteenth-century Bergamo represented the controversy at work. De Passi and Sonzogno did not simply echo that controversy; in fact, they revealed how it was playing out in a local context, in which both Jansenists and Jesuits had deep and powerful affiliations. More importantly, what was happening in Bergamo reverberated outside the city: it re-actualized the broader theoretical controversy and linked the periphery with the center.

At the center, namely Rome, the devotion of the Sacred Heart had attracted an early and favorable consensus from various ecclesiastics and confraternities. But it received a wary reception from the official Church. If friends and enemies of the devotion were outside as well as



inside the Roman Church, many nuances existed between these two poles, including a level of true disinterest or a very tepid interest in the cult. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the devotion was repeatedly rejected, mostly on the grounds of its graphic representations and its insistence on the materiality or carnality of the heart, rather than on its metaphorical implications. In the second half of the century, the devotion was still stirring controversies.

The Sacred Heart not only revealed the Church's internal split between the Jansenists and the Jesuits, but also brought out concerns about the ability to regulate worship within the Church through the approval and authorization of emergent devotions. Lack of approval or censure left room for accommodation, and fostered dialogue and negotiation between those who supported the new devotion and those who opposed it within a divided Church. When the people and the historical circumstances involved in this process changed, the dynamics of the interaction changed too. Personal inclinations, beliefs, and connections of the various popes at various times altered the premises underlying the official diffidence toward a devotion that was raising theological as well as iconographical issues, despite the local recognition that it had obtained. Because of the ambivalence generated by its simultaneous acceptance and outright rejection of the devotion, the Church sought grounds for compromise.

Among the popes of this era, Benedict XIV (papacy years 1740-1758) was certainly not a supporter of the Sacred Heart. Even before he became pope, while he was a member of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (as Cardinal Lambertini), he had not given his approval for the devotion.<sup>62</sup> With Clement XIII (who was pope from 1758-1769) the situation changed. Sympathetically inclined towards the Jesuits, he was part of the Arch-confraternity of Saint Theodore on the Palatine Hill, under the name of Friar Charles of Saint Ignatius. The goal of the confraternity was to spread the devotion of the Sacred Heart—an activity achieved mostly through the distribution of images. In 1767, during the pontificate of Clement XIII, Pompeo Batoni painted a canvas dedicated to the Sacred Heart. The work represents Christ showing (almost offering) his heart to the viewer, who engages in and becomes part of the scene (Fig. 3). This painting was and still is one of the most reproduced images of the devotion, and has been copied and printed continually since its first appearance on the altar in the northern side of the church of Il Gesù in Rome. Although Batoni's image immediately became the model for private as well as public images of the devotion, the Sacred Heart did not obtain universal recognition within Catholic liturgy.

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<sup>62</sup> Mario Rosa, "Benedetto XIV," *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani: Enciclopedia Treccani*, vol. 8 (1966), accessed February 28, 2014, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/papa-benedetto-xiv\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/papa-benedetto-xiv_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).



Fig. 3: Pompeo Batoni, *The Sacred Heart of Jesus*, oil on copper, 1767, Church of Il Gesù, Rome

During the pontificate of Clement XIV (1769-1774) the process leading toward official papal approval of the devotion came to an impasse. The Pope had to deal with the growing opposition to the Society of Jesus expressed by the European monarchies. The history of the Sacred Heart was therefore linked to the mixed fortunes of the religious order that had done the most to promote and spread the devotion.

A turning point occurred in 1781 when, during the pontificate and under the aegis of Pius VI, Pompeo Batoni painted seven monumental altarpieces for the Estrela Basilica in Lisbon, all of which were dedicated to the Sacred Heart. The series was a significant commission ordered by the Queen of Portugal, Maria I Braganza. The Queen figured in the highly allegorical paintings as protector of the devotion as well as of the Catholic Church in the world. It was a statement of political importance, for it was a visual manifesto of the reconciliation between Rome and Portugal, whose relations had broken off after the suppression of the Jesuits in 1758.<sup>63</sup> Here the political aspect or the political relevance of the devotion clearly emerges because the heart became both cause and result of a new alliance between throne and altar. This was an important step in counteracting the increasing isolation that the Holy See was experiencing in Enlightenment Europe.

Regardless of the ebb and flow in the devotion's endorsement, the wholesale rejection of the devotion for which the Jansenists called was doomed to failure. The Sacred Heart had developed strong roots in Catholic devotion as well as in politics. Although the devotion was not yet

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth Maxwell, *Pombal: Paradox of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge-New York-Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 71-84.

acknowledged as universal within the Church, it was no longer a private cult celebrated solely in the secrecy of cloisters. Not only had it left the nuns' cells, but it had spread widely among the Catholic faithful. Numerous indulgences had been issued to nobles and bishops who promoted and celebrated the devotion. In addition to France, where it had arisen initially, the devotion of the Sacred Heart spread within Spain, Poland, Hungary, and Italy. In the Venetian Republic, Bishop Dolfìn was not alone: the last two Patriarchs of Venice, Giovanni Bragadin and Federico Maria Giovanelli, were also ardent supporters of the devotion.<sup>64</sup> Following Bragadin's plea in 1765, Clement granted the city indulgences for the devotion. The cult of Christ's heart had first made its appearance there in 1732, when a *Compagnia del Sacro Cuore* was founded at the Church of San Canciano. There a specific altar was dedicated to the new devotion. The convent of Santa Caterina was soon run by nuns of the Society of the Sacred Heart and, increasingly, nuns of various Venetian convents became devoted to the heart.<sup>65</sup> The devotion was already popular with the faithful by the mid-eighteenth century in Venice, having been fostered also by the early circulation of texts containing prayers and hymns to the heart. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Sacred Heart of Jesus had entered the religious literary scene in the figurative and expressive language of Francesco Maria Ghirlandi's *Ghirlanda d'affetti poetici al Sacro Cuore*, in which the hearts of both Christ and Mary were the subject of the opening sonnet.<sup>66</sup> In 1742, the major works of Leonardo da Porto Maurizio were published in Venice; he also aggressively promoted the devotion.<sup>67</sup> By the second half of the eighteenth century, the Sacred Heart had found a place in devotional literature, prayers, and novenas. Orations to the Heart appeared alongside those for Mary, Christ, and the saints.<sup>68</sup> At about the same time, the Remondini also published in Venice the entire work of Francesco de' Liguori, who was one of the most strenuous supporters of the devotion of the Sacred Heart, to which he dedicated prayers, novenas, and songs. Artists soon started to devote their craft to the devotion. This is an intriguing part of the story that is still mysterious, because the hearts painted in this early stage of the devotion sooner or later disappeared.

Between 1742 and 1745, Bartolomeo Letterini painted a *pala* representing the Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart, with the flaming heart enveloped by the crown of thorns in the upper part of the image (Fig. 4).<sup>69</sup> The altarpiece was completely repainted between the middle and the end of the nineteenth century; the heart was discovered during the 1985-86 restoration.<sup>70</sup> But it was with Tiepolo's "Martyrdom of Saint Agatha," painted for the church of the Benedictine nuns

<sup>64</sup> de Fumel, *Il culto dell'amore divino*, 44.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>66</sup> Johanna Fassl, *Sacred Eloquence: Giambattista Tiepolo and the Rhetoric of the Altarpiece* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2010), 192. The story of those two hearts is very much intertwined. It also sheds more light on the feminine quality of this devotion, which would remain a strong and important feature throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See Emma Fattorini, *Il culto mariano tra Ottocento e Novecento: simboli e devozioni: ipotesi e prospettiva di ricerca* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1999).

<sup>67</sup> Leonardo da Porto Maurizio (1676-1751) was a leading figure in Roman devotional life in the first half of the century. His work launched the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome, and it spread afterward. See Stefania Nanni, *Roma religiosa nel Settecento: spazi e linguaggi dell'identità cristiana* (Rome: Carocci, 2000).

<sup>68</sup> *Raccolta di Panegirici Sopra Tutte Le Festività di Nostro Signore, di Maria Vergine e de' Santi...*, Tomo 6 (Venice: Girolamo Dorigoni, 1762), 62-71, 98-105, 197-208; *Raccolta di fervorose orazioni...* (Florence: Gaetano Cambiagi, 1778), 14. See also Serafino Petrobelli, *Panegirici ed altri sacri ragionamenti*, vol. 1 (Venice: Remondini, 1752).

<sup>69</sup> Fassl, *Sacred Eloquence*, 187-188.

<sup>70</sup> Antonio Niero, "Spiritualità popolare e dotta," in *La Chiesa di Venezia nel Settecento*, ed. Bruno Bertoli (Venice: Edizioni Studium Cattolico Veneziano, 1993), 144.

around 1755 at Lendinara (Patria del Friuli), that the Sacred Heart of Jesus emerged as a devotion to Christ.<sup>71</sup> The heart, isolated and encircled by a crown of thorns, appeared not “to counterbalance the powerful presence of the female saint” but rather to share the pictorial space with the saint.<sup>72</sup> The nuns were devoted to the heart, and that was the object of the painting (along with Saint Agatha). This was a device that allowed Tiepolo to paint the Sacred Heart as a separate organ, yet with a link to an established holy image. The heart was painted at the top of the canvas, on a smaller movable lunette that later mysteriously was lost and has now disappeared.



Fig. 4: Bartolomeo Letterini, *Madonna Addolorata con il sacro cuore di Gesù*, oil on canvas, 1730, Church of San Canciano, Venice

It was not the first time that Tiepolo had painted the subject. In 1737, a “Martyrdom” was also painted for the basilica of Saint Anthony in Padua. On that occasion, Tiepolo had painted Saint Agatha looking up at Saint Peter, whose appearance was followed by the miraculous healing of her wounds. That heavenly vision in the upper part of the altarpiece at Lendinara was replaced with the Sacred Heart.<sup>73</sup> However, that heart was not immediately acknowledged as being a representation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and, as a matter of fact, not all art historians today accept this attribution or the juxtaposition of the two different devotional scenes: the one

<sup>71</sup> The canvas is now in the Staatliche Museum in Berlin. Keith Christiansen, *Giambattista Tiepolo, 1696-1770* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996), 239; Fassel, *Sacred Eloquence*, 166.

<sup>72</sup> Art historian Fassel’s interpretation differs from my own because she sees the heart as almost incidental, while I argue that it is in fact very likely the real protagonist in the painting. *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>73</sup> Christiansen, *Giambattista Tiepolo*, 239.

with Saint Agatha's martyrdom and the tribute to the growing devotion of the Sacred Heart.<sup>74</sup> In 1766 another sacred heart, this one painted by Antonio Gabrieli, was displayed on the altar of the SS. Martyrs in the Church of the Jesuits in Belluno. This Sacred Heart too was removed during the Napoleonic era.<sup>75</sup> Thus the devotion to the Heart of Jesus in Venice as well as in the rest of the Dominion had become a feature in popular devotion, fostered by bishops, cherished by new confraternities, celebrated by painters, and honored by future saints such as Leonardo da Porto Maurizio and Alfonso de' Liguori. The heart was increasingly appearing in existing liturgical practices in Venetian territory.

### **Inquisitors seeking advice**

The proliferation of books that vigorously promoted the devotion and the introduction of new iconographical motifs did not simply raise a heated debate. The argument instead rose to an entirely new level, involving the local Inquisitors who found themselves caught in the middle between the factions. They were confronted both with texts that seemed to be multiplying despite being forbidden, and with images that they did not recognize as part of the tradition. Inquisitorial pleas for guidelines about what to publish and what to exhibit reveal both their dismay about the devotion and the Church's ambivalence towards it. In the process of censorship, the individual personalities of the Inquisitors played key roles. On the whole, the Inquisitors were mostly at odds with the novelty of the devotion, which was nevertheless championed by the local bishops and clergy.

This was true in Italy beyond the Republic of Venice. During Benedict XIV's pontificate, other Inquisitors asked for guidance regarding books and pictures about the devotion, which some priests had displayed in their churches.<sup>76</sup> The Inquisitor of Perugia, for instance, acknowledged the validity of the devotion, since the presence of the heart was a recurrent motif within the mystical tradition. He also noticed that some books had been published which were in fact prohibited. Nonetheless, he was mostly troubled by images of "a wounded heart that had been arranged over altars."<sup>77</sup> He at once feared this and wondered if the separation of the heart from Christ's body was the first step toward other "visual novelties." The exhibition of the heart might encourage the idea that other parts of Christ's body could be dissected and represented alone, in a sort of dismembering process that he personally found disquieting. Moreover, the books and images had not received approval from the Sacred Congregation of Rites and Ceremonies, the Roman institution in charge of disentangling this sort of issue. Interestingly, concern about the inherent risk of isolating the heart, which might be a dangerous precedent that

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<sup>74</sup> Filippo Pedrocchi, *Tiepolo* (Florence: Art Dossier Giunti, 1996), 48; Rodolfo Pallucchini, *Storia di Venezia: temi*, in *L'arte*, vol. 2 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Treccani, 1995), 363.

<sup>75</sup> Flavio Vizzuti, "Antonio Gabrieli," *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani: Enciclopedia Treccani*, vol. 51 (1998), accessed February 28, 2014, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-gabrieli\\_\(Dizionario\\_Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-gabrieli_(Dizionario_Biografico)/). Gabrieli was born in Belluno (1694-1789) and was a local painter who did not attain the fame of other Venetian artists. But he did achieve some recognition during his career, which took place almost entirely between Belluno and Treviso.

<sup>76</sup> *Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede* (hereafter ACDF), *St. St. C 4-p*; in particular, the correspondence with the Inquisitor of Perugia.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 2r, August 5, 1752: "[s]ul fondamento che accordandosi di permettere sopra gli altari pitture, o quadri che altro non contengono se non il cuore ferito del NSGC, possa con tal'esempio venirsi alla temuta divisione di altro suo santissimo membro, come V.R. teme, hanno creduto qti Emi [...] che lei proibisca la collocazione sopra gli altari delle immagini o pitture rappresentanti un cuore ferito."

could lead to a focus on other bodily parts of Christ, had been an element of the rationale of Benedict XIV's rejection when he was still a cardinal.

Returning now to the rest of the Venetian Dominion, outside Bergamo books that had been prohibited by the Index were nevertheless printed locally. Especially in the Patria del Friuli, the extreme northeast corner of the Republic, censors must have turned a blind eye. How that happened did not completely remain a covert affair; the Bishop himself had consented to the contested publications. The Inquisitor was puzzled by this, and turned to the Sacred Congregation. His request was for clearer guidance, but in the process he exposed the contradictions that the Church itself was perpetuating about this matter.

The Inquisitor in the Friulian town of Udine, Francesco Benoffi, had been dealing with this issue since 1753, and he was not pleased by the latest developments.<sup>78</sup> In Udine as well as in Concordia, nuns who were fervently devoted to the Sacred Heart were "arbitrarily" spreading the devotion and introducing new hymns that celebrated the Sacred Heart in the liturgy.<sup>79</sup> The devotion had been inaugurated during the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the Monastery of St. Vitus in the diocese of Concordia. Those litanies sung in praise of the heart had not received Church approval, so Benoffi wrote to Rome asking for guidelines, pointing out that to introduce novelties in the liturgy was an abuse. Clement VIII had reaffirmed this principle in 1601 with a decree establishing that any new litanies needed a canonical authorization. While for private cults (namely those practiced outside the official liturgy in the privacy of one's own home, chapel, or cell) the validation of the Inquisitor was enough, for public ceremonies the Sacred Congregation of Rites was required. It is worth noting that in both cases the Bishop was not, jurisdictionally speaking, in charge of this matter. Without entering directly into a conflict with the Bishop, the Inquisitor Benoffi nevertheless refused to back down from his position. He therefore sent books as well as manuscripts promoting the cult to Rome, where the content could be examined by the Sacred Congregation.

Benoffi also stated that "part of the populace [was] bewildered by these orations, which it [did] not recognize as belonging to the Roman tradition."<sup>80</sup> Although those litanies had been approved in the Church of Saint Theodore in Rome, he believed they had to be prohibited in Udine, as well as in all the churches and convents of the Venetian Dominion.<sup>81</sup> People praying incessantly all those Latin orations, argued Benoffi, "reduce the devotion to a pure *material event*, [and] most of them leave the church the same way they came in" (my italics).<sup>82</sup> By saying "material," the Inquisitor most likely intended "mechanical," as he was referring to the fact that commoners did not understand Latin, and therefore the real meaning of the new prayers was for them completely obscure. The choice of the word was not casual or accidental; *material* alluded to the major criticism that the enemies of the devotion had posed concerning the carnality of the

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<sup>78</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1753-1754*, cc. 57-63; *C.L. 1771-1772*, cc. 102-13.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, *C.L. 1753-1754*, c. 52.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*: "[u]na parte del popolo cui sono note le supreme proibizioni si maraviglia in udire queste preci, che non gli sembrano uniformi allo spirito della Chiesa Romana."

<sup>81</sup> The Arch-Confraternity of the Sacred Heart was first established in Italy, and was founded by the famous preacher Leonardo da Porto Maurizio in 1729. Leonardo was an indefatigable promoter of the devotion: see above n. 89. For an extensive study of the devotion of the Sacred Heart in Rome and the role of Porto Maurizio in spreading both it and the Via Crucis, see Seydl, *The Sacred Heart*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* *C.L. 1753-1754*, c.58: "[r]esta dunque esser proibite le preci introdotte nel culto pubblico dalle Madri Salesiane, e dietro loro da molte chiese e monasteri di monache in Dominio Veneto, e richiedono un opportuno provvedimento il quale può stabilirsi o in maniera istrutiva a vantaggio del popolo, il quale con le sole preci latine reduce la divozione a una *materialità*, o per lo più esce di chiesa come v'entró."

heart, namely its troubling physical verisimilitude. This indicates Benoffi's awareness of the controversy about the "material heart," and makes clear which side he was taking.

However, contrary to what he may have thought, eliminating the devotion was not an easy task. The cult was already deeply rooted in the Church and had gained many devotees. Perhaps the devotional hymns and prayers, although new and in Latin, were not as disturbing to the devotees' sensibilities as Benoffi claimed. The Archbishop had allowed the celebration of the cult, especially in the monasteries and convents; however, the Inquisitor wanted to know on behalf of the archbishop "which prayers could be substituted for those he had decided to eliminate during the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and on the feast of the Sacred Heart."<sup>83</sup> From these words it would seem that the Bishop, who was the main arbiter in the introduction of devotions and new liturgical songs, was as willing as Benoffi was to remit the matter to the Congregation. Benoffi's attitude was unapologetic; behind his apparent deference in asking for guidelines, he was already opposed to the Sacred Heart, and intended to curb those songs that had not been approved, as well as to remove the suspicious books. Moreover, he wanted to know whether he could remove any paintings that represented the Sacred Heart from churches. After all, the dissemination of images of the Sacred Heart was proving to be the most effective way to propagate the devotion.<sup>84</sup>

In 1772, Francesco Benoffi was again at the forefront of the Sacred Heart affair; he was Inquisitor in Padua at this time, and was still facing the same issues.<sup>85</sup> In Udine, he had managed to eliminate the representations of the Sacred Heart from churches, following an order of the Congregation. In Padua, he wanted to censure the book *Biglietti confidenziali critici*, which fostered the devotion of the Sacred Heart.<sup>86</sup> The book was a harsh refutation of Camillo Blasi's *De Festo Cordis Iesu dissertatio commonitoria cum notis, et monumentis selectis*. Benoffi's "Dissertation about the Sacred Heart," published in 1772, contained one of the sharpest criticisms of the cult.<sup>87</sup> The anonymous author of the *Biglietti*, who was also promoting the circulation of images of the Sacred Heart, provoked the Inquisitor's intervention and taxed his patience. In his report to Rome, Benoffi did not hide his exasperation at having to deal again with what he clearly considered a matter that should have long been closed. The prohibited book, complained Benoffi, had been introduced by the young director of the Seminary in the city, a friend of the Jesuits who acted secretly to print texts and pamphlets, and who resorted to the

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., c.63: "[I]’Ecc.mo Sig. Cardinale Patriarca Arcivescovo in uno stesso tempo avendo premura di far eseguire i supremi loro decreti, e considerando la difficoltà di levare affatto una divozione, la quale aveva tanta apparenza di approvazioni, senza dare ammirazione e amministrare al popolo materia da ragionare, finalmente è venuto in deliberazione di presentarsi con una sua lettera in Sacra Congregazione dei Riti e di già l’ha fatto, chiedendole quali precisi abbia a sostituire alle proibite nell’esposizioni dell’Augustissimo Sacramento e nella festa che celebrasi a onore del Sacro Cuore di Gesù.”

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. Seydl's detailed study focuses on the development of the devotion in Rome, Emilia Romagna, and Portugal. While investigating the diffusion of popular prints and commissioned paintings that were mostly inspired by Batoni's canvases, Seydl also traced the growth of the devotion from the center to the periphery.

<sup>85</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1771-1772*, cc. 102-10.

<sup>86</sup> This book (*Biglietti confidenziali critici contra il libro del sig. Camillo Blasi avvocato romano stampato in Roma quest'anno 1771*) was the work of the theologian Giambattista Faure (1702-1779). In his *Biglietti confidenziali*, he refuted the Jansenist theology, which he considered an invalid and insincere critique of the devotion. Giuseppe Pignatelli, "Giambattista Faure," *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani: Enciclopedia Treccani*, vol. 45 (1995), accessed February 28, 2014, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giambattista-faure\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giambattista-faure_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

<sup>87</sup> Camillo Blasi, *De Festo Cordis Iesu dissertatio commonitoria cum notis, et monumentis selectis* (Rome: Benedetto Franzesi, 1771).

commonly used strategy of creating fake imprints to avoid censorship.<sup>88</sup> The publication of forbidden texts seems to have been permitted by ecclesiastics who hid themselves behind a vow of silence. Astutely, the Inquisitor suspected that the anonymous work had been written by several “pens” in Rome—allegedly cardinals and theologians—who then sent their manuscripts to Padua, where they were copied, printed, and made ready for the market dealing with devotional literature.

In sum, Benoffi made it sound like a conspiracy. Indeed, the highest authorities in Rome were split into two conflicting parties concerning the devotion. Each side played an important role in keeping in contact with, guiding, directing, controlling, and influencing their respective adherents in the Venetian Dominion. The Inquisitor claimed that the book he was examining was the private property of one of the most powerful families in Padua, who threatened to appeal to influential patrons in Venice to have it returned.<sup>89</sup> As discussed earlier, both in the Republic and in Rome, a polarized situation existed with powerful and influential exponents on both sides, each of which was able to build up a network of supporting allies to counter the efforts of opponents. The director of the local Jesuit school disclosed to Benoffi that Camillo Blasi, the target of the anonymous book, was a friend of the Pope, and that rumors were spreading that the real author of the book was in fact Clement XIV himself, who had allegedly written the pamphlet while still a cardinal. Enlarged and revised, the book was then published under Blasi’s name, although it was thought that he “would have not been capable of such an enterprise.”<sup>90</sup> Most of the copies were sent to France, where the devotion also had many affiliates and enemies. The statement ended with a rather cryptic sentence: “[t]his pope is a real enigma.”<sup>91</sup> That the book, which is still attributed to Camillo Blasi, was suspected to be the work of the Pope is rather telling. In those turbulent years preceding and following the suppression of the Jesuits, the level of mutual distrust within the Church was reflected in the correspondence between the periphery and the center.

Beyond the ambiguities and contradictions within the Church, there was also another important phenomenon in play. In the aftermath of the Council of Trent, when the Inquisitors moved increasingly into arenas that had been the preserve of the bishops, they entered into multiple jurisdictional conflicts. At the end of the eighteenth century, the opposite occurred: while the institution of the Inquisition was breaking down, the bishops were reclaiming their leading role in revitalizing the Church.

### **The Sacred Heart, the Eucharist, and the ultimate disrobing of Christ**

As were other bishops of his time, Dolfin was interested in reviving Christianity by introducing and allowing the devotion of the Sacred Heart, and by adding new prayers for this into the liturgy. These prayers were intimate and personal, and different from prayers to the saints, those helpful advocates who were receptive to requests for favors and pleas for assistance.

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<sup>88</sup> This consisted of adding a fictitious printer, date, and place of publication. It was a common strategy in order to avoid censorship; in Venice it was done even by the secular authorities. On this topic, see Mario Infelise, “Falsificazioni di stato,” in *False date: repertorio delle licenze di stampa veneziane con falso luogo di edizione* (1740-1797), ed. Patrizia Bravetti and Orfea Granzotto (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2009), 7-27.

<sup>89</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1771-1772*, c. 103.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.: “[f]a strepito in Roma un libro dell’avvocato Blasi già tempo amico del Papa, che batte la divozione del Cuore di Gesù e si tiene sia il voto dello stesso papa quando era Cradinale, in oggi ampliato e finito e stampato sotto il nome del Blasi, *ma egli non è capace di tanto.*” (my italics)

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.: “[n]on si capisce questo papa.”



Sacred Heart, I adore you with my most humble feelings, and along with the angels and the saints I love you and I give you my heart. Here it is! Let it enter you through the lance wound and join my heart with yours, so they will never be separated again.<sup>92</sup>

This excerpt, from a prayer said by the nuns in the Bergamo convent, celebrates a powerful, “physical” communion with Christ. It represents a sensuous mysticism, an emotional as well as physical connection between Christ and the faithful. This troubled the adversaries of the devotion, whose austere religious sensibilities were gravely offended by such extreme effusions. In order to understand the relation between the Sacred Heart and the Eucharist, and the ways in which the similarities between the two caused anxiety to the Jansenists, I return here to the words and actions of the Jansenist theologian Pujati, who had been active in the Bergamo disputes. While the use of Christ’s body in the devotion to the Sacred Heart was the original matter of contention, Pujati pushed the dispute further, arguing that the new cult violated the sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>93</sup> By setting these two practices in opposition, Pujati was suggesting that the cult of the Sacred Heart desecrated the integrity of the Church’s core practices.

Before analyzing his argument in detail, it should be emphasized that the nexus between the heart and the Eucharist was not an invention of the devotees of the Sacred Heart. The thirteenth-century devotion of the Sacred Heart was in fact explicitly a Eucharistic devotion; that is to say, the need for direct contact with God was expressed through mystical Eucharistic piety in the form of the cult of the Sacred Heart.<sup>94</sup> Eucharistic piety was in fact, as Jeffrey Hamburger has put it, “the hallmark of female spirituality during the late Middle Ages.” The disembodied heart of Jesus, which became the main emblem of this spirituality, “stood by synecdoche for the whole of Christ’s body.”<sup>95</sup> In turn, the Eucharist, i.e. the actual flesh and body of Christ, was strongly associated with the Passion. The Eucharist represented Christ’s Passion and was the only sacrament that was both offered and received, exemplifying the exchange between God and humankind. During the Middle Ages, fascination with the Passion and Christ’s body produced a rich array of variations on the theme. As Bynum argues, the motif of the humanization of Christ “grew out of twelfth-century concern for imitating the human Christ.”<sup>96</sup> In medieval literature, body depictions and body metaphors were the most common means of communicating the transcendental experience of mysticism. Thus all of Christ’s bodily parts were seen as testimony

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<sup>92</sup> ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, the letter is undated but is part of a Bishop’s letter to Venice, dated January 31, 1781: “[o]razione al Sacro Piagato Cuor di Gesù da recitarsi con tutto il cuore d’avanti al Ss.mo Sacramento. Sacro Cuore che siete la parte principale di quel corpo Ss.mo unito isostaticamente al Divin Verbo, tempio vivo dello Spirito Santo, glorificator sommo dell’Eterno Padre, tesoro immenso di ogni grazia, abisso profondo di ogni virtù, io vi adoro con i più umili sentimenti insieme cogli angeli e coi santi, vi amo, vi dono tutto il mio povero cuor. Deh! Fatelo entrare per l’apertura che in voi fece la lancia ed unitelo a voi si strettamente che non abbia a separarsi mai più. Amen.”

<sup>93</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1782*, n. 4.

<sup>94</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 228-48.

<sup>95</sup> In tracing the development of the luxuriant visual representations of the heart, Hamburger explained the link between the heart and the Eucharist, whose representations overlapped, complemented, and referred to each other: Hamburger, *Nuns As Artists*, 125.

<sup>96</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 90.

of his humanization.<sup>97</sup> According to Leo Steinberg, even the depiction of Christ's penis was not a naturalistic aspect of the artwork, but rather a reflection of a contemporary theological trend that focused less on Jesus' divinity than on his humanity.<sup>98</sup> The devotion to the five wounds of Jesus grew out of this fertile devotional terrain as well, becoming more and more intense in the High Middle Ages, where it tended to concentrate on the lance wound in his side and on the broken and pierced heart that lay within. As part of such a humanizing process, to expose the wounds of Christ meant to expose his frail humanity too. To see was also to feel *for* and *with*; this meant to have compassion, from the Latin word *compassio* or 'co-suffering.' In Alacoque's first encounter with Christ, before the intimate exchange of hearts, she lay on his wounded chest: an act of compassion turned into an exchange of mutual affection.<sup>99</sup> The new prayer uttered by the nuns in Bergamo was not as new as De Passi and Sonzogno, as well as the author of the "Dissertation about the Sacred Heart" document, seemed to imply. It was part of a long tradition in which a deep and intimate relationship with Christ, his body, and his suffering was visually represented and linguistically expressed.

Pujati's argument was not only a personal opposition to that long Christian tradition but also a rejection of the mystical spirituality that the Enlightenment had identified and condemned as a remnant of Baroque piety. The holy Eucharist, he argued, was the true sacrament of love in the indivisible persona of Jesus Christ, offered in "flesh, blood, soul and divinity."<sup>100</sup> The *Cordicoli*, Pujati contended, cleverly played with words in order to tailor the devotion to the Congregation's expectations. They had defended themselves from the Decree of 1756, which took issue with the materiality of the heart, by "substituting the word 'charity' for the word 'muscle'."<sup>101</sup> Here again, the issue at stake was deeper than it might seem, since the muscle with such overt physicality was moving away from that spirituality which Pujati, as a Jansenist, saw as the core of devotional life. He singled out what he perceived to be deceitful rhetoric, meant to circumvent the Congregation's resolution. When Bishop Dolfin had explained the meaning of the heart for the Bergamo faithful, he carefully chose words that echoed the symbolic meaning of the heart: "[Let's pray for] the ardent charity of Jesus Christ, our Savior, whose sacred heart is the throne, the center and the victim, so that we can easily conform to the image of the Son of God through his mortification, suffering, and torments, and the imitation of his sublime virtues, as in the words he pronounced: Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart."<sup>102</sup> The Bishop therefore focused on the two aspects of the devotion that were acceptable to the Congregation: charity and redemption.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>98</sup> See Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Richard Trexler focused instead on the sexual character of Christ's nudity, arguing that the exposure of intimate parts of his body could have aroused erotic feelings in the viewers. See Richard Trexler, "Gendering Jesus Crucified," in *Iconography at the Crossroads*, ed. Brendan Cassidy (Princeton, NJ: Index of Christian Art, 1993), 107-120.

<sup>99</sup> This was a biblical reference captured in the picture of the Last Supper when, as in the Gospel of St. John 13:25, the Evangelist laid his head upon the heart of Christ. John Eudes (1601-1680), considered one of the founders of the devotion of the Sacred Heart, was a near-contemporary of Alacoque and also was particularly fond of such sentimental images conveying, in his specific case, both the devotion of the hearts of Mary and Christ. See Wright, *Heart Speaks to Heart*.

<sup>100</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1782*, cc. 228-263; this also contains a pamphlet published anonymously in 1780 in Cesena, Faenza, and Venice (by Simone Occhi), the title of which is "Lettera del Nobile Sig. [...] di Bergamo sopra la devozione del Cuor di Gesù." Pujati has been identified as the author.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>102</sup> ASV, Inquisitori di Stato, Bergamo, January 31, 1781.

The artistic obsession with Christ manifesting His wounds at the Passion had its origins in medieval Christianity and never abated thereafter. Paintings and prayers dramatically evoked the scenes from Christ's Passion, describing in vivid detail the pain that the crown of thorns inflicted on Jesus, the brutality of the *Calvarium*, the nails piercing his hands, the agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation, and the final injury and insult perpetrated by a soldier who stabbed Christ on the right side of His chest with a lance. Water and blood flowed out of that wound and, finally, His corpse was shown with all the marks of those offences against it. All of these stigmas were part of the Passion and had a central place in Christian piety and liturgy. Particular devotions celebrated the Passion together with everything that it entailed. One example was the devotion to the Five Wounds. However, when the supporters of the Sacred Heart used the Five Wounds to support and legitimate their cult of the heart, insisted Pujati, they were instead perpetrating a fraud inasmuch as they were misrepresenting tradition. That was another of the many subterfuges which they used to get their way. The devotion of the Five Wounds was not about "the fissure or the nails, the hands or the feet, or Christ's chest," but about Christ Himself, pierced and crucified. Moreover, "hands, feet, and chest are not the objects of the devotion," insisted Pujati, but rather "*allow the signs to express and inspire*" (my italics) devotion for the only possible cult, that is, to Jesus Christ.<sup>103</sup> According to Pujati, since the heart was still depicted as hovering alone and isolated in paintings, to use such words as "charity" and "love" was not an act of surrender to the Church's will, but rather a travesty of it.

From this perspective, bodily representations of Christ were seen as offensive to His dignity. Pujati insisted that the devotees felt no horror whatsoever in presenting His heart in the most unlikely ways: inside Christ's ripped-open chest, or held "in the hand of a delicate rather than devout Nazarene, or on a luminous globe, or in other whimsical and most indecent shapes."<sup>104</sup> These were clear references to Batoni's painting and to the images modeled after it. As the prayer of the Bergamo nuns demonstrated, such graphic descriptions of intimacy with the body of Christ were both textual and visual, or could become visualizations through the text of the orations.<sup>105</sup> Pujati wrote that "[the *Cordicoli*] dared to disclose the slaughter of the carnal heart of Jesus."<sup>106</sup> There was something about this extreme gesture that those who opposed the devotion found both offensive and disturbing. It was perceived as a reenactment of the Disrobing, not for moral edification or with the purpose of educating the faithful, but as a way to lure the masses by means of an indecent show. The devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus took the Disrobing of Christ to its ultimate end, literally stripping the skin and the flesh from his body in order to reveal and offer to the spectator the organ hidden inside. For the devotion's opponents, this was the ultimate violation of the respect due to Christ, and an act of blasphemy.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., xiii: "[n]é giova ai cordicoli il sotterfugio di difendersi col culto delle cinque piaghe. Imperciocché nol si riferisce questo alla fissura ed ai luoghi de' chiodi, alle mani cioè, a' piedi, ed al costato di Cristo: ma il si riferisce allo stesso Cristo impiagato e crocifisso. Le mani, i piedi, e il costato non terminano in sé il culto, ma solo ne ammettono i segni che lo esprimono, ed eccitano al culto unico e vero di Gesù Cristo Signor Nostro."

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., xiii: "a dispetto della Santa Sede che positivamente esclude il cuor carnale dall'oggetto del comun culto, volendo che la carità di Gesù Cristo sia il motivo della divozione verso di lui; e così solitario, e come isolato, non hanno orrore di presentarlo al pubblico culto, o per entro al petto squarciato, o in mano di un leggiadro nazzareno più che divoto, o in un globo di luce, o sulla croce, o in altre strane e capricciose ma sconsigliate forme."

<sup>105</sup> About the relationship between text and image, see Wendy M. Wright, "Transformed Seeing: Visual Devotional Imagery and the Shape of the Imagination. The Case of the Sacred Heart," *Studia mystica* (2001): 97-109; and Hamburger, *Nuns As Artists*, 80, 136, 164, 180, 214.

<sup>106</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1782*; Ibid., xx: "e sì farsi lecito di rapresentare o l'orrido macello del cuor carneo di Gesù nello squarciato suo petto, o secondo il ridicolo recente ritrovato d'alcuni che si credon così d'aver riparato a tutto, un leggiadro nazareno avente in mano il suo cuor carneo."

## From the monastery of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva: a rebuttal

The rebuttal to Pujati's attack came from the Dominican Monastery at Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome through the words of Bernardino Membrive, a friar who had defended, approved and endorsed the devotion as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>107</sup> First, Membrive absolved the devotion of the accusation that it was fostered by a nest of Protestant dissenters—an accusation made by Pujati himself.<sup>108</sup> Second and most importantly, Membrive created a genealogy of the Sacred Heart (leaving out Margaret Mary Alacoque, whose visions were still contested), in which he traced the devotion back to the official saints of Christianity. Saint Gertrude was the saint who first introduced the devotion, which she foresaw in a prophetic way. This can be seen in her memoirs, where she writes: “The sweetness of Jesus Christ is going to be known later in history, when the world, tepid and languishing in its love for God, will need to ignite the devotion again.”<sup>109</sup> By using these words of Saint Gertrude, the Dominican emphasized how her prophecy had finally come true: the devotion was now demonstrating its redeeming quality. Membrive also excised the Jesuits' contribution to the devotion altogether. The Jesuits were in fact not even mentioned by the Dominican monk, who very skillfully argued that the devotion became public in the second half of the seventeenth century, “but *not* through the individual effort of a particular religious order.”<sup>110</sup>

This was a bold statement meant to dissociate the devotion from the Jesuits, whose presence attracted dissension and controversy that was detrimental to the devotion.<sup>111</sup> Instead, he explained that a significant number of confraternities were devoted to the heart, which comprised “thousands of devotees; among those, illustrious figures, erudite clergy, more than zealous bishops, and cardinals; people of all statuses and conditions, from all nations, and all religious and secular orders.”<sup>112</sup> The devotion had therefore already won a much wider and stronger level of support than its opponents wanted to acknowledge. Moreover, Membrive added, the feast had been singled out by the Church, which had bestowed indulgences on it, and the Pope had lately granted a new office and Mass to the crown of Portugal, which was associated with the devotion. This was the event that earned Pompeo Batoni's paintings international attention. Religion and politics were impossible to disentangle here. At the same time, this also highlights an important

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<sup>107</sup> The monastery became the seat of the Congregation of the Holy Office in 1628.

<sup>108</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1782*; *Ibid.* cc. 227-233. The rebuttal itself seems to be an adaptation of a previous document dated February 26, 1776, although it did refer to Pujati's book, dated 1780, and to an edict of the Congregation, dated 1778.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 228v: “e chiedendole la santa perche non ne avesse parlato nel suo vangelo rispose che per allora dovea prima insegnare a conoscere il divin verbo che la soavità e dolcezza del suo cuore si riservava a scoprirsi vie meglio negli ultimi tempi, affinché dall'udir queste cose si riaccenda il mondo già intiepidito e languente nell'amor di Dio.”

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 229v: “Qui con nuova falsità attribuisce l'autore i progressi della divozione agl'illegittimi sforzi d'un ceto particolare di persone religiose.”

<sup>111</sup> Although it may seem disingenuous, the Dominican was not completely wrong about the contribution of other religious orders to endorsing the Sacred Heart. The Redentorists, along with their founder Alfonso de' Liguori (1696-1787), were also committed supporters of the devotion. In the Republic of Venice, the Remondinis extensively published de Liguori's devotional texts, spreading the devotion outside the habitual Jesuit paths. See Alfonso de Liguori, “Novena del Cuore di Gesù: notizia della divozione verso il cuore adorabile di Gesù,” in *Novena del Santo Natale colle meditazioni per tutti i giorni dell'avvento fino all'ottava dell'Epifania* (Bassano: Remondini, 1766), 245-27.

<sup>112</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1782*; *Ibid.*, c. 230r: “In terzo luogo contano alcune di esse sino a molte migliaia i confratelli e tra questi de personaggi illustri, dottissimi sacerdoti, vescovi e cardinali zelantissimi, ogni maniera e condition di persone d'ogni stato, d'ogni nazione, d'ogni ordine secolare e regolare.”

development of the devotion: not only bishops, but many members of the European aristocracy, were actively engaged in promoting the cult.<sup>113</sup>

After asserting the past and present legitimacy of the devotion, Membrive examined the meaning of the heart and showed how its place within Catholicism should no longer be questioned. Membrive argued that the wound in the pierced heart, the crown of thorns encircling it, and the flames surrounding it show that, in focusing upon the heart, the faithful were worshipping the love of God. Even the coarsest and most ignorant commoners—such as the inhabitants of the Alps and the barbarians of the East, among whom the devotion had also spread—could not look at the heart so depicted without remembering the love of Christ; nor could they venerate one without worshipping the other. Membrive also rejected the claim that the Congregation of Rites had limited the devotion to the spiritual heart, while excluding the carnal heart. To exclude the heart as a symbol would be absurd, maintained Membrive: if the Congregation wanted only to honor the spiritual love of Jesus without worshipping the carnal, wounded heart as a symbol of it, the Congregation should have said “straightforwardly that this feast renewed the memory of Jesus as love.”<sup>114</sup> Instead, argued Membrive, the Congregation had stated that the devotion renews symbolically the love of Jesus, “*symbolice renovari memoriam divini amoris.*” He added that “if we exclude the symbol, how can we renew symbolically the love of Christ? ... Where is the symbol if we exclude the heart? Love cannot be the symbol of itself.”<sup>115</sup>

At the end of his defense of the devotion, Membrive launched into an apologia for the cult, arguing for the importance of images in religiosity. He wrote that since humans are made of reason and senses, they are easily moved by the spiritual. However, sensory things are needed in order to make them love the sublime and the invisible. Religion nurtures the faithful with external rites, hymns, solemn celebrations, and sensible objects of devotion. Hence not only does the Church show the Savior or the child in the nativity—or Christ dying on the cross in his own blood—in order for them to be adored, but it encourages us to worship his name, his wounds, the nativity itself, the thorns, the lance, and above all, the cross. Thus it is unnecessary to exclude Christ’s material heart from the devotion and the feast of the heart.

As Benedict XIV had argued, the Church never celebrated the divine attributes of God or the interior virtues and abstract perfection of Christ with a Mass and office, except by using some material object that could clearly represent them, or with events that could more vividly imprint these concepts on the minds of the faithful. Benedict had never conceded that the feast of the Passion of Jesus was to be celebrated without any symbols or mysteries, such as the wounds, the Passion itself, or the cross. “Not only can we not exclude any material object from the feast of the Sacred Heart,” maintained Membrive, “but we should not.” Moreover, he wondered whether the Church could “find a more appropriate symbol for the love of Christ than his wounded heart?”<sup>116</sup> In the end, he concluded that the heart itself was the most appropriate symbol for this love.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> See also de Fumel, *Il culto dell'amore divino*, 32, 48-50. The bishop of Lodève’s book seems both to mirror and expand on Membrive’s arguments about the devotion.

<sup>114</sup> ACDF, *C.L. 1782*; *Ibid.*, c. 231r: “se il cuore che la S. Congregazione vuole onorato fosse il solo spirituale amor di Gesù, senza che si onorasse ancora il sensibile ferito cuore come simbolo di quello, dovea dire che con questa festa si rinnovava nudamente e immediatamente la memoria dell’amor di Gesù.”

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 231r.-231v: “[s]e il simbolo si esclude, come dunque si rinnova simbolicamente la memoria dell’amor di Gesù? [...] Ma dove è il simbolo se si esclude il cuore? L’amore non può essere il simbolo di se stesso.”

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 233r: “[n]on sol dunque non si deve escludere dalla festa del S. Cuore ogni obbietto sensibile, ma non si può. Per altra parte poteva la chiesa trovare un simbolo più felice dell’amor di Gesù che il sacro ferito suo cuore?”

## The Sacred Heart: revamping Catholicism The many degrees of devotion

Many erudite members of the Church realized that people needed images, as representations and as symbols, but the former were concerned that ordinary folk could not grasp the theological truth behind these images. However, the issue was more complicated than they wanted to admit, and dissension was not only a matter of popular versus elite understanding and expression of devotion. The dispute around the Sacred Heart represented a larger disagreement about the use of images in religious art as well in religious education and acculturation; that is, instead of accepting the image simply as an object, the believer responds to the signifier (a word, image, or other item that stands for something else) as if it were the signified (the concept that a signifier represents). This forces consideration of both the image represented as well as the materials from which the image is composed. Images, in this sort of discussion, are to be considered ‘art’ in terms of aesthetics, but they are also part of a cognitive process challenging static ideas of “signifier-signified” that do not accord with the dynamic processes by which people think and feel. In images (iconic signs), signifier, signified and referent easily merge together.

Images are infused with the power to “aid memory and recognition, inspire awe, arouse piety, and make the absent present and the dead living.”<sup>118</sup> The relationship between religious images and their beholders has been the subject of several studies by art historian David Freedberg. As he argues, there is an element of verisimilitude that binds signifier and signified because “we still seek to reconstitute the reality of the signified in the sign.”<sup>119</sup> In his work on psychological responses to art, he seeks “to establish what is specific in the psychological effect of images.” Though Freedberg’s “specific” is ahistorical, art historians as well as historians could still benefit from his theory, which suggests that in the believers’ responses to images, the realism of the representation is essential to the efficacy that the images may have. In this respect, “effective images strive towards an illusion in much the same way drama does.”<sup>120</sup> The lifelike images found in the *sacri monti* in northern Italy—chapels containing scenes from the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or the saints, mostly in the form of (life-size) sculptures—are a case in point; in these depictions, actual fabrics, objects, and figures are incorporated in the representations.<sup>121</sup> By the same token, iconographically speaking, the association between the Eucharist and the Sacred Heart was taken a step further, and the two became conflated when the

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L’innumerevoli relazioni che ha il cuore all’amore in tutti gli uomini ha già prodotto un consenso universale per cui in tutte le emanazioni, in tutti i secoli e rozzi e dotti e poeti e pittori e scrittori sacri e profani nel cuore riconoscono e quasi a lui attribuiscono l’amore e speso l’uno scambiano per l’altro.”

<sup>117</sup> Interestingly, Silva—the member of the Congregation who was in charge of resolving the controversy – after examining Pujati’s text, dismissed it as “a worthless, trivial little book” (“si tratta di un libricciattolo di poco momento”) that did not deserve the attention of the tribunal or real censorship. Silva had to admit that Pujati’s little book did not contain any errors against the faith, so he could not proscribe it. His decision was therefore to forbid the publication of all books “sive pro, sive contra devotione cordis Jesu.” *Ibid.*, cc.259v, 261v, 29 May, 1782.

<sup>118</sup> David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 44.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 245. Some historians have also pointed out the power of religious images to elicit responses as well as participation from the faithful. However, Freedberg considers study of the behavioral and emotional manifestations “of the exchange between images and their beholders” to be a thoroughly theoretical approach.

<sup>120</sup> Michael O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>121</sup> Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 245.

image of the heart was impressed upon the host.<sup>122</sup> In the same vein, eighteenth-century monstrances (*ostensoria*) made in the shape of a heart to contain consecrated hosts were replacing the ordinary *ostensoria*. Some were made of crystal, which suggests an attempt to intensify the connection between the container and the contained.<sup>123</sup>

As Caroline Bynum has demonstrated, in Christianity matter *matters*. She claims in fact that the essentially visual and visionary character of late-medieval piety was not *merely* visual: the material of which those presentations were composed was as important as the scene or the image represented. Representations of holy figures or events were not just references to what was beyond them; they were imbued with the divine. “Visionary experience,” writes Bynum, “tended to result in holy matter that itself animated or transformed, both authenticating and reproducing the original eruption of the sacred.”<sup>124</sup> Bynum’s claims about the function of art in the Middle Ages seem relevant to the eighteenth-century conflict over the Sacred Heart. In fact, her argument provides a way of thinking about the conflict as being between a traditional, historically-based way of accepting and revering historical images and artifacts, on the one hand, and the Jansenists’ more modern and cerebral view that images displaced the true worship of the spirit, on the other.<sup>125</sup>

It is difficult to think of a better image to represent the *locus* of the divine than the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is figuratively and literally the conflation of the human and the divine, as well as the embodiment of both. What could possibly be more evocative than the image of divine love conveyed in a fleshy heart, as Father Membrive had poignantly observed? The matter, in this case, was merely representational and not metaphorical. But the logic of Membrive’s reasoning does not change, because to the believers the truth of the painted flesh *was* the flesh as it was perceived. Even though virtually no one expected images of the Sacred Heart (or any other image for that matter) to bleed, sweat, speak, or move, those images retained a power that *moved* those who believed in them. For a time, religious life in Bergamo was disrupted by an outbreak of iconoclasm. Because of their power, images were erased, books were banned, and devotional objects were removed by the Church. Bishop Dolfin sought the assistance of the secular authorities to put an end to instances of iconoclasm that targeted the images of the Sacred Heart, which he had so vigorously promoted. “Love and hatred of images,” writes Freedberg, “are often two sides of the same coin.”<sup>126</sup> If the detractors of the Sacred Heart were so viscerally opposed to the sensuous representations in the images, it was because they too felt the power of those images.

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<sup>122</sup> Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni, *Schola cordis: amore sacro e profano, devozioni, pellegrinaggi, preghiera, attraverso il simbolismo del cuore in immagini e oggetti europei (secoli XVII-XX)* (Ravenna: Essegi, 2000), 20.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 33; Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni, *Carte intagliate ritagliate e punzecchiate: immaginetto devozionali e decorazioni profane manufatte in paesi europei nel Settecento e nell'Ottocento* (Ravenna: Essegi, 1998), 73.

<sup>124</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: an Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 110.

<sup>125</sup> Episodes of manifestations of the sacred may occur less frequently than in the past, yet they still, in the twenty-first century, involve the sighting of the divine as the *locus* of the divine. See Mark Garvey, *Searching for Mary: An Exploration of Marian Apparitions Across the U.S.* (New York: New York Plume Books, 1998); and Marco Marzano, *Cattolicesimo magico: un'indagine etnografica* (Milan: Bompiani, 2009). Also of interest are the events involving Padre Pio, from his stigmata to his strong support and devotion of the Sacred Heart; his controversial canonization in 2002 by Pope John Paul II is also noteworthy in this regard. On these topics, see the compelling work of historian Sergio Luzzato, *Padre Pio: miracoli e politica nell'Italia del Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009).

<sup>126</sup> David Freedberg “Iconoclasm and Idolatry,” in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. David E. Copper (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 341.

Pujati himself wrote that Christ's wounds were meant to *express* and *inspire*. Jansenist practices were not lacking in emotional responses, but emotion had no place in what was, especially compared to orthodox Catholic religious practices, a highly intellectualized spirituality. It was precisely that strong emotional response evoked by the Sacred Heart that Pujati despised and intellectually rejected. His personality, combining religious passion, severe moral rigor, and self-denial, suggests perhaps a more complex reading of Jansenist ideas. The Jansenists too felt and feared what their theology rejected, namely the life and power inherent in images. Those who opposed the Sacred Heart understood the power of images, and believed that the appeal of these images was dangerous for everyone, whether learned or unlearned, noble or commoner. Moreover, they saw the Church's willingness to use imagery to attract the unlearned as a gross oversimplification of the distinction between social classes. In a very insightful passage, one of the wittiest opponents of the Sacred Heart undermined one of the most common contemporary assumptions about the opposition between 'elite' and 'popular':

There are people of average literacy, people who think they are erudite yet are not, and those who are learned in certain things and very ignorant in others. After all, well-educated people make mistakes. The truth is that between the learned and the unlearned there are infinite variations.<sup>127</sup>

Images of the Sacred Heart were to be found in patrician as well as peasant homes. It would have been a naïve mistake for critics to dismiss the circulation of this devotion as an affair pertaining only to the lower strata of society. Camillo Blasi, author of the passage above, makes the point that if anyone could learn from "the book of images," and if this source was not conveying theological truths, then anyone also could learn the wrong lesson from it. Thus those endangered by the novelty of the devotion were not only the unlearned but literally all believers. It was a risk that, according to him, was not worth taking.

If, as Blasi argued, "between the learned and the unlearned there are infinite variations" between the Church's versions of truth and error, then there were also many grades of devotion. This was by no means the discovery of a new principle. On the contrary, in the two centuries after the Council of Trent, the grey area of acceptable devotional practices had grown almost constantly and without effective control by the Church. As long as individual private devotion remained private, individual error did not necessarily entail an ecclesiastical intervention, even if these practices strayed to the verge of unorthodoxy. However, once erroneous practices left the private domain and entered the public space of devotion, the matter could become more of an issue for the Church, as the history of the Sacred Heart consistently demonstrates.

### **The relentless materiality of the heart**

Although the ascetic reform that Jansenists promoted in their attack on the Sacred Heart would not succeed, their fierce aversion to the fleshy heart did not go unnoticed. The depiction of the

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<sup>127</sup> "Sappiano adunque che questa divisione degli uomini è troppo smisurata. Vi sono persone di mediocre letteratura. Vi sono persone le quali credono essere dotte, in altre cose poi sono ignorantissime. V'ha persone dotte le quali errano. Insomma, fralli veri e felici dotti, e fralle persone ignorantissime v'ha di molti infiniti gradi varissimi di mezzo." Camillo Blasi, *Lettere italiane aggiunte all'antirretico in difesa delle Dissertazione commonitoria dell'avvocato Camillo Blasi* (Rome: Benedetto Francesi, 1772), 17-18. This was a rebuttal, published anonymously, that Blasi wrote in response to the criticism that his previous works against the devotion had provoked.



heart, disembodied and hovering in the air as a bloody organ, held clear theological implications. The heart could become a depiction of a relic that did not and could not exist, because the doctrine of the Resurrection implies that Christ rose from the dead in the very same physical body in which he died. Batoni's 1765 painting entitled "The Sacred Heart" provided an influential model for representations of the devotion by including images of both Christ and the heart. However, Batoni's canvas, representing a rather feminine Jesus graciously offering his heart to the faithful, did not escape criticism by contemporaries. Moreover, Batoni's representation of Jesus' heart was still a carnal heart, and representations of the heart alone did not completely give way to images of Jesus *with* his heart. As can be seen from what happened in Bergamo, images of the heart alone were still appearing two decades after Batoni unveiled his canvas in Rome. Although it was a clever artifice, meant to avert a major criticism of the cult, namely that it was a devotion to the dismembered organ of Christ's body, the addition of Christ to the images was not quite enough. The heart needed to become less and less fleshy in order to overcome criticism, to subdue the harsh tone of the debate, and finally to permit a compromise.

The Sacred Heart was by no means a fixed or fossilized image; indeed, it proved to be a flexible motif that was susceptible to iconographical changes over time. The attempt to sanitize the image of the heart started as early as the devotion itself but was rejected by the *Cordicoli*, who believed that its materiality was essential to the image. Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the heart in paintings became more symbolic and less real; in a word, the *matter* of the heart, so utterly disturbing, was progressively stripped away. The process of making the heart less and less fleshy eventually got to the point that a new devotion arose, namely that of the Divine Mercy, which depicted the heart as ethereal and dissolved entirely in pure light.<sup>128</sup> Interestingly, while the process of distancing the form (the heart) from its matter (the flesh)—which is paradoxically the opposite of what the heart was (thus the *incarnate* had to be made *dis-incarnate*)—was developing, *ex-votos* in the shape of hearts replaced earlier types of *ex-votos*.<sup>129</sup> *Ex-votos* in the shape of hearts had existed previously, but it was in the eighteenth century that they began to flourish, replacing ones that encompassed a wide variety of forms (Fig. 5).<sup>130</sup> Countless eighteenth-century silver heart-shaped *ex-votos* are still extant and are on display in many Catholic churches, arranged on red velvet panels hanging on the walls. These unapologetically remind the viewer of the devotion as it was in its early and contentious iconographical form.

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<sup>128</sup> The devotion was (and is) based on visions of Jesus reported by the Polish nun Maria Faustina Kowalska in the 1930s. See Richard Torretto, *A Divine Mercy Resource: How to Understand the Devotion to Divine Mercy* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2010).

<sup>129</sup> *Ex-votos* are votive offerings given to a saint when a prayer for a miracle is answered. Before the heart shape replaced older forms, *ex-votos* usually represented the healed part of the body. Less commonly, *ex-votos* also sometimes came as small paintings illustrating the basic elements of the miracle story.

<sup>130</sup> In her studies, Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni has emphasized the growing number of heart-shaped votive offerings between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See "Ex-voto e simbologia del cuore," in *Il santo*, XVI, no. 2-3 (1976): 291-300, and "Simbologia e cultura tipologica dell'ex-voto a forma di cuore," in *Il santo*, XXIII, no. 3 (1983): 555-72.



Fig. 5: Heart-shaped ex-voto in gold, 18th century, Italy. Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni, *I cuori della Madonna: il simbolo del cuore in oggetti e immagini della devozione mariana dal Seicento alla prima metà del Novecento* (Ravenna: Essegi, 1997), 29

The Sacred Heart of Jesus, as its eighteenth-century opponents had feared, invasively and aggressively made a place for itself. Not only did it become the iconic image of Catholicism in the world, but by virtue of its evocative representations it shaped and articulated religious identity.<sup>131</sup> Did the Sacred Heart reach its current form in the twentieth century, as some historians claim, having slowly but progressively left its bodily shape behind? While majestic statues of Christ adorn the most recent cathedrals dedicated to the devotion of the Sacred Heart, and the heart is no more than a symbol expressed in gesture, in Italy as well as in other Catholic countries religious enthusiasm for *ex-votos*, emblems, and devotional objects in the shape of hearts has not abated (Fig. 6).<sup>132</sup> In the realm of private devotion, the Sacred Heart still assertively displays its original bodily matter.

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<sup>131</sup> Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze*, and "Religion and Visuality in America: Material Economies of the Sacred," in *Cambridge History of Religions in America*, ed. Stephen Stein, Vol. 1 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 748-780.

<sup>132</sup> Elisabetta Gulli Grigioni has shown that the heart became iconographically the most favored symbol for both religious and secular objects over the course of the twentieth century. Devotional jewelry inspired by the Sacred Heart appears in the form of necklaces with heart pendants. This usage can be traced back to the eighteenth century, when in the convents of the diocese of Lodève, nuns wore emblems like those depicted in Marguerite's engravings; the fashion then spread outside of France. See De Fumel, *Il culto dell'amore divino*, 73.



Fig. 6: Domestic holy water stoup with the Sacred Heart, late 19th century, ceramic, Museo Etnografico, Udine.

Ex-votos were not the only objects which the devout could employ to venerate the heart. Religious items in the shape of a heart were widely produced in the eighteenth century and after. Reliquaries, medals, pendants, scapulars, stoups, and all sorts of religious paraphernalia in the shape of heart became highly popular in churches and in domestic settings, as well as in private usage.

The fleshy heart still resonates with current spirituality; moreover, in Italy the heart still appears in public exhibitions. In Cividale del Friuli in April 2006, the local religious and secular institutions brought the Sacred Heart to the fore again by launching an art contest. Needless to say, the artists' approach to the devotion was varied but mainly focused on the heart. Significantly, the exhibition explored multiple possibilities for depicting the heart, and included images in which the heart both revealed and transcended its materiality.<sup>133</sup> Hence, the battle over the iconographical depiction of the heart remains unfinished even today, because the heart keeps fluctuating between the fleshy muscle that *is* and the spiritual to which it *is pointing*. Given the impossibility of “freezing” the Sacred Heart, we may speculate that the needs which characterized late medieval theology, that is “the paradoxical need to restrain (sometimes to the point of denying) and yet utilize (sometimes to the point of exaggerating) the transformative power of the material,” are still present in modern society.<sup>134</sup>

Deep resistance and ambivalence toward the devotion has not completely dissipated, as the ongoing dichotomy between “popular devotion” and official devotion reveals. A passage from a document of the Congregation of the Faith issued in April 2002 concerning the Sacred Heart is enlightening in this regard:

Popular piety tends to associate devotion with its iconographic expression. This is a normal and positive phenomenon. Inconveniences can sometimes arise:

<sup>133</sup> Thirty-three artists were asked to interpret the devotion of the Sacred Heart from a modern perspective. I cannot conceive of a better example than this to contradict theories about the alleged end to the discourse concerning the best or the most proper ways to depict and represent the heart. As the paintings show, these artists' views range from the more traditional to the most rarified and poetic, yet unconventional, exploration of *matter*. Tradition therefore meets with innovation, and spiritual with material, to re-propose once again the apparent contradictions of the heart. This collection of works is still visible online and was accessed February 28, 2014: <http://www.mondocrea.it/itriflessioni/story?data=riflessioni&num=687&sec=20>

<sup>134</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 131.

iconographic expressions that no longer respond to the artistic taste of the people can sometimes lead to a diminished appreciation of the devotion's object, independently of its theological basis and its historical-salvific content. This can sometimes arise with devotion to the Sacred Heart: perhaps certain overly sentimental images are incapable of giving expression to the devotion's robust theological content, or do not encourage the faithful to approach the mystery of the Sacred Heart of our Savior.<sup>135</sup>

In very cautious yet resilient fashion, the Catholic Church re-stated here its functional—and to some degree ambivalent—take on images and popular culture, echoing the ancient idea that images *are* the book for simple folk. “Popular” and “iconographic” are still two seemingly indissoluble concepts and terms. Visual arts as well as devotional items are “relegated” to a questionable, although useful and valuable, means to express devotion. Yet, as such, these images express devotion *in a minor key*. The conflict over whether the exposed heart of Jesus was “indecent” has come a long way, moving from the eighteenth-century debates about a contentious devotion to widely accepted expressions of a key symbol of Catholicism. The underlying reasons for the eighteenth-century controversy have not faded away, and the heart still represents the inner contradiction of a doctrine that needs and therefore uses images as well as material objects, yet at the same time is still troubled by them. On the other hand, during John Paul II’s papacy, the number of canonizations enormously increased, along with the tendency to promote rather than to curb all visible manifestations of the sacred. Clearly the miraculous and the emotional still have an important role to play within Catholicism. In a famous speech delivered at the Basilica of Montmartre in 1980, Pope John Paul II declared his personal devotion to the Sacred Heart, recommitting the Church and Catholics everywhere to it. Although some may contend that this expressed the official view rather than the lived religion, it would be legitimate to ask why the Church would keep promoting a devotion that seems to bear such inherently deep ambivalences. Clearly, those ambivalences are as intrinsic a feature of contemporary Catholicism as they were before.

### **The Christocentric shift**

One major result of the devotion of the Sacred Heart was that it created a shift in Catholic devotional practices, bringing Christ back to the center of Catholic devotional life by encouraging a sentimental identification between Christ and the faithful, which was elicited by the heart. In this respect, the devotion worked against the cult of the saints in an attempt to restore Christ’s predominant role in piety.

The rise and fall of the cult of the saints and the rise of the cult of the Sacred Heart, respectively, reflect differing points of emphasis for the Catholic Church. When the Church was attempting to define itself in relation to the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent allowed veneration of the cult of the saints to expand. Once that sense of urgency to re-shape and redefine the Church had faded, Catholics were left with some apparently unresolved problems in regard to

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<sup>135</sup> “The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,” Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy Principles and Guidelines*, Vatican City, December 2001, 166-73, last accessed February 28, 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20020513\\_vers-direttorio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20020513_vers-direttorio_en.html)

the cult of the saints. The devotion to them had grown uncontrollably, often to the point of obscuring the devotion to Christ and God. Muratori, in his letters to Segneri as well as in his major work about popular devotion (entitled *Della regolata divozion de' cristiani*), not only called for an immediate regulation of the cult of the saints; he also urged a shift in piety away from the saints and toward the real object of Catholic devotion, namely God and Christ. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, Muratori had promoted a return to Christology, affirming the centrality of Christ as a way to overcome the abuses that were especially apparent in excessive, disproportionate, and unregulated devotion to the saints and even to the Virgin Mary.<sup>136</sup>

With its focus on the empathy between Christ and the faithful, the Sacred Heart reversed the allegedly mundane character of the devotion to the saints. By emphasizing Jesus' love, the cult of the Sacred Heart exposed the contractual nature of the cult of the saints and moved it to the margins. The contractual relationship between saints and believers was perceived as devotion in exchange for, or as thanks for, a miracle. For reformers, appeals to saints to cure and prevent any ailments or illnesses—or to rescue the believer from danger—were reason for scorn and condemnation. Reformers saw these contracts as a venial feature of popular piety, calling for the Church to curb the number of saints' feasts and to undermine the cult of the saints altogether. This argument was nothing new, but during the eighteenth century it did prompt the actual abolition of many saints' feasts.

Despite or perhaps because of the criticism that the saints underwent during the Reformation, after the Council of Trent their place within Catholicism was confirmed and even reinforced. Strong manifestations of devotion to Christ were central in the Protestant churches, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were seen with some suspicion and even discouraged by the Catholic Church, where much more emphasis was placed on devotion to the saints.<sup>137</sup> In the same vein, during the first decades immediately after the start of the Reformation, the Catholic Church underwent internal theological turmoil in order to sort out the best way to deliver the Lord's Prayer, because of the strong connection that the prayer had with the Reformed world and the beginning of the Lutheran movement.<sup>138</sup> The Lord's Prayer had to remain important, yet it underwent considerable textual changes in order to satisfy Catholic sensibilities and to prevent it from leaning dangerously close to Protestantism.<sup>139</sup> When it came to channeling and regulating devotion to the saints the problem became thornier still, as the Church found itself incapable of controlling the various local practices that stood at the core of village life.

Furthermore, the Church could not deny that the intercession of saints was efficacious as well as proper without undermining a central tenet of Catholic faith and without coming too close to the Protestant position. With their profusion and celebrations at the local level, saints therefore became a catalyst of popular devotion. Saints served as markers of the cyclical life of the Italian countryside, which revolved around the seasons and the feasts. Saints fulfilled a variety of functions and took on a variety of roles: they were protectors, patrons, and symbols of

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<sup>136</sup> Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Della regolata divozion de' cristiani* (Trent: Giambattista Parone, 1748), particularly the chapters titled "Della Divozione verso il Signore Gesù Cristo," 23-33, and "Della Divozione ai Santi," 235-55.

<sup>137</sup> Giorgio Caravale, *Forbidden Prayer: Church Censorship and Devotional Literature in Renaissance Italy* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011). According to eighteenth-century Venetian Inquisition documents, people were still being brought before the tribunal for the destruction of saints' paintings, for preaching Lutheran ideas against the saints, and for claiming the centrality of Christ in devotional practices.

<sup>138</sup> Caravale, *Forbidden*, 3-24.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

communal unity, as well as of familial standing. The array of saints honored in a village reflected and shaped, in the deepest sense, that village's society and culture. Social harmony and political order depended on their cult. In sum, perhaps it is not too far-fetched to state that devotion to the saints—reaffirmed and to some degree regulated by the Council of Trent—helped the Catholic faith and the faithful not to go astray. Their presence balanced the new and singular emphasis on Christ that Reformers asserted and that some Catholics also advocated and practiced.

When eighteenth-century reformers launched their attack on the cults of the saints, commoners evaded the restrictions which the authorities imposed on their devotional practices in a final attempt to cling to their beliefs and not to give up their lived religion. The Church's attempted reform of piety was met with popular resistance. The heavenly patronage that so suitably mirrored the earthly one, namely the cooperative social structure that survived until the Industrial Revolution, was never going to disappear suddenly. Saints remained indispensable interlocutors for believers in times of spiritual and material need, and their space in devotion was not yet completely replaced by the heart. Saints' feasts were still celebrated, yet their very essence—built upon communal life—was to be undermined by changes occurring within the social, political, and economic systems. In the aftermath of the reform of saints' feasts, the Sacred Heart devotion came less to fill an immediate or an imminent void than to fulfill a different quest for the sacred.

It is not that difficult to sort out why the Jansenist polemical barrage missed the mark. The austere, severe, and elitist Jansenist interpretation of atonement and salvation was not a viable option for the majority of Catholics. Likewise, the Jansenists' inclination for unadorned churches, plain liturgy, and rigorous spirituality could not suit a religiosity that had become accustomed to Baroque exuberance and a profusion of rituals, sacramentals, processions, devotional objects, and sensuous artworks. The Jansenist attempt to reform the worship of the Sacred Heart ultimately revealed just how deeply these practices and beliefs were entwined in the daily lives of the populace, which was more complex and spiritual than Muratori and the Jansenists had been willing to admit. These devotions were not merely ways of *expressing* belief. As the bishops who supported the cult of the saints and promoted the devotion of the Sacred Heart acknowledged, venerating the saints and celebrating the heart in fact *constituted* belief. In parish life, the liturgical year did not simply mirror the annual cycles of nature; it provided a structure in which all events, religious as well as social, were intertwined with each other. Masses, offices, processions, and the display and veneration of images, relics, and sacramentals formed a nexus in which life, work, and religion shaped a sacred communal space. Intellectuals and reformers might look upon these activities disparagingly; however, the faithful were not simply practicing their faith with the aids of material objects or images—rather, they *were making beliefs* in the very act of their devotion.

This article has provided a glimpse of the religious turmoil that occurred in Italy in the later years of the eighteenth century. Examining the events that happened in Bergamo allows us to study historical examples of the application of both Jansenist and Jesuit ideas concerning faith and devotional practice. That case study exemplifies issues and controversies that were much broader in scope than what a contest of words within one particularly combative urban environment might otherwise suggest. The Sacred Heart was a contested devotion that brought to the surface opposing and clashing voices within Catholicism. On one side stood those who desired visible manifestations of the divine, used images, and felt the need for external ritual practices; on the other side stood those who claimed that the Word should be enough to inspire devotion. Caught in between these extremes, and covering many degrees of middle ground, the

Church was eager to regain control over the majority of believers who unwillingly had had to give up most of their cherished saints' feasts and, moreover, were increasingly being exposed to the most unsettling "enlightened" ideas. Deism, with its insistence upon a distant God, seemed not too different from the ideas of those Catholics who professed that the age of miracles was over. If there was no need for miracles, if there was no need for saints, and if there was no need for priests to drive out the devil because there was no devil, then perhaps there was also no need for God.

At the turn of the century, the Church, faced with internal and external challenges, pursued a policy of prudent but unrelenting accommodation. By allowing the devotion to flourish while maintaining a sort of theological truce, the Church displayed a measure of foresight. Sonzogno, De Passi, Pujati, and Bishop Dolfin were all ordered by their superiors to keep quiet. They were not to engage in verbal fights through pamphlets, books, manifestos, or public conversations that would stir up vicious satire or sharp-tongued sonnets and, last but not least, confuse the believers. Hearts were no longer carried in processions, but the heart had already found its place within liturgical practices. At that point, there was no way back.

While the saints were progressively ostracized, their numbers curbed, and their feasts abolished, the Sacred Heart offered the faithful a reinvented alternative through which to practice their sense of the sacred; and this alternative was increasingly promoted by the Church. A more contemplative and Christ-centered piety was to grow out of the cult of the Sacred Heart. The rhetoric and the images of the Sacred Heart of Christ, with their emphases on empathy, tenderness, and sentiment, would become the religious language of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The heart of Jesus was welcomed precisely because it gave the faithful a very different sort of image than the Man of Sorrow(s), and a way to worship Jesus without dwelling on his Passion and death (Fig. 7). Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the reform of the saints and this Christological revolution, Italian villages, towns and cities still celebrated their own saints, while adding to their feast days a new one dedicated to the Sacred Heart. In their pastoral visitations of the dioceses of Venice, Padua, and Treviso, bishops consistently reported that the devotion of the Sacred Heart had become an established part of festivities and festivals, alongside those of the remaining saints; and the confraternities of the heart became a predominant feature of almost every parish.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Bruno Bertoli and Silvio Tramontin, ed., *La visita pastorale di Ludovico Flangini nella diocesi di Venezia, 1803* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1969), lvi, 39, 87-90; Luigi Pesce, ed., *La visita pastorale di Giuseppe Grasser nella diocesi di Treviso, 1826-1827* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1969), 33; Bruno Bertoli and Silvio Tramontin, ed., *Le visite pastorali di Iacopo Monico nella diocesi di Venezia, 1829-1845* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1976), cxxii, 45, 63, 111; and Margherita Piva, ed., *La visita pastorale di Federico Manfredini nella Diocesi di Padova, 1859-1865*, vol. 1 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1971), xlii.



Fig. 7: Christ Crucified with instruments of the Passion and the souls in Purgatory, 18th century, Remondini, Bulino engraving, Museo Etnografico, Udine. This busy and crowded scene seems to be an iconographical attempt to depict the Sacred Heart as almost disguised by other, more established and recognizable symbols of devotion. The Remondinis merged in one image instruments of the Passion, emerging bodies of penitents from a sea of flames, and the heart of Jesus. The heart sits at the feet of the crucified Christ; it is depicted in a funnel shape and seems to draw into itself not only Christ, but also the rest of the scene. All of the traditional signs of the Man of Sorrow(s) ultimately dissolve into the heart. Thus the prior emphasis on an act of Atonement for sin switches to a tribute to the heart that encompasses all.

However, this was a process of accumulation rather than a process of exclusion. The people retained their saints, or at least some of them, and at the same time they incorporated the devotion of the heart. The heart was therefore not merely replacing the saints; rather, it enriched the panoply of devotional choices, addressed another dimension of human spiritual life, and fulfilled a different category of needs. The increasing presence of the heart of Jesus did not push away or marginalize the cherished saints, but it did very successfully re-emphasize a Christocentric focus in Catholic piety.

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