

The Cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph: An Inquiry into the *Status Quæstionis*

By Msgr. Arthur Burton Calkins

I. Introduction

“Heart of Jesus, I adore Thee; Heart of Mary, I implore thee; Heart of Joseph, pure and just; in these three Hearts I place my trust.” These are pious invocations which I remember from my childhood. Although I cannot indicate their provenance, they testify to a certain spontaneous impulse on the part of the faithful to unite the Hearts of the Holy Family, the “earthly Trinity”, to venerate the Heart of Joseph along with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Obviously, such an impulse had been preceded by the lengthy development of the cultus¹ of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Even taking into consideration the slow and somewhat complex evolution of devotion to the Heart of Jesus, the late Pope John Paul II pointedly stated in his letter of 5 October 1986 to Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., Superior General of the Jesuits, that

In fact, if the Lord in his providence wished that a powerful drive in favour of the devotion to the Heart of Christ, under the forms indicated in the revelations received by St. Margaret Mary, should go forth from Paray-le-Monial in the seventeenth century, at the threshold of modern times, *the essential elements of this*

*devotion belong in a permanent fashion to the spirituality of the Church throughout her history; for since the beginning, the Church has looked to the Heart of Christ pierced on the Cross, from which blood and water flowed forth as symbols of the sacraments that constitute the Church; and, in the Heart of the Incarnate Word, the Fathers of the Christian East and West saw the beginning of all the work of our salvation, fruit of the love of the divine Redeemer. This pierced Heart is a particularly expressive symbol of that love.*²

I wish to underscore two points from this statement: (1) that the essential elements of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus “belong in a permanent fashion to the spirituality of the Church throughout her history” and (2) that the physical Heart of Jesus now in heavenly glory is a particularly expressive symbol of the divine-human love of the God-man.³ It should be further noted that what we have summarized here in a few brief statements regarding the cultus of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus represents an evolution of the theology and devotion to the Heart of Jesus in the course of the centuries⁴ and a lengthy process on the part of the magisterium that was initially marked by negative judgements which eventually had to be reversed.⁵

While historically the evolution of the cultus of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary is often

² *Inseg IX/2* (1986) 843 = *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana) [ORE 960:5, 7 = (*L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly English edition; First number = cumulative edition number; second number = page number(s)]. Italics my own.

³ On this second point cf. Pius XII, *Haurietis Aquas*, Heinrich Denzinger, S.I., *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionem et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*. Edizione Bilingue (XXXVII) a cura di Peter Hünermann (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 2000) #3922-3925 (hereafter cited as *D-H*).

⁴ Cf. Bertrand de Margerie, S.J., *Histoire Doctrinale du Culte au Cœur de Jésus* t. 1 *Premières Lumière(s) sur L'Amour* (Paris: Éditions Mame, 1992) and *Histoire Doctrinale du Culte envers le Cœur de Jésus* t. 2 *L'Amour devenu Lumière(s)* (Paris: Éditions SAINT-PAUL, 1995).

⁵ Cf. Margaret Williams, R.S.C.J., *The Sacred Heart in the Life of the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1957) esp. 121-138; Arthur R. McGratty, S.J., *The Sacred Heart Yesterday and Today* (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1951) esp. 151-210.

¹ I prefer to use the Latin word *cultus* in speaking of the devotion to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary – and possibly to the Heart of Joseph – for three reasons: (1) the word *cultus* has a wide range of meaning in Latin that allows it to refer both to the worship [*latria*] which is rendered to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to the veneration [*hyperdulia*] which is rendered to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and to the veneration [*dulia*] which is rendered to saints; (2) the derivative English word “cult” does not have the same range of meaning as the Latin and has unsavory associations which I wish to avoid; (3) the English word “devotion” is rather weak and is not an appropriate synonym for worship or in reference to the liturgy as in “liturgical cultus”.

simultaneous and profoundly interconnected, as in St. John Eudes (1601-1680), so also the official clarification of the object of the cultus of the Heart of Mary came only in relatively recent times.⁶ In a very significant address on the Hearts of Jesus and Mary given on 22 September 1986, Pope John Paul II stated

It is worthy of note that the Decree by which Pope Pius XII instituted for the universal Church the celebration in honour of the Immaculate Heart of Mary states: “With this devotion the Church renders the honour due to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, since under the symbol of this heart she venerates with reverence the eminent and singular holiness of the Mother of God and especially her most ardent love for God and Jesus her Son and moreover her maternal compassion for all those redeemed by the divine Blood” (S.R.C., 4 May 1944; AAS 37, 1945, p. 50). Thus it can be said that our *devotion to Mary’s Immaculate Heart expresses our reverence for her maternal compassion both for Jesus and for all of us her spiritual children, as she stood at the foot of the Cross.*

...

We see symbolized in the heart of Mary her maternal love, her singular sanctity and her central role in the redemptive mission of her Son. It is with regard to her special role in her Son’s mission that devotion to Mary’s Heart has prime importance for through love of her Son and of all of humanity she exercises a unique instrumentality in bringing us to him.⁷

Once again I would underscore that the physical Heart of Mary now in glory is indicated as the symbol of her person and explicitly of “her maternal love, her singular sanctity and her central role in the redemptive mission of her Son”.

The question then before us is this: is there ground for a legitimate cultus to the Heart of Joseph? Can one say that the foundational elements of devotion to the Heart of Joseph belong in some way to the perennial spirituality of the Church? Can the Heart of Joseph be recognized as the symbol of his person, of his fatherly love for the Son of God and of his unique role in the Son’s redemptive mission? This, of course, would necessarily imply due proportionality.⁸ Finally, has the Church sanctioned such a cultus?

II. First Initiatives

Since the cultus of St. Joseph in the West only emerges in the second millennium⁹ and comes to be solemnly affirmed by the Church only in the latter half of the nineteenth century¹⁰, it is somewhat surprising that devotion to the Hearts of Jesus, Mary and Joseph makes its first public appearance, as far as we are able to tell, as early as 1733 in Portugal and Brazil and that fervent devotion to the Heart of Joseph subsequently flourished in Mexico in the 18th and 19th centuries.¹¹ There is an indication that a certain Discalced Carmelite Father Elia of the Three Hearts made a vow to spread devotion to the “just and most meek” Heart of St. Joseph on pilgrimage throughout Italy and France for a five-year period beginning in 1843 and that his undertaking was approved by Pope Gregory XVI on 28 April 1843, although nothing is known about the results of his activity.¹² Even more detailed and readily available is the

⁸ Cf. Boniface Llamera, O.P., *Saint Joseph* trans. Sr. Mary Elizabeth, O.P. (St. Louis: B Herder Book Co., 1962) 296-298.

⁹ Cf. Francis L. Filas, S.J., *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus: The Complete Life, Theology and Devotional History of St. Joseph* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1962, second ed.) 493-569.

¹⁰ Cf. Filas 576-636.

¹¹ Cf. Tarcisico Stramare, O.S.J., “Storia della devozione al cuore di San Giuseppe,” (hereafter cited as *Storia*) *Tabor* 51:2 (1997) 14. This essay was first published in Spanish as “Devoción al corazón de San José” in *Estudios Josefinos* 50, N° 100 (Julio-Diciembre 1996) 179-194.

¹² Cf. *Storia* 15.

⁶ Cf. John F. Murphy, *Mary’s Immaculate Heart: The Meaning of the Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1951); Théodore A. Koehler, S.M., “The Heart of Mary in the Latin Tradition from the Seventh to the Sixteenth Century” *Marian Library Studies* New Series 25 (1996-1997) 91-175.

⁷ *Inseg* IX/2 (1986) 699-700 [ORE 959:12]. Italics in the second paragraph my own.

information about the Pious Union of the Most Pure Heart of St. Joseph (*Pia Unione del Cuore purissimo di San Giuseppe*) founded by the Oblate of the Virgin Mary Father Michele Bocca in 1846 who always considered the devotion to the Heart of Joseph as inseparable from devotion to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.¹³ Father Stramare points out that there was a fair amount of literature devoted to the Heart of St. Joseph in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the cultus was promoted by a number of notable ecclesiastics.¹⁴ Admittedly, much more research is required in order to fill in this brief historical sketch.

III. The Prohibition

Given the tortuous itinerary of the cultus of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and the initial reservation to it on the part of the magisterium, it is not surprising that the promotion of the cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph should face similar opposition. This came to light in an audience granted by Blessed Pius IX to Father Paolo Abbona, an Oblate of the Virgin Mary, the Congregation which was promoting the Pious Union of the Most Pure Heart of St. Joseph. Here is his testimony about that audience:

Speaking about the Most Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary, I recalled that some add “and of St. Joseph”. Today – 18 December 1873 – the Pope said to me that this is an abuse; one should not depict the Heart of St. Joseph; devotion to the Heart of Saint Joseph is not approved by the Church. The Pope himself told me this today.¹⁵

Father Stramare, whose valuable work I am basing myself on at this point, asks the question: “What is the actual position of the Holy See in regard to this question?” Since no official response has been made to this question in over 100 years, it may seem opportune to raise it again in the light of subsequent developments.

Let us first trace the history of the prohibition in the light of the documentation presently available. On this matter it is necessary to have recourse to *Pontificia Josephina*, the excellent catalogue and summary of Roman and magisterial documents provided by Father Blaine Burkey, O.F.M. Cap. in the pages of *Cahiers de Joséphologie* (Montreal) from 1962 to 1994.¹⁶

The first negative intervention on the part of the Holy See, which is presently available, is the response of the Sacred Congregation of Rites to the Bishop of Nantes who had asked whether the invocation *Cor Sancti Joseph purissimum, ora pro nobis* could be used in non-liturgical functions. On 14 June 1873 the Sacred Congregation ordered its Secretary to write to the Bishop of Nantes warning him that the cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph is not approved by the Holy See [*Monendum esse per epistolam Rmum. Dominum Episcopum cultum Cordis S. Iosephi non esse ab Apostolica Sede approbatum*].¹⁷

There was a second response by the Sacred Congregation of Rites issued on 19 February 1879 admonishing the Archbishop of Chambéry that the cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph has been reprobated by Gregory XVI and that therefore medals are prohibited which show the Heart of St. Joseph along with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. The authors of *Le Messager de S. Joseph* are to be warned of this also [*Cultus cordis S. Joseph, jam a s.m. Gregorio XVI reprobatus fuit et idcirco prohibita numismata quæ, una com SS. Cordibus Jesu et Mariæ, illud S. Joseph exhibent. Hinc admonendus orator et forte etiam auctores ephemeridis Le Messager de S. Joseph, hanc devotionem non licere*].¹⁸

The third such intervention came from the Vicariate of Rome in response to *dubia* [doubts]

¹⁶ Cf. Larry Toschi, O.S.J., “Liturgical Feasts of Saint Joseph in the 19th and 20th Centuries” in Larry Toschi, O.S.J. (ed.), *Saint Joseph Studies: Papers in English from the Seventh and Eighth International St. Joseph Symposia: Malta 1997 and El Salvador 2001* (Santa Cruz, CA: Guardian of the Redeemer Books, 2002) 25, footnote 1.

¹⁷ Blaine Burkey, O.F.M. Cap., *Pontificia Josephina* C558 [197-198] in *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 12 (1964) 377-378.

¹⁸ *Pontificia Josephina* D45 [263] in *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 17 (1969) 339.

¹³ Cf. Storia 14-20.

¹⁴ Cf. Storia 24-25, endnotes 8-11.

¹⁵ Storia 21 (my trans.).

submitted by the editor of *Analecta Ecclesiastica* regarding the Pious Association of the Holy Family with specific reference to medals of the Holy Family showing the Hearts of the Jesus, Mary and Joseph on their respective chests. The reply was that it is not expedient to wear medals showing the Hearts of the Child Jesus and Mary and in the case of St. Joseph it is not lawful [*Non expedire quoad Corda D. Infantis et B. Matris. Quoad S. Josephum, non licere*].¹⁹

Just as we found that there are obvious lacunae in the history of this cultus, so we also find that there are notable lacunae surrounding its prohibition. As far as I have been able to determine, the ban on the cultus by Pope Gregory XVI, referred to in print on 19 February 1879 during the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII, has never been found.²⁰ Unfortunately, Father Blaine Burkey's published *Josephina Pontificia* only begins with the pontificate of Pius IX and so sheds no light on the matter.

Thus a whole series of questions comes spontaneously to mind.²¹ Did Gregory XVI really approve the preaching and diffusion of devotion to the Heart of St. Joseph by Father Elia of the Three Hearts? Why did he later forbid the devotion? When did he do so and on what grounds? Why was it necessary to wait until 1879 for official notice that the devotion had already been prohibited in the pontificate of Gregory XVI? Why was nothing ever published about this prohibition during the long reign of Blessed Pius IX? Why were the grounds for the prohibition not clarified in the responses of the Sacred Congregation of Rites and the Vicariate of Rome and why was no document cited? These are questions regarding the past which remain unanswered, but there are also questions regarding the present. What is the actual status of the prohibition, given that there exists a public association of the faithful in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles known as the "Handmaids of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus, Mary and Joseph", given private revelations about devotion to the Heart of St. Joseph

and other initiatives of which I am not presently aware?

Insofar as I am able to assess the *status quaestionis* at the moment without the light of further historical documentation, I believe that one could profitably explore the question of what theological grounds might eventually allow for the cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph and one could also explore the question in the light of the more recent papal magisterium.

IV. Theological Grounds – The Assumption of St. Joseph

I believe that the best theological explanation offered thus far for the prohibition of the cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph, without further explicit indications from the magisterium, comes from Father Roland Gauthier, C.S.C. who was certainly one of the great figures in the field of Josephological research in the twentieth century. In exploring the question of whether one could hold that St. Joseph was immaculately conceived, a matter subsequently ruled out by the magisterium²², he raised another fascinating question.

One could also ask, along with the great German theologian Scheeben, if during this epoch, that is from 1854 to 1905, the Church did not reprove, at least implicitly, this opinion of the immaculate conception of Saint Joseph. It is known that on several occasions Rome disapproved of the cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph, which was invoked under the title of "Heart Most Pure" and which was represented in images or on medals in union with the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. In our opinion, moreover, nothing authorizes us to interpret the acts of the Roman

¹⁹ *Pontificia Josephina* D487 [426-427] in *Cahiers de Joséphologie* 20 (1972) 168-169.

²⁰ Cf. Alfred de Bonhome, "Dévotions Prohibées," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 3:788-789.

²¹ Cf. *Storia* 23-24.

²² In his Encyclical *Fulgens Corona*, Pius XII spoke of "the very singular privilege" of Mary's Immaculate Conception "which was never granted to another person" [AAS = *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 45 (1953) 580] and in his general audience of 12 June 1996 John Paul II explicitly stated that this excluded attributing this privilege to St. Joseph [*Inseg* XIX/1 (1996) 1498].

Congregations in this sense, not even the attitude of the propagators of this devotion, since they never breathed a word about the immaculate conception of Saint Joseph. Could not one rather believe that Rome did not wish to approve a devotion which assumed, as its proper and specific object, the bodily organ and sensible love of the Heart of Saint Joseph, and which consequently involves the problem of the bodily assumption of the holy Patriarch?²³

I believe that his question really provides the key to the theological basis for the possible cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph. We have already noted the magisterial precision that “the physical Heart of Jesus now in heavenly glory” is described as a particularly expressive symbol of the divine-human love of the God-man and that “the physical Heart of Mary now in glory is indicated as the symbol of her person” and explicitly of “her maternal love, her singular sanctity and her central role in the redemptive mission of her Son”. While the physical hearts of Jesus and Mary are only the material objects of the cultus and not the formal or final objects, it would seem that the fact that they are now “beating in glory” provides the necessary basis for the cultus. In the case of Jesus, this is verified by the Church’s profession of faith in his triumphant Ascension into heaven. In the case of Mary, this is verified by the Church’s firm belief in her glorious Assumption.

Can such a similar belief be sustained for St. Joseph? Let us have recourse to the research of Father Francis L. Filas, S.J.

Independently of any reference in Scripture, the doctrine of the resurrection of St. Joseph and the assumption of his glorified body into heaven could be proposed on grounds of fitness. Usually, however, it has been based on the

words of St. Matthew, “Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep arose; and coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection, they came into the holy city and appeared to many” (27: 52, 53). ...

From the time of the Fathers of the Church the predominant opinion has been that these souls were reunited to their bodies never to die again; and that when Christ ascended into heaven, they entered heaven with Him, body and soul, for all eternity. Hence, their resurrection would not be a mere return to earthly life, but a revivifying and glorification of their bodies as will happen on the Last Day to the rest of the just. If this interpretation is correct, it is logical to assume (as numerous authors have done) that St. Joseph was granted the glorification of his body at the moment of Christ’s resurrection. Of all, he would surpassingly deserve the privilege.²⁴

Of course, the position on this matter has not been unanimous. St. Augustine held that the Easter resurrection of the just was merely temporary (as in the case of Lazarus), and that these persons had to die once again. In his earlier years St. Thomas Aquinas had asserted that these saints entered heaven with Christ, but later deserted this view in favor of Augustine’s.²⁵ Along with Augustine, perhaps the other strongest contrary view is that of Benedict XIV speaking as a private theologian.²⁶ On the other hand Martin Jugie, A.A., whose work on the death and assumption of Our Lady remains a classic, states:

If we had to decide this question simply by authorities, it seems that the thesis of a permanent resurrection would be brought to the fore both by the quality and the

²⁴ Filas 421-422.

²⁵ Cf. James J. Davis, O.P., *A Thomistic Josephology* (Montreal: St. Joseph’s Oratory Center of Research; University of Montreal Faculty of Theology, 1967) 285-289; Filas 422.

²⁶ Filas 425.

²³ Roland Gauthier, C.S.C., “Immaculée Conception de Marie, privilège singulier ou unique? Étude historique sur l’opinion de l’immaculée conception de S. Joseph”, *Cahiers de Josephologie* 2 (1954) 193-194 (my trans.).

number of the commentators who have upheld it in the past and still uphold in our own times. In our own day it has clearly prevailed.²⁷

Regarding the specific question of St. Joseph's being included among those entering heaven with Christ, Jugie further stated "We do not think that Suarez, Francis de Sales and Cardinal Lépicier made 'an empty conjecture' in conjecturing that St. Joseph was among those brought back to life."²⁸ Among the strongest defenders of this belief were Jean Gerson, Sts. Bernardine of Siena and Francis de Sales.²⁹

Father James J. Davis, O.P. also points out that

Pope John XXIII, in a homily on the feast of the Ascension in 1960, explicitly interpreted St. Thomas as holding, in his Commentary on Mt., that those who rose from the tombs after the resurrection of Christ entered into heaven with Christ, and the Pope went on to say that one could accept as plausible the bodily assumption of St. John the Baptist and St. Joseph.³⁰

The text of Blessed John XXIII is as follows:

Among the Fathers and Doctors who variously interpret this passage of St. Matthew, Aquinas in his Commentary decisively takes his place with those who assert that "the bodies of the saints who slept rose" and he adds "so as to enter into heaven with Christ".

This, then, pertains to the dead of the Old Testament who were closest to Jesus – let us name two of the most intimate in his life, John the Baptist, the Precursor, and Joseph of Nazareth, his nurturer and guardian – it belongs to them – thus we may

²⁷ Martin Jugie, A.A., *La mort et l'assomption de la Sainte Vierge* (Vatican City, 1944) 52 (trans. in Filas 424).

²⁸ Jugie 54 (trans. in Filas 425).

²⁹ Cf. Filas 425-428.

³⁰ Davis 289.

piously believe – the honor and privilege to open this marvelous accompaniment through the ways to heaven. [*Tra i Padri e i Dottori che variamente interpretano questo passo di S. Matteo, l'Aquinate nel suo Commentario prende posto decisamente presso quanti asseriscono che corpora sanctorum qui dormierant surrexerunt – egli aggiunge – tanquam intraturi cum Christo in caelum.*

Spetta quindi ai morti dell'Antico Testamento i più vicini a Gesù – niminiamone due di più intimi alla sua vita, Giovanni Battista il Precursore e Giuseppe di Nazareth, il suo nutricatore e custode – aspetta a loro – così piamente noi possiamo credere – l'onore ed il privilegio di aprire questo mirabile accompagnamento per le vie del cielo.]³¹

On this fascinating topic I will leave the last word to Father Boniface Llamera, O.P. (1913-1959), one of the most noted of the Spanish Dominican Josephologists of the twentieth century.³² After having treated the topic at length and in depth he states:

It seems reasonable that the Holy Family – Jesus, Mary and Joseph – predestined to initiate the new divine life of the human race, should also initiate the glorious life of the resurrection. It is true that Jesus and Mary are by far superior to St. Joseph, but this superiority did not prevent the Saint from belonging to the Holy Family, even holding the place of husband and father. It seems very unlikely, then, that Jesus being risen, his providential father

³¹ AAS 52 (1960) 455-456 (my trans.). It should be noted that the Pope was citing from St. Thomas' Commentary on Mt. which represents his earlier period. The complete English text may be found in Davis 287.

³² Cf. James J. Davis, O.P., "Spanish Dominican Josephologists of the Twentieth Century," in Toschi, *Saint Joseph Studies* 11-13.

should not also be risen with Him, or that Mary should be risen without her most worthy spouse.

We can, therefore, believe that St. Joseph, our most loving Patriarch, has triumphed and enjoys with all the saints, in an absolute manner, the life of the soul as well as the life of the body, in eternal companionship with Jesus and Mary.³³

I would only add this comment: while I do not believe there is any serious likelihood of a dogmatic definition on the matter of the Assumption of St. Joseph, I believe that it is a very probable opinion which bears a notable weight of authority. I opine that it could possibly afford a sufficient basis for legitimizing the cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph, should the authority of the Church so decide.

V. The Papal Magisterium of Pope John Paul II

Could it be that there is a movement on the part of the magisterium in the direction of legitimizing the cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph? It may be too early to make a fully informed response, but there are elements in the magisterium of the late Pope John Paul II which might be seen as moving in that direction. These would need to be studied within the background of previous papal statements – if there are any of note – which I have not had the opportunity to do up to now. Nonetheless, those of John Paul II do seem to indicate an openness to discourse about the Heart of Joseph, frequently linked with the Heart of Mary. I will provide below those texts which I consider to be most significant in this regard, indicating the crucial phrases in bold script.

A. The Hearts of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Perhaps the most notable of all of Pope John Paul II's references to the Heart of St. Joseph occurs in #86 of his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* of 22 November 1981 in which he links the Hearts of Jesus, Mary and Joseph:

I entrust each family to Him [Christ the Lord], to Mary, and to Joseph. To their hands and their hearts I offer this Exhortation: may it be they who present it to you venerable Brothers and beloved sons and daughters, and may it be they who open your hearts to the light that the Gospel sheds on every family. [*Ei demum et Mariæ et Ioseph singulas commendamus familias. Eorum etiam curæ cordique hanc committimus Adhortationem: ipsi vobis, Venerabiles Frateres ac dilecti Filii, porrigant eam vestrosque recludant animos lumini illi, quod super omnem familiam Evangelium diffundit.*]³⁴

B. The Hearts of Mary and Joseph

Secondly there is a rather lengthy series of references to the Hearts of Mary and Joseph. The first comes from the homily at Midnight Mass of Christmas 1980:

It does not matter that, for the moment, this light is **shared in only by a few hearts**; that it is **shared in by the Virgin of Nazareth and her Spouse**, the Virgin who was not enabled to give birth to her Son beneath the roof of a house in Bethlehem, “because there was no place for them in the inn” (Lk. 2:7). [*Non importa che questa luce sia, per il momento, **partecipata soltanto da alcuni cuori: che partecipi ad essa la Vergine di Nazaret ed il suo Sposo**, la Vergine alla quale non è stato dato di mettere al mondo il suo Figlio sotto il tetto di una casa a Betlemme, «perché non c'era posto per loro nell'albergo».*]³⁵

³³ Boniface Llamera, O.P., *Saint Joseph* trans. by Sister Mary Elizabeth, O.P. (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1962) 272.

³⁴ *Inseg* IV/2 (1981) 1045 [ORE 715:18].

³⁵ *Inseg* III/2 (1980) 1796 [ORE 665:1].

The Pope spoke similarly in an address on 20 December 1981 at the new Regina Margherita Hospital in Trastevere:

The inspiring scene, which we will contemplate represented in the crib, speaks to us all of a life that has just been born, which **the warmth and solicitude of loving hearts (Mary, Joseph, the shepherds)** defend from the dangers of a difficult situation. [*La scena suggestiva, che contempleremo raffigurata nel presepe, parla a tutti noi di una vita appena sbocciata, che il calore e la sollecitudine di cuori pieni di amore (Maria, Giuseppe, i pastori) difendono dalle strettezze di una situazione difficile.*]³⁶

On 29 December 1985 he spoke thus in his homily in St. Mark's Basilica on Rome's Piazza Venezia:

Today the Church experiences the joy of the birth of the Saviour, the Son of God, in Bethlehem – as the mystery of the family, as the Holy Family.

It is a profoundly human truth: through the birth of a baby *the conjugal community* of a man and woman, of a husband and wife, becomes more perfectly a family. At the same time, there is a great mystery of God, which is revealed to man – the Mystery hidden in faith and **in the hearts of those spouses, of that couple, Mary and Joseph of Nazareth**. In the beginning they alone were witnesses of the fact that *the Baby born in Bethlehem is the "Son of the Most High"*, come into the world by the action of the Holy Spirit. [*La Chiesa vive oggi la gioia della Natività del Signore, del Figlio di Dio, a Betlemme: come mistero della Famiglia, della Santa Famiglia.*

E' una verità profondamente umana: per la nascita di un bambino la

*comunità coniugale dell'uomo e della donna, del marito e della moglie, diventa più perfettamente famiglia. Al tempo stesso, questo è un grande mistero di Dio, che si svela davanti agli uomini: il Mistero nascosto nella fede, e nel cuore di quegli Sposi, di quei Coniugi Maria e Giuseppe, di Nazaret. All'inizio soltanto loro furono testimoni del fatto che il Bambino che è nato a Betlemme, è «Figlio dell'Altissimo», venuto al mondo per opera dello Spirito Santo.»*³⁷

On the Feast of St. Joseph in 1987 in his homily in Civitavecchia, he began by quoting “Joseph, son of David, *do not fear to take Mary your wife*” (Mt. 1:20) and then continued:

Thus the divine mystery of the Incarnation was entrusted to Mary before any other person. In her, “*the Word was made flesh*” (cf. Jn. 1:14), when, during the Annunciation, she submitted her will to the inscrutable designs of God ...

To Joseph, then, to the carpenter of Nazareth, was entrusted, as to Mary, *the same mystery of God*. A great mystery, the mystery eternally hidden in God, a mystery that “became flesh” in man's history and **was revealed to human hearts: to the eyes of faith**. [*Quindi il mistero divino dell'Incarnazione è stato affidato, prima di ogni altra persona, a Maria. In Lei, il Verbo si fece carne, quando durante l'annunciazione, sottomise la sua volontà ai disegni imperscrutabili di Dio*

A Giuseppe, quindi al carpentiere di Nazareth è stato affidato, come a Maria, lo stesso mistero di Dio. Un grande mistero, il mistero eternamente nascosto in Dio, mistero che «divenne carne» nella storia dell'umanità ed è stato rivelato agli

³⁶ Inseg IV/2 (1981) 1181 [ORE 720:8].

³⁷ Inseg VIII/2 (1985) 1628 [ORE 918:3].

*occhi dei cuori umani: agli occhi della fede.]*³⁸

On 9 September 1993 the Holy Father linked the Hearts of Mary and Joseph together in his homily at the Marian Shrine of Aglona in Latvia:

The mystery of the divine Incarnation! It was so difficult to understand that it first had *to find a place in the minds and hearts* of human beings. **First in Mary's heart**, which is what occurred at the annunciation in Nazareth, and **then in the heart of Mary's husband, Joseph.**³⁹

In his Letter to Families of 2 February 1994 the Holy Father wrote:

Only in this hiddenness do we see the workings of the Holy Spirit, the source of "fairest love". He has poured forth this love **not only in the hearts of Mary and Joseph** but also in the hearts of all married couples who are open to hearing the word of God and keeping it (cf. Lk. 8:15). [*Solummodo eiusmodi in abdita recessione operatur Spiritus Sanctus, pulchræ dilectionis scaturigo. Illum quidem amorem ipse non in corda Mariæ solius et Iosephi effudit, verum etiam in animos coniugum qui ad audiendum Dei verbum custodiendumque sunt parati.*]⁴⁰

In his Angelus address of 6 February 1994 which was devoted to the mystery of the Presentation in Temple he made these comments:

Step by step, we must ask ourselves about the direction we have taken, with the same question that was certainly **in the hearts of Mary and Joseph**: what does the Lord wish from us? What is the direction he has planned for our child? [*Di tappa in*

*tappa occorre interrogarsi sulla direzione del cammino, ponendosi la domanda che certamente era presente nel cuore di Maria e di Giuseppe: che cosa vuole il Signore da noi? quale è la strada che Egli ha tracciato per il nostro bambino?]*⁴¹

In his Angelus address of 5 January 2003, towards the end of his long pontificate, we find the Pope returning to a theme which he had begun to develop already in his early years:

The Child born in Bethlehem who comes on the face of the earth is truly "contemporary" with every person who lives on the face of the earth.

For this reason, he is also our "contemporary". The gifts of the Lord never become obsolete. Here are the glad tidings of Christmas: **the divine light which filled the hearts of Mary and Joseph** and guided the steps of the shepherds and Magi, still shines for us today. [*Il Bambino nato a Betlemme è veramente il 'coetaneo' di ogni persona, che viene sulla faccia della terra.*

*È, pertanto, anche nostro 'contemporaneo'. I doni del Signore non tramontano mai. Ecco il lieto annuncio del Natale: la luce divina, che inondò il cuore di Maria e di Giuseppe, e guidò i passi dei pastori e dei Magi, brilla anche oggi per noi.]*⁴²

C. The Heart of St. Joseph

In his the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos* of 15 August 1989 Pope John Paul II made a number of references to the Heart of St. Joseph, at least as found in the English translation. Speaking of the uniqueness of St. Joseph's vocation the Holy Father stated in #8 that

³⁸ *Inseg* X/1 (1987) 623 [ORE 982:7].

³⁹ *Inseg* XVI/2 (1993) 702 [ORE 1307:12].

⁴⁰ *Inseg* XVII/1 (1994) 316 [ORE 1329:XI].

⁴¹ *Inseg* XVII/1 (1994) 413 [ORE 1327:12].

⁴² *Inseg* XXVI/1 (2003) 10-11 [ORE 1775:2].

His fatherhood is expressed concretely “in his having made his life a service, a sacrifice to the mystery of the Incarnation and to the redemptive mission connected with it; in having used the legal authority which was his over the Holy Family in order to make a total gift of self, of his life and work; in having turned his human vocation to domestic love into **a superhuman oblation of self, an oblation of his heart and all his abilities** into love placed at the service of the Messiah growing up in his house.” [*Concreta autem ratione paternitas illius inde declarata est «quod sua ex vita ministerium effecit ac sacrificium ipsi incarnationis mysterio necnon redimendi officio ei inhaerenti, quod legis auctoritate utebatur quam iure in sacram habebat Familiam ut sui ipsius et vitae suae et sui operis inde donationem illi Familiae praeberet, quod humanam suam domesticum ad amorem vocationem transfiguravit is idem in oblationem vires humanas excedentem sui cordisque sui et omnis facultatis, in amorem ministerio Messiae destinatum iam domi suae generatum»*].⁴³

This text was also quoted by the Holy Father in Italian in his Angelus address on 21 March 1999 when he spoke about Joseph’s

having turned his human vocation to domestic love into **a superhuman oblation of self, an oblation of his heart and all his abilities** into love placed at the service of the Messiah growing up in his house. [...*nell’aver convertito la sua umana vocazione all’amore domestico nella sovrumana oblazione di sé, del suo cuore e di ogni capacità, nell’amore posto a*

servizio del Messia germinato nella sua casa.]⁴⁴

The next text from #8 of *Redemptoris Custos* requires an additional comment. Here we find that in the official Latin text the word that corresponds to the English word “heart” is not *cor* but *animus*. Prescinding from the question of what language the apostolic exhortation was originally written in, I believe the Holy Father’s intention of speaking about the Heart of Joseph is clear because this is a direct quotation from a radio message of the Servant of God Pope Pius XII to Catholic school students in the United States in which the Pope was speaking English and did, in fact, speak of St. Joseph as showing Jesus “all the natural love, all the affectionate solicitude that a **father’s heart** can know”.⁴⁵

Since it is inconceivable that such a sublime task would not be matched by the necessary qualities to adequately fulfill it, we must recognize that Joseph showed Jesus “by a special gift from heaven, **all the natural love, all the affectionate solicitude that a father’s heart can know.**” [*Quando concipi mente non potest muneri adeo excelso dotes non respondere necessarias illud convenienter ad perficiendum, concedi oportet coluisse Iosephum in Iesum «peculiari Caeli largitione universum illum naturae amorem omnemque sollicitudinis affectum quem patris cognoscere posset animus»*].⁴⁶

Commenting on the chaste marital union between Mary and Joseph in #19 of *Redemptoris Custos*, the Holy Father made this illuminating comment about Joseph’s Heart:

The deep spiritual closeness arising from marital union and the interpersonal contact between man

⁴³ *Inseg* XII/2 (1989) 206 [Vatican edition 16]. The quotation is from a discourse of the Servant of God Pope Paul VI given on 19 March 1966; *Inseg Paulo VI* IV (1966) 110.

⁴⁴ *Inseg* XXII/1 (1999) 587 [ORE 1584:1].

⁴⁵ AAS 50 (1958) 174.

⁴⁶ *Inseg* XII/2 (1989) 207 [Vatican edition 17].

and woman have their definitive origin in the Spirit, the Giver of Life (cf. Jn. 6:63). Joseph, in obedience to the Spirit, found in the Spirit the source of love, the conjugal love which he experienced as a man. **And this love proved to be greater than this “just man” could ever have expected within the limits of his human heart.** [*Altitudo autem propinquitatis eiusdem sive potius spiritualis coniunctionis vehementia et consortionis inter personas, tandem e Spiritu proficiscuntur «qui vivificat». Obsequens autem Spiritui Iosephus fontem in illo denique ipso reperit amoris, sui scilicet conubialis amoris ut viri; qui quidem amor maior illo amore fuit quem «vir iustus» secundum cordis sui humani modum exspectare sibi potuit*]⁴⁷

On 19 March 1993 in addressing workers in Vescovio, he commented on the necessity of Joseph’s meditating on the word he had receiving in a way similar to his many references on how Mary had to ponder the word in her heart (cf. Lk. 2:19, 51):

For him too **the word sown in his heart** required *the toil and sweat of cultivation*. As we follow him in the unfolding of the Gospel story, it is not difficult to imagine the constant effort required in his fidelity. Closely involved in the mystery of the incarnation, he was asked to believe in something which was humanly difficult to understand. [*Inseg XVI/1 (1993) 674-675; ORE 1284:5*] **La Parola seminata nel suo cuore** comportò anche, per lui la fatica e il sudore della coltivazione. *Sequendolo nei vari momenti della narrazione evangelica, non è difficile intuire tutto il lavoro della sua fedeltà. Coinvolto da vicino nel mistero dell’Incarnazione, gli fu chiesto di*

credere a ciò che era umanamente difficile da comprendere.]⁴⁸

VI. The Status Quaestionis

What I have tried to do in this presentation is to bring together as many factors bearing on the question of the cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph as possible. Let us review the major developments which we have noted.

1. We have noted that, according to the late Pope John Paul II, the cultus of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, even if not explicit in the first millennium of the Church’s life and recognized by her magisterium only after initial negative judgments, belongs “in a permanent fashion to the spirituality of the Church throughout her history”.

2. We may also note an analogous recognition of the cultus of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on the part of the Church.

3. In both of these cases the material object of the cultus is the physical Hearts of Jesus and Mary which are now “beating in glory” while the final object of the cultus is their persons.

4. There is evidence for a cultus to the Heart of St. Joseph from 1733 in Brazil and Portugal and subsequently in Mexico, Spain, France and Italy. There is a lack of studies on this matter at the moment. We are not aware of whether the development spread from one place to another or whether it began spontaneously in various places. The available literature needs to be studied, organized and assessed.

5. The cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph was prohibited in the 19th century, but the original prohibition by Pope Gregory XVI has never been found or published and thus the basis for the ban is not clear. There is a need for further historical research and clarification in this area as well.

6. The best theological opinion for the basis of the prohibition would seem to be the Church’s lack of certainty about whether the Heart of St. Joseph is now “beating in glory”. This position was

⁴⁷ *Inseg XII/2 (1989) 216 [Vatican edition 30].*

⁴⁸ *Inseg XVI/1 (1993) 674-675 [ORE 1284:5].*

sustained by Father Roland Gauthier, C.S.C., but by how many others, it is not clear. This is also an area which requires further research.

7. There is a fairly venerable tradition for belief in the Assumption of St. Joseph which has existed for centuries in the Church, which was recognized as legitimate by Blessed John XXIII and which would, therefore, provide a basis for the belief that the Heart of Joseph is now “beating in glory”. It must be added, however, that this belief is certainly less universal than the belief in Our Lady’s glorious Assumption. It is not *proxima fidei* and is not likely to be defined.

8. It may be argued that the papal magisterium of the late Pope John Paul II left the question of the prohibition of the cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph open and that a number of his references are compatible with the existence of such a cultus and would tend to support it, particularly his reference to the Hearts of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* as well as in his references to the Hearts of Mary and Joseph together and his giving attention to the various states of the Heart of St. Joseph. He also quotes brief passages from the magisterium of the Servants of God Pius XII and Paul VI on the Heart of St. Joseph. All of these, it is true, may be simply passing references, but further study would need to be done in this area also in order to ascertain if there might be an emerging positive pattern in the papal magisterium regarding the Heart of Joseph.

All of these factors, in themselves and taken together, do not annul the prohibition of a cultus of the Heart of St. Joseph. On the other hand, I do not believe that it can be asserted that the door is definitively shut on this matter. As I have already indicated, it seems that several related areas bearing on this question need to be studied and evaluated with care. History has taught us that bans on the cultus of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Divine Mercy were transitory and not permanent. Is it still possible that the Lord wants to establish a cultus to the Heart of St. Joseph in order to call attention to his unique role in the history of salvation and to associate him every more closely in the minds of the faithful with Jesus and Mary? In this matter is the Church advancing – under the

guidance of the Holy Spirit – towards the plenitude of divine truth?⁴⁹ Only time will tell.

⁴⁹ Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* #8.