



## The heart as a hagiographic attribute of Saint Benedict Rosary: hypothesis on its origin and its underlying model of Christian life

O coração como atributo hagiográfico de São Benedito do Rosário: hipótese sobre a sua origem e seu modelo subjacente da vida cristã

Helmut Renders\*

### Abstract

In this article, we investigate an unusual variation of the classic hagiographic attributes of Saint Benedict: Saint Benedict Rosary with heart. This is an attempt to explain both the relative scarcity of figures with this additional attribute and their existence. For this, we discuss the history of Saint Benedict's representations, the function and examples of *religio cordis* in colonial Brazil, and the features of brotherhoods and confraternities worshipping Saint Benedict. We argue that the alternative hagiographic attributes of Saint Benedict represent different emphases of Christian faith with more or less closeness to the colonial religion project. We conclude that confraternities of "black" people preferably did not use the figure of Benedict with Infant Jesus, but Benedict Rosary's representations. Thus, they did not emphasize the experience of "mystical union" as the maximum expression and favorite purpose of their faith, but the sympathetic sharing model, according to which closeness to God is related to closeness to the neediest people. We interpret the heart's attribute not as a return to the dominant discourse of *religio cordis* of colonial Catholicism, but as a critical rereading of the official discourse by confraternities and brotherhoods.

**Keywords:** Benedict with Infant Jesus; Benedict Rosary; heart; *religio cordis*; *theologia cordis*; brotherhoods and confraternities of Our Lady of the Rosary.

### Resumo

Neste artigo, investiga-se uma variação incomum dos atributos hagiográficos clássicos de São Benedito: o São Benedito do Rosário com coração. Procura-se explicar tanto a relativa raridade de figuras com esse atributo adicional como sua existência. Para isso, discute-se a história das representações de São Benedito, a função e exemplos da *religio cordis* no Brasil colonial e as características das irmandades e confrarias que veneravam São Benedito. Defende-se que as atribuições hagiográficas alternativas de São Benedito representam distintas ênfases da fé cristã com mais ou menos proximidade ao projeto da religião colonial. Conclui-se que as confrarias dos "homens 'pretos'" não usaram preferencialmente a figura de Benedito com o Menino Jesus, mas as representações do Benedito do Rosário. Dessa forma, não enfatizaram a experiência da "união mística" como expressão máxima e propósito predileto da sua fé, mas o modelo da partilha solidária, segundo o qual a proximidade de Deus passa pela aproximação aos/às mais necessitados/as. Interpretamos o atributo do coração não como retorno ao discurso dominante da *religio cordis* do catolicismo colonial, mas como uma releitura crítica do discurso oficial pelas confrarias e irmandades.

**Palavras-chave:** Benedito com Menino Jesus; Benedito do Rosário; coração; *religio cordis*; *theologia cordis*; irmandades e confrarias da Nossa Senhora do Rosário.

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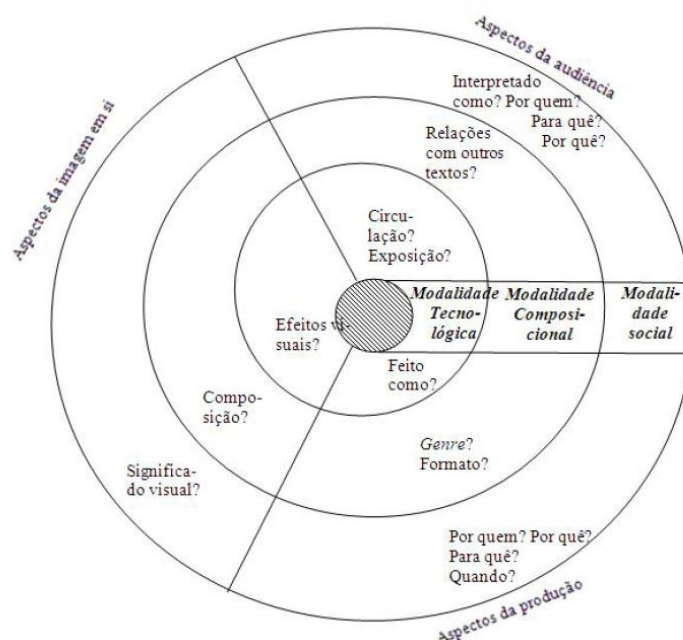
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\* Post-PhD in Religious Science from the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF). PhD in Religious Science from Universidade Metodista de São Paulo (UMESP). Professor at UMEP. Country of origin: Brazil. Email: [helmut.renderers@metodista.br](mailto:helmut.renderers@metodista.br).

## Introduction

In our research on *religio cordis* in Brazil, we have observed that there are sculptures of Saint Benedict Rosary with the hagiographic attribute of heart. Far from making conclusive statements with regard to the scope of this phenomenon, we would rather prefer to draw attention to this phenomenon; present an analysis of the respective hagiography when compared to the two dominant ones, i.e. Saint Benedict with Infant Jesus and Saint Benedict Rosary (or “with Flowers” or “with Roses”); and introduce a hypothesis concerning its emergence. For this, we propose to investigate the socio-religious hagiographic imagery promoted by the various hagiographic attributes and their supposed effect and impacts on the daily life of brotherhoods and confraternities of Saint Benedict and colonial Catholicism.

Regarding the method, we agree with Rose (2007, p. 31), who suggests to interpret images and sculptures from the triple perspective of technological, compositional, and social modalities.



Source: ROSE, 2007, pp. 31

- Regarding the *technological modality*, the aspect of location seems to be significant. Church or monastery, library or sacristy, a book written in Latin, a sculpture on the exterior wall of a house or as part of an oratory inside the house, all these places are related to different people and social groups, sometimes mixed, sometimes clearly distinct. In our case, they are confraternities or brotherhoods of “black” men. But there are also technologies related to ethnic groups (baked clay is an Indian art), which are different from European customs (the Jesuit preference for carved wooden figures).
- As for the *compositional modality*, we focus on production aspects and the image itself. Do such representations have African or European features? Do such figures have correct proportions?
- The *social modality* focuses our look on issues related to production (Who? When? For what? Why?), reception (How is it interpreted? By whom? Why?), and production conditions. What is the relation between the meanings set by institutional design, for instance, as part of a colonization project, and mythopoetic tendencies coming from the bottom (ECO, 2000) that create new meanings and even alternative spaces? Despite our emphasis lies on the representations itself, the issue of audience needs to be at least mentioned. Is there evidence for rereading, preferably collective, despite the producer’s intention put into action by the artist’s work? The performative issue also belongs to the reception aspect, in the “effective”, even “powerful” (FREEDBERG, 1991) meaning of the imagistic discourse.

Starting from these inquiries, we aim our look at the sculptures analyzed throughout this article.

## 1 Origin, arrival, context, and classic iconographic attributes of the veneration of Saint Benedict with Flowers or Rosary in Brazil

Saint Benedict, sometimes nicknamed “the Moor”, was born in 1524, in Sicily, and died in 1589, aged 65 years<sup>1</sup>. According to the narrative of his origin, he was a slave captured in Northern Africa, i.e. a Moor, or he descended from African parents, from Ethiopia. At 18 years, he joined a group of hermits and followers of Saint Francis of Assisi and, 17 years later, he entered as a cook in a Convent of Capuchins, where he temporarily became the top of novices. Never ordained, there are distinct narratives pointing out charity or ecstatic religious experience as a characteristic of this Franciscan layman.

In general terms, the sculptures of Benedict bring clothes typical of a Third Order Franciscan and his brown skin. As for the hair, we observe, in Brazil, figures with European straight hair or African curly hair<sup>2</sup>; as for the faces, figures with a rather European or African shaped nose. Obviously, this reflects ethnic characteristics of the brotherhoods and confraternities of Saint Benedict: at first, they still consisted of many predominantly European ethnic groups; in turn, over time, the colonial social stratification was expressed, herein, and its division between “white”, “brown”, and “black” individuals.

However, social issues have not been expressed only by the sculptures’ physiognomy. More subtly, but not less effective, two legends of Benedict’s life also contributed for a definition of the hagiographic attributes more specific to the saint, in order to express different models of spirituality or Christian life. In the earliest narrative, a religious experience accompanied by ecstasy was highlighted; in another, a philanthropic action put into question by the authorities, but supposedly authorized by God through a miracle.

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<sup>1</sup> His life data coincide, thus, with those of Teresa of Ávila, or Teresa of Jesus (1515-1582; canonization in 1622), and John of the Cross (1542-1591; canonization in 1726). The canonization of Saint Benedict took place, but only in 1807. This probably shows the “growth” of devotion, from the perspective of the Holy See, from a marginal devotion to a popular devotion impossible to be ignored. We chose to integrate them in the bosom of mother Church.

<sup>2</sup> In some rare cases, we also observe a haircut shaped like a tonsure, which is usually restricted to the First Order. Then, it is a mistake.

The first of these two narratives highlighted the hagiographic attribute of Infant Jesus in the lap of the saint, representing the saint's subjective feeling of the presence of Jesus in his heart at the time of the Eucharist, along with, according to the narrative, a temporary ecstasy. According to the respective model, Saint Benedict carries Infant Jesus lying on a handkerchief, held by two hands. In general, Infant Jesus ends up being positioned close to the saint's heart. Thus, it gets close to an essential iconography of post-Tridentine Catholicism, which combines Eucharist with sacrifice and blood, and Jesus and the human heart with the experiences of transverberation or dwelling by Infant Jesus. This imagery, according to the narrative, is completed by the aspect of temporary ecstasy, described as momentary fainting – something which, at least, recalls a mystical union time, seen in medieval times as the greatest possible achievement of faith before death, an emphasis appreciated again by the Catholic reform. Thus, Saint Benedict with Infant Jesus represents the sociocultural imagery of official Catholicism at the time of Catholic reform and the achievement and its tendency to reduce the essence of Christian life to a mystical experience of the inner person as foretaste of the delights of eternity prepared for it in the transcendent.

Quite different is the second narrative. It is said through it that the saint, in an attempt to bring food from the monastery to poor people living in the city, was caught up in by a superior. When challenged to show the hidden food, he might had turned into roses. We observe in this model, particularly, two hagiographic attributes: handkerchief and bouquet of roses. In Portugal, he became known as Saint Benedict with Flowers; in turn, in Brazil, we observe the most popular Benedict Rosary or “with Roses”<sup>3</sup>. Usually, the left hand holds the bouquet and the right hand holds the handkerchief, folded or puffed, which has to be seen as reminiscent of the iconography of Benedict with Infant Jesus<sup>4</sup>. Sometimes, the

<sup>3</sup> Thus, the statement by Augras (2005, p. 58) that “the Brazilian imagery took this episode to produce statues known as ‘Saint Benedict with flowers’” may refer only to the beginning of a very Brazilian production of sculptures or to the creation of a designation different from the Portuguese, instead of the onset of worship itself.

<sup>4</sup> According to Franco Junior (1997, p. 13), the right side represented, at the time, in iconographic terms, the male and divine aspect, and the left side, the female and unholy aspect. Deitmaring (1969, p. 265-292) also indicates this way. In this sense, charity was part of daily life.

theme is varied: the bouquet of roses appears above a handkerchief, held by two hands, i.e. taking the place of Infant Jesus. This closeness to the previous hagiography may be interpreted either as a replacement or as a citation<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, Saint Benedict with Infant Jesus and Saint Benedict Rosary represent, two distinct episodes in Benedict's life, which, in turn, lead his worshipers to different spiritualities or faith praxis. On the one hand, mystical experience is highlighted as the core and ultimate target of spirituality; on the other hand, charitable initiative is claimed as an essential element in the Christian life. "Mystical Union as temporary ecstasy within the heart" or "imitation of Christ in daily life" are the alternatives that, in turn, represent the discussion in the late medieval era that led to the emergence of modern *devotio*. The first hagiographic type represents the classic emphases of Catholic reform in its official version; the second set of hagiographic attributes, a popular rereading that connects hope in receiving divine care, despite the fact of being included in a social group deprived of the right to dream. In the latter narrative, the focus lies on the miracle of mercy as an extraordinary experience able to "dribble" even the surveillance of superiors, representing in the new Brazilian context the colonial system and its slavery rationale<sup>6</sup>.

In Brazil, Saint Benedict's worship came from Africa, where his relation to devotion of Our Lady of the Rosary had also been established. Devotion of Our Lady of the Rosary, introduced by Dominicans even before the onset of slavery (MELLO E SOUZA, 2002, p. 160), was a missionary devotion focusing on foreigner's conversion. Occasionally, Saint Benedict's worship arrived along with slaves themselves (COELHO, 2002, p. 70) and he certainly gained even more followers due to the fact of being a black saint (SANTOS, 1997, p. 77). Thus,

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<sup>5</sup> Because of the "citation" element, it is assumed that Benedict with Flowers or Rosary came after Benedict of Infant Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> Concerning the popularity of *religio cordis* in the upper classes of colony see, for instance, Orazem (2011); as for the various projects of *religio cordis* see the Catholic discussion, for instance, in Libanio (1988, p. 79-102) and Bingemer (1988, p. 74-105) or in Maçaneiro (2002). It becomes clear that there was, until 10 years ago, a Catholic discussion seeking to bring *religio cordis* closer to groups engaged and committed to struggles of the marginalized people. We have written about the discussion on the relation between the sociological typology of "'cordial' man" (Sérgio Buarque de Holanda), the Brazilian religious matrix (Bittencourt Filho), *religio cordis*, Protestantism, and Brazilian Pentecostalism both a panoramic study (RENDERS, 2011a) and specific studies (RENDERS, 2011b; 2012a; 2012b).

Benedict's worship came to Bahia, from where it spread to the whole country<sup>7</sup>. Hoornaert (1991, p. 87) speaks of devotion beginning in 1639, in Bahia, and Augras (2005, p. 61) states that devotion might have had its own headquarters a little before 1700<sup>8,9</sup>.

It seems that the dynamics of a closer onset between brotherhoods or “white”, “brown”, and “black” confraternities, with subsequent separation due to protests by whites, was repeated in several places, as Soares (2000) also shows for Rio de Janeiro city. In this sense, the statement by Salles (1963, p. 27), i.e. “the lay religious associations – Brotherhoods, Confraternities, and Third Orders – emerged in 18<sup>th</sup> century society in Minas Gerais”, may refer only and be restricted to associations predominantly made up of slaves or freed slaves<sup>10</sup>.

The social position of this devotion consisted, thus, in the so-called brotherhoods or confraternities. This form of associating lay individuals was created in the late medieval era to ensure “proper care for the body” (KARASCH, 2010, p. 1), including a dignified funeral (VICENT, 1994). According to Julita Scarano (apud AUGRAS, 2005, p. 61),

[...] there were black confraternities in Portugal [...] that were often absorbed in the bosom of white brotherhoods – keeping blacks in subordinate positions within them – whereas in Brazil they preferred to maintain separation.

Mary Karasch (2010, p. 2) points out that, perhaps, the first black brotherhood in Portugal was organized in 1496; then, the devotion spread throughout the Portuguese kingdom:

<sup>7</sup> Promoting the devotion of Our Lady of the Rosary was a task of Dominicans (ANDRADE, 2012, p. 243) and Capuchins (MENSAQUE, 2007, p. 423), and Saint Benedict belonged to the latter.

<sup>8</sup> This corresponds to Silva (2003, p. 78), who mentions the “the brotherhoods of Conceição da Praia Rosary, whose first commitment dates back to 1686 [...] and the most important of them, that of Portas do Carmo Rosary, founded in 1685”. “Commitment” refers here to the official text from the crown approving the creation of brotherhoods.

<sup>9</sup> Other first commitments: “Belém (1682); Recife (1686); Olinda (1688) and, above all, in the state of Minas Gerais, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century” (cf. HOORNAERT, 1991, p. 87).

<sup>10</sup> According to social stratification in the colony, poor people could also be part of these associations of “black’ men”.



Both of them, Dominicans and Jesuits, spread the devotion and brotherhoods among Africans. The first brotherhoods dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary in Africa was established in São Tomé Island in 1526; in 1577 there was already another one in Sena, Mozambique, and, in 1620, there was one in San Salvador, the capital city of the kingdom of Congo.

The focus of our interest, however, lies on the spiritual programs promoted by various iconographic assignments and on their iconological presence in brotherhoods and confraternities of Saint Benedict of “black’ men”. We aim to understand the religious imaginary worlds promoted by means of them and their social implications. And, from this perspective, Saint Benedict with Infant Jesus and Saint Benedict Rosary represent two programs, religiously speaking, not only slightly different.

It seems to us that this difference becomes manifest in the choice of one or another model by different types of confraternities and brotherhoods. We have more accurate data, but only for Minas Gerais:

In Minas Gerais, there were three iconographic formulas preferred by artists to represent Saint Benedict. In one of them, the saint, always wearing Franciscan clothes, appears carrying a rolled napkin and/or Infant Jesus. Among the images cataloged, seven fall into this typology. In another formula, the saint takes only a napkin, and sometimes a cross, as observed in eight images. In the last, and most frequent of them – with 22 items –, the saint brings a napkin wrapped in one hand and the other holds a folded part of his clothes where we observe a bouquet of flowers. In Portugal, such devotion is named Saint Benedict with Flowers and it is related to a tradition telling the Saint have been convent’s cook (COELHO, 2002, p. 70-71)<sup>11</sup>.

In fact, some authors believe that the cross’ attribute could rather represent an overlay of attributes from other saints than a genre related to Saint Benedict himself. But even if it is, mostly, brotherhoods and confraternities have not followed the iconography of colonial Catholicism and its emphasis on the mystical experience of “Christ in the heart”, but chose a memory of the saint highlighting his

<sup>11</sup> Megale (2012, p. 69) mentions only the hagiographic attribute with “outstretched arms having over them Infant Jesus lying on a white bed sheet” and 1734 is claimed to be the starting date of devotion in Brazil (MEGALE, 2012, p. 67).



charitable praxis as an expression and purpose of holiness<sup>12</sup>. For active associations even in order to release of mistreated slaves (MOURA, 2009, p. 216-218), this is not surprising. The difference between official and popular imagery dissemination also becomes manifest in a study carried out in 2006 on the popular celebration of Saint Benedict's festival in Ananindeua, Pará, Brazil<sup>13</sup>.

## 2 The heart as hagiographic attribute of Saint Benedict in sculptures found in the Sacred Art Museum of São Paulo

In his summary of the hagiographic attributes of Saint Benedict's sculptures found in Minas Gerais, Beatriz Coelho (2002, p. 243) highlights images with the "flowers" attribute – i.e. the least official model –, but she also mentions beside the "heart". "Saint Benedict, sympathetically carrying red flowers, wears clothing with hard trim and the iconographic symbol of the flaming heart on his chest, something rare in images of this saint, in Minas Gerais" (COELHO, 2002, p. 13). But is this a mere aesthetic issue?

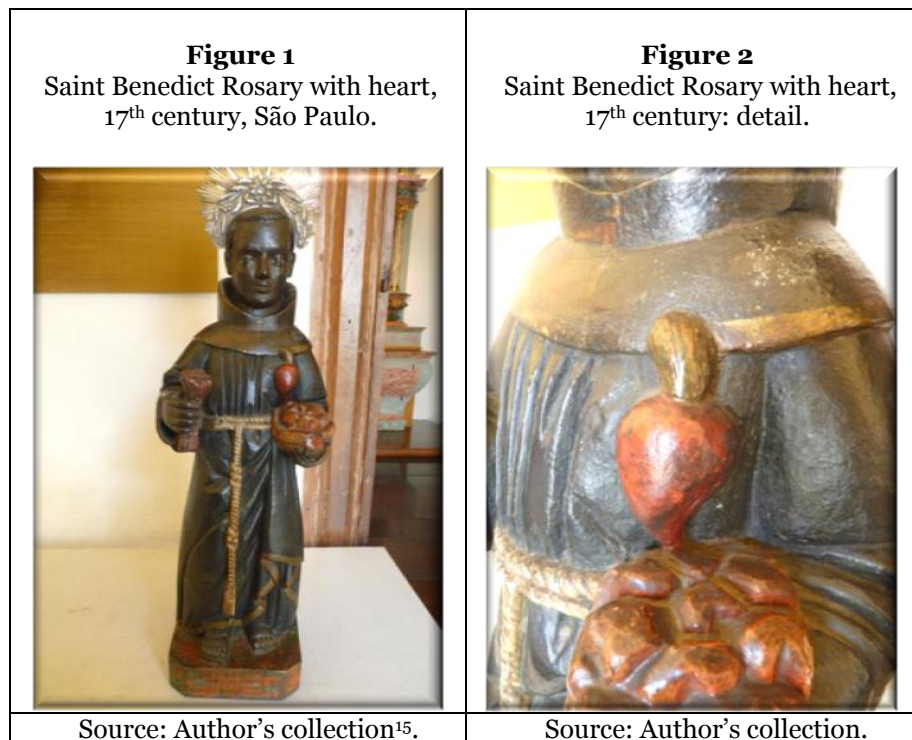
To move forward on the issue, we introduce three examples of sculptures adding the heart's attribute to sculptures of Saint Benedict with Flowers and Rosary<sup>14</sup>. In two cases, we are sure that the heart was included in the original sculpture (figures 1-4). In the third, it is possible that the heart has been applied subsequently (figures 5-6). The three sculptures, in wood or baked clay, were found in the Sacred Art Museum of São Paulo, in an exhibition that ended in March 2012.

<sup>12</sup> We notice that in some Churches of the Rosary there are also Francisco de Pádua's sculptures where, on the chest, in the middle of a crown of rays, is written *caritas* (charity).

<sup>13</sup> When Vieira (2008, p. 29-30, 35) introduces Saint Benedict's life, the image of "little saints' delivered during masses" is that of Saint Benedict with Infant Jesus, while "the speech of those ministering rituals at the church" and "private accounts of devotees themselves" refer only to Saint "Benedict with flowers". The author also presents an alternative interpretation of Saint Benedict's image with Infant Jesus: "that the child is actually 'miracled'", and the consequent designation "Saint Benedict of the Lambs" (VIEIRA, 2008, p. 31). Thus, this interpretation also applies the aspect of charity to the image of Saint Benedict with Infant Jesus.

<sup>14</sup> We would like to thank the collectors Dr. Ary Casagrande and José Roberto Marcellino dos Santos, for permission to photograph the sculptures and display the images in scientific publications, and the museologist at the Sacred Art Museum of São Paulo, Andréa Zabrieszch dos Santos, for providing us with the contacts.

The first figure also has clear European face and hair features. The heart is highlighted by the relief and painting, and in its upper part, there are flames (figures 1-2).



The heart is highlighted both by its plasticity and color. The flames are clearly visible, in gold tone. In this combination, this is the classical Jesuit hagiography.

The sculpture in the second example (figures 3 and 4) is, in artistic terms, simpler, but it has clearly Afro-descent face and hair features. In this case, the heart is visible both by relief and staining. When compared to the previous (figures 1 and 2) and subsequent (figures 5 and 6) sculpture, there are no flames. It is assumed, due to hair shape, that the figure was manufactured by “Little chess-shaped hair

<sup>15</sup> Figures 1 and 2: Saint Benedict, polychrome baked clay, 17<sup>th</sup> century. From the private collection of Dr. Ary Casagrande. Image reproduced with owner's permission, by intermediation of Andréa Zabrieszach dos Santos, museologist at the Sacred Art Museum of São Paulo (COREM 139-I).

master”<sup>16</sup> and it might have been produced in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in São Paulo.



In spite of the apparent simplicity, the figure is well-proportioned and it contains all the classic hagiographic insignia. Again, the heart is high and colorful, but the flames are lacking. Since it is from Minas Gerais, we assume it was used in a brotherhood or confraternity consisting of slaves.

In turn, the third example (figures 5 and 6) represents, in terms of creative process, a case apart. Here, the heart seems to have been applied after completion

<sup>16</sup> *Little chess-shaped hair master* describes a manufacturing whose figures were found throughout the basin of middle Tietê and Santana de Parnaíba. It operated in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. in the late period of “Bandeirantes” and early occupation of Minas Gerais. Its art is characterized, first, by the application of an African physiognomy to figures, both men and women. We assume it to be a production from São Paulo, by Africans and for Africans.

<sup>17</sup> Figures 3 and 4: Saint Benedict, polychrome wood, assigned to “Little chess-shaped hair master”, second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Provenance: Minas Gerais. From the private collection of Dr. Ary Casagrande. Image reproduced with owner's permission, by intermediation of Andréa Zabrieszch dos Santos, museologist at the Sacred Art Museum of São Paulo (COREM 139-I).

of the figure, by etching the contours of a heart and flames. This manipulation is easily noticed due to its very poor technical performance when considering the rest, for instance, it does not match the elegant movement of clothing folds or the golden details.



Or should we imagine a particular later use, perhaps in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the, so far more recent, deployment of Catholic *religio cordis* in the form of devotion to Jesus' Sacred Heart?

We look now at the three examples introduced here as a whole. In quantitative terms, within the collections of Saint Benedict to which they belong and exposed in the exhibition, they represent around 2% to 5% of the total number

<sup>18</sup> Figures 5 and 6: Saint Benedict, polychrome baked clay with silver shining, 18<sup>th</sup> century. Provenance: São Paulo. From the private collection of José Roberto Marcellino dos Santos. Image reproduced with owner's permission, by intermediation of Andréa Zabrieszsch dos Santos, museologist at the Sacred Art Museum of São Paulo (COREM 139-I).

of sculptures shown. Thus, we conclude that the hagiographic attribute of heart along with Saint Benedict's sculptures does not constitute a rule, but a big exception. However, how could we explain the emergence of an exceptional iconography in Saint Benedict's sculptures in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian colony?

### 3 Importance and place of *religio cordis* in social stratification in the Brazilian colony

The iconographic attribute of heart is known and often observed in Augustine, Gertrude of Helfta, Teresa of Ávila, Francis Xavier. The three people who contributed most to the Brazilian religiosity, the three Iberian mystiques, John of the Cross, Teresa of Ávila, and Ignatius of Loyola (BINGEMER, 2004, p. 45), interrelated their religious beliefs in the form of *religio cordis*. Finally, there is a line that starts from the imagery attributed to Gertrude of Helfta, passes by Teresa of Ávila, and returns in the promotion of Jesus' Sacred Heart as the favorite devotion in the phase of Romanization and ultramontaniam.

The open side of Jesus – gateway to the inner secret of the Heart – was an image very present to the Benedictines of Helfta, as testified by Mechthild of Magdeburg and Mechtilde of Hackeborn, from the same monastery. Gertrude falls within this context and drinks of this mystical awareness which, in turn, dates back to ancient patristic tradition. The elements distinguishing it are: 1. the psycho-affective intensity of experience; 2. its explanation as a personal process of bonding and conformation with Jesus' Heart; 3. the Eucharistic-Trinitarian range of experience. In these three points, Gertrude is master and theologically prior to other authors, such as John Eudes, Margaret Mary Alacoque, and Claude de la Colombière. [...] Soon after, Gertrude expresses a particular wish, which deserves our attention as readers: Oh, merciful Lord, inscribe thy wounds on my heart! Then, the grace only asked is granted to her: at that very hour, when my memory was still devoutly occupied with such thoughts, I felt it was being divinely granted me – to me, unworthy as I am – the very thing I had asked in prayer, that is: within my heart, as a bodily place, I knew that the signs of thy most holy wounds, worthy of respect and adoration, had been inscribed (MAÇANEIRO, 2002).

Despite being considered the author of the imaginary transverberation of heart<sup>19</sup>, Gertrude's typical iconography accentuates Christ in her heart. See, for instance, the figure in baked clay from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, originally in Saint Clare's Convent in São Paulo, i.e. a convent of Franciscan women, nowadays included in the collection of the Sacred Art Museum of São Paulo. The heart, held with both hands, "contains" Infant Jesus and, in its upper part, we observe flames, or sunbeams.



<sup>19</sup> According to the account above, there is initially a closeness between the imagery of receiving Jesus' wounds and being wounded by a spear or an arrow (Teresa of Ávila) as an expression of divine closeness within a person, usually portrayed as ecstatic experience. This intimate divine-human relationship is a continuation of the imagery of mystical union and expression of the Platonic line, usually related to Dionysius the Areopagite.

<sup>20</sup> Figures 7 and 8: Gertrude of Helfta, baked clay, polychrome, 17<sup>th</sup> century. Provenance: São Paulo. Image reproduced with permission, by intermediation of Andréa Zabrieszsch dos Santos, museologist at the Sacred Art Museum of São Paulo (COREM 139-I).



Infant Jesus also seems to hold a heart in his left hand, something which reminds us of paintings of heart exchange in Catherine of Siena or Teresa of Ávila herself, such as in the sacristy of Carmo Church, in Ouro Preto.

As Benedict was originally a Capuchin, i.e. a Franciscan, it is worth recalling the importance of other presences of heart's attribute among Franciscans<sup>21</sup>. While it was never associated with the person of Francis of Assisi, we observe the attribute in the coat of Third Orders of Saint Francis, as in São João del-Rei (figures 9 and 10)<sup>22</sup>. Recognized as confraternity since 1749 (Figure 12), its church was built between 1774 and 1827 (Figure 9). In its main facade, we observe a reference to wound receiving<sup>23</sup> By Francisco (figures 9 and 10, green circle) and the very five wounds of Jesus; at its center, his heart (figures 9 and 11, red circle)<sup>24</sup>.

**Figure 9**

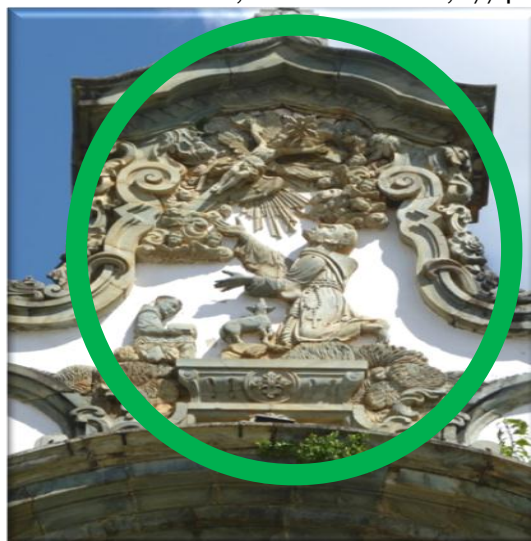
Facade of the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi, São João del-Rei, 1774.



Source: Author's collection.

**Figure 10**

Detail of the facade of the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi, São João del-Rei, 1774.



Source: Author's collection.

<sup>21</sup> After article's conclusion, we found at the museum of the chapel of Saint Michael the Archangel Paulista, São Paulo, an old Jesuit chapel dating back to 1621 and enlarged in 1739, at the time of possession-taking by Franciscans, two figures of Benedict, one of them only with the heart without rosary and having the letters IHS, one with heart and only an arm that could have held a rosary. The museologist could not definitively claim whether the sculptures might be from the Jesuit or Franciscan period, perhaps the museum has in its collection figures from the Jesuit era. Benedict's figure would make more sense in a Franciscan chapel, but the letters IHS were used by the Jesuits. A Benedict with a hagiographic attribute of heart without flowers would make sense especially in a chapel of the non-African population.



<sup>22</sup> In Ouro Preto, there is the same iconography in the Church of the Third Order of Saint Francis, completed in 1789.

<sup>23</sup> Besides the relation heart-Eucharist – that we already know for Saint Benedict – there is also a relation between wounds and *religio cordis*. Almost all representatives of *religio cordis* are told to have received wounds.

<sup>24</sup> It was created, here, an iconological language inherent to *religio cordis*, with roots that reach even the devotion of Gregory's mass.



The five wounds were also the symbol of brotherhood (Figure 12) and they were placed above the entrance (Figure 11).

<p><b>Figure 11</b> Detail of the facade of the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi, São João del-Rei, 1774.</p>  <p>Source: Author's collection.</p>	<p><b>Figure 12</b> Coat of the Fraternity of the Third Order of the Franciscans in São João del-Rei and Tiradentes, 1749.</p>  <p>Source: Author's collection.</p>
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The Franciscan Third Orders, made up by Portuguese people, then had created, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, their adaptation of *religio cordis* through the imagery of wounds.

It is in this context of eminence for *religio cordis*, as an expression of an inner mystique-affective religiosity, we need to “read” the appearance of heart’s attribute in sculptures of Saint Benedict Rosary. First, however, we still need to clarify the social location of *religio cordis* in the colony. It was not only a general

element of evangelization, but an essential element of colonial mystique. Thus, it is not surprising that it bond up even and especially with the elites. See the example of Teresa of Ávila, venerated by the Discalced Carmelites.

The Third Order of Carmo was an institution that acted primarily as a social organization of whites having *purity of blood*, symbols of power in the colonial period. Therefore, the Third Order of Carmo was a brotherhood with association of the most important people in the region, i.e. public officials, plantation owners, merchants, and others. Some researchers, such as Russel-Wood (1970), argue that the professions of most brothers in the Third Order were merchants, landowners who exchanged their products for commodities (ORAZEM, 2011).

*Religio cordis* belonged to the foundations of colonial theology, i.e. it was an integral part of slavery ideology that supported economic life in the colony. *Religio cordis* was first linked to colonizers' religion, instead of the religion of slaves and those excluded from the colony. Saint Benedict Rosary, however, was the saint of African descent people, poor individuals in the colony, and “mulattos”. And perhaps he is adored because of this still today by the population, as a saint of impossible causes<sup>25</sup>...

#### **4 Hypothesis concerning the timely emergence of heart's iconography in sculptures of Saint Benedict Rosary**

Thus, both the emergence and the rarity of heart's iconography in sculptures of Saint Benedict may be explained as the introduction of the dominant spiritual discourse in the brotherhoods and confraternities that adored Saint Benedict. It is not just an aesthetic issue<sup>26</sup>, but the interaction between the oppressive slavery

<sup>25</sup> During colonial times, poor people in the colony gathered along with slaves in the Churches of the Rosary. Since slavery was then seen as an “impossible issue” in terms of its overcoming, the relation between Benedict and the “impossible causes” makes sense. Coming from Benedict Rosary to Benedict with Infant Jesus represents a further step.

<sup>26</sup> “Saint Benedict, sympathetically carrying red flowers, with garments having hard trim and the iconographic symbol of the flaming heart on his chest, rare images for this saint, in Minas Gerais” (COELHO, 2002, p. 135).

religion, hidden behind heart's image, and the religion of oppressed slaves. As an explanation, we may imagine various scenarios.

- It may express, here, a colonial religious policy, a strategic intervention in slaves' imagination. To do so, it would serve as an example, especially, Saint Benedict's figure manufactured by "Little chess-shaped hair master" (figures 3 and 4), and it was probably used in brotherhoods or confraternities of the slaves themselves.
- It may be an attempt to appropriate and even get closer to the spirituality of rich people and rulers of the colony on the part of social groups on the rise making their religiosity, symbolically, closer to the colonial religiosity. It would be a false ascension, i.e. a symbolic closeness without structural changes.
- Finally, it may express, here, the attempt of an appropriation or rereading of the official discourse of *religio cordis* by the rosary brotherhoods or confraternities. In this case, the accent could combine the miracle promoting solidarity to heart's attribute as a sign of empathy with the neediest ones.

To further examine the issue, we would need more detailed information on the provenance of these sculptures. In turn, for the vast majority of slaves and poor people in the colony, upward social mobility was not an actual option if not through merciful actions taken by the brotherhoods and confraternities themselves, buying freedom for oneself, and occasional merciful actions taken by owners.

If we could often find sculptures of Benedict with Infant Jesus and the heart, the first interpretation would have a firm basis. This, however, is not the case and the intervention model in search of promoting *religio cordis* as an essential and unifying element of Brazilian Catholicism becomes manifest on a large scale and as an official project of the church only at the time of Romanization and

ultramontanism<sup>27</sup>. This took place in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the side chapels of Third Order churches were systematically dedicated to the devotion of the Sacred Heart. Maybe that was the time of changing the figure from the 18<sup>th</sup> century (figures 7 and 8).

The second interpretation proposed might be limited to a restricted group of persons, such as, for instance, freed or “brown” slaves. Perhaps this is a secondary clue for this explanation that two figures presented here have European features (figures 1-2 and 5-6).

There is the interpretation that the hagiographical attribute of heart along with that of Benedict Rosary was added to highlight the theme of mercy in the general emphasis. The heart would work, in this case, almost as a “catalyst” or “amplifier”. If so, it could have taken place in a timely manner, i.e. it has not turned into a widely accepted or disclosed language<sup>28</sup>.

In general, however, the issue did not emerge. The brotherhoods and confraternities of “black” men, mostly, did not choose the hagiographic attributes of Infant Jesus or the heart. And perhaps this is the expression of a conscious “silent resistance” in the symbolic field of colonial religion, against an inhuman mysticism and seeking religious elements capable of generating and keeping hope. Given this context, it seems to us very likely that the interpretation of the emergence of the hagiographic element of heart implied a bottom-up rereading, emptying the official discourse, and in this case, the heart would be a sign of mercy, as “catalyst” for the mercy already articulated by the hagiographic element of rosary. We would have an emphasis on the miracle of empathy hidden behind the hagiography of official *religio cordis*.

<sup>27</sup> Romanization began with Vatican I and it represented an attempt to reintroduce in the Catholic Church a rather centralized structure. At this stage, the devotion of Jesus’ Sacred Heart was set in many churches of religious orders, or in their side chapels or main naves.

<sup>28</sup> As for the sculptures we presented here, the technical aspect represents its own challenges. It is expected that the rather sophisticated manufacturing technique of “Little chess-shaped hair master” (sculpting the figure in wood) is found more frequently in the official manufacturing under the colonial ideological control. And, indeed, it also produced many sculptures of other saints. On the other hand, these sculptures have, indeed, rather African traits.

## Final remarks

We could not answer all questions that, over the text, ended up coming to us. Perhaps this arises from the fact that there was never a single explanation that fits all contexts and uses. Our choice to interpret the emergence of heart as an additional and strengthening attribute for the rosary may be, then, only occasionally correct.

The study showed, concerning the method, that the most suitable results will not come from unilateral looks, for instance, merely technological, iconological, sociological, or theological. In this regard, we consider the contribution by Rose significant because it suggests applying the most interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary look possible, especially when we want to investigate the peculiarities of movements or rather marginal religious groups, in terms of those less frequently documented and interpreted by themselves. We also registered the relative lack of data or lack of more specific information about the provenance of sculptures and the history of their use in order to identify more accurately usual and extraordinary religious practices.

If our choice of interpretation prevails as the most likely, we could have found an expression of *religio cordis* that at the very colonial era and under the surveillance of the Catholic reform articulated a criticism to the official reading of *religio cordis*, similar to several critical readings made over time about this religious language. In this case, the devotion of Benedict Rosary with heart would constitute an example of a popular devotion of a marginalized group in colonial society making the Catholic *religio cordis* closer to the emphasis on an engaged promotion of love, justice, and God's mercy.

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