

**C.PP.S.
HERITAGE II:**

**Community, Ministry,
Spirituality**

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Foreword

With the publication of *C.PP.S. Heritage II: Community, Mission, Spirituality*, the C.PP.S. general curia has achieved its goal of providing a compendium of documents aimed especially for the use of our candidates and those responsible for their formation, although these two volumes are also suitable for a wider audience. Such a compendium had been requested by many of our members in formation ministry over the years, and on the occasion of a course for formators presented in 2003, we chose a number of articles and presentations, many given at that course, for eventual publication.

This second volume focuses on what have come to be called the *three pillars* of our Congregation: mission, community, and spirituality. In the four decades since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, we have as a Congregation reflected at length on these dimensions of our community life. Those of us who were in the Congregation during the years of the Council and those following recall the excitement, passion, and occasional conflict that process engendered.

One of the fruits of that reflection, given a special impetus in the recognition of the uniqueness of societies of apostolic life in theology and in the 1983 Code of Canon Law, is the awareness that our *apostolic goal*, our *mission*, has a place of priority for us that makes us different from vowed religious. As a document from the Union of Superiors General puts it:

. . . societies of apostolic life are more properly defined in terms of their apostolic goal, and how

they order their life together and the spirituality to sustain both their work and that life, rather than their degree of approximation to vowed religious life. (Quoted in *C.P.P.S. Heritage I*, p. 15.)

We also have been influenced by a renewed awareness of the missionary nature of the Church, a theme that received special emphasis at the Second Vatican Council in the decree *Ad Gentes*. That decree reminds us that “. . . the Church is by its very nature missionary, since according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (no. 2). Twenty-five years later, Pope John Paul II would write an important encyclical on mission and stating emphatically that “proclamation is the permanent priority of mission” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 44). Such statements would have come as no surprise to our founder, who liked to call himself an “apostolic missionary” and for whom preaching the Good News was always a “permanent priority.”

That sense of having an urgent apostolic goal, of *being missionary*, which inspired Gaspar to found the Congregation, is evident in almost every article in this volume, regardless of its stated theme. We can talk about “three pillars,” but perhaps it might be more accurate to speak of a single column made up of intertwined pillars. St. Gaspar had a very clear sense of his mission, he ordered community life to support that mission and his Missionaries, and his spirituality was the source and sustaining power of his missionary zeal.

As one reads the articles in this volume, it is clear that writing about community life, for example, inevitably involves a discussion of mission, since Gaspar wanted community life to support the ministry of the first Missionaries. Indeed, as John Klopke points out in his article on the mission house, that institution was

part of the mission itself. The mission house was both the community *and* the ministry, inextricably bound together.

The spirituality of the Blood of Christ, formed in St. Gaspar especially during his years of exile under the tutelage of Francesco Albertini, can likewise hardly be separated from his ministry and his ideas for community life. We may have different ways of expressing our devotion to the Precious Blood and different ways of describing our Precious Blood spirituality, but the underlying theme of the redeeming and reconciling love of God that is at the heart of the mystery of the Blood of Christ remains as the bedrock. This vision, this experience, led Gaspar to re-evangelize the Church in the Papal States in his day, and leads his Missionaries today to be preachers of the Word, heralds of the powerful message of the Precious Blood.

The first four articles deal with the theme of *community life*. Fr. Romano Altobelli, C.PP.S., offers a scholarly presentation of the nature of community life from a general theological perspective as well as addressing St. Gaspar's understanding of community life as found in his letters and in the first *Rule*.

Fr. Barry Fischer, C.PP.S., current moderator general of the Congregation, presents perspectives on community life in the light of two important documents of the Church, *Fraternal Life in Community* and *Consecrated Life*, as well as in the light of our heritage and charism.

According to the late Fr. John Klopke, C.PP.S., the *mission house* may be St. Gaspar's unique contribution to the history of religious life. In his article he points out how the mission house was not merely a residence for the Missionaries but was an integral part of the mission itself.

The Congregation now has a presence in some twenty countries of the world, and the international and

multicultural realities have significant impact on forming for community life today. Fr. Barry Fischer addresses those issues in his article on forming for community.

The next three articles deal specifically with our *mission*. Fr. Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S., a lifelong student of our founder, offers an article on Gaspar's idea of the apostolate, an article rich in the words of Gaspar himself.

In his article, Fr. Barry Fischer reflects on the historical context of each of the "three pillars," reflects on our present reality, and suggests possible challenges and directions for the future.

At the end of the course for formators held in the summer of 2003, Fr. Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S., general councilor and well-known theologian and speaker, wrote a synthesis of what had been learned and held to be significant during the course. He outlines the nature and challenges of our mission in the Church and world today and the consequences for formation.

The spirituality of the Blood of Christ has undergone noteworthy development in the last several decades. The late Don Luigi Contegiacomo, C.P.P.S., postulator of St. Gaspar's cause for canonization, offers a historical perspective on the spirituality of the Precious Blood that draws on the original *Rule* of the Congregation as its principal source.

In the next two articles, Fr. Conti presents us with two sketches on the spirituality of the Precious Blood in the life of our founder. One outlines how St. Gaspar gave expression to his devotion to the "Divine Blood," the concrete spiritual practices that he advocated. The other traces the development of his devotion, especially during the crucial years of his exile when he was under the spiritual care of Don Francesco Albertini, and in the early years of the Congregation.

Fr. Robert Schreiter rounds out the volume with two articles. One offers a concise historical and theological

presentation on Precious Blood devotion and spirituality. The second is a reflection on those symbols associated with our Precious Blood spirituality that have special meaning for us today.

Now that the second volume is published, I can, as editor, breathe a sigh of relief. At the same time, working on this project has only deepened my conviction that much remains to be done to make available the rich resources of our heritage to the English-speaking world. Certainly there could be many more volumes added to these two, and I hope that in the future the general administration of the Congregation will continue this project.

In working on a book like this, one is left with a sense of gratitude to many people. First of all, of course, are the authors of the articles in this volume, whose love for the Congregation, enthusiasm for their subject matter, and whose mastery of the material are evident. We are most grateful to them for revealing to us the riches of our “C.P.P.S. Heritage.”

I want to give a special word of thanks to Pauline Vokits, who set up the book for printing, who was our principal contact with The Messenger Press, and who carefully read every word of this book several times. While we have never met in person, we carried on a lively “dialogue” by e-mail. Her observations, questions, and suggestions have contributed to making these two volumes much more readable and useful.

Finally, I thank our moderator general, Fr. Barry Fischer, and my fellow general councilors Frs. Francesco Bartoloni, Robert Schreiter, and Luis Filipe Cardoso Fernandes, not only for supporting me in this project, but for the many ways in which they have contributed to sharing our “C.P.P.S. Heritage” with our members, candidates, and lay associates.

In name of the C.P.P.S. general curia I am happy to offer this second volume to all who wish to know more

about our rich heritage and who seek to find in that rich heritage an inspiration for their life and ministry in the service of God's Reign.

Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S.
Secretary General
Rome

April 7, 2006

500th anniversary of the birth of St. Francis Xavier,
principal patron of the Congregation.

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Community Life in Our Society According to the Charism of Our Founder

Romano Altobelli, C.P.P.S.

INTRODUCTION

The task of writing this article has provided me with the opportunity of meeting St. Gaspar, of realizing the spirit that inspired him and the understanding and humanity that made him what he was. It was also a meeting with the Holy Spirit, who made of St. Gaspar a “seraph,” enamored of Jesus bleeding on the cross for the salvation of humankind. It was especially through rereading his authentic *Rule* and *Praxis* that I rediscovered him as a man of God and prophet of God.

He was a well-balanced man of God, capable of planning in detail and of bringing priests to live together in stability and bound by something that always unites but never divides, because it is not something human or juridical.

He was a prophet of God because he imposed the *vinculum caritatis* ‘bond of charity’ which, while it gives an element of stability and permanency to our choice, preserves the element of dynamic mobility and spontaneity of the *agape* which creates “living together in fellowship,” a community which is ever young with the youth and dynamism of love and which, therefore, is always relevant.

In preparing this paper, I have obviously kept before me the *Regula* and *Praxis* of St. Gaspar, the “Historical Report for the Updating of the Constitution” (1968), the conciliar decree *Perfectae Caritatis* with the commentary by Father Tillard, O.P., as well as material on Christology and community life from the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

I was astonished to see how much of what is said in *Perfectae Caritatis* is to be found both implicitly and literally in our *Rule* and *Praxis*. It was like reading St. Gaspar’s mind when reading the decree one hundred and fifty years later. The plan and the terminology are, of course, different.

I intend to proceed as follows. In the first part, I shall speak briefly of St. Gaspar’s underlying, charismatic strength that is the foundation on which his entire “Work,” the Congregation as an apostolic, missionary entity, is built. In the second part, I shall try to draw out from the relevant articles of the *Rule* and *Praxis* what is the “essential nature of the Community.” Finally, in the third part, as St. Gaspar set it out in “community life,” we shall see what is meant by “ontological *koinonia*,” i.e., what is the essence and nature of fellowship. It is impossible to avoid making a few reflections here and there.

THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARISM OF ST. GASPAR

It is impossible to speak of the work of a saint or of some important part of his work without underlining the dynamism, the interior personal driving force behind all his activity and all that he accomplished.

We cannot speak about the Community that St. Gaspar had in mind and founded without some brief mention of the inner driving force which led him to believe in this Community and to bring it into being.

What made him so zealous was something so strong that it left him no peace. He stood up to difficult situations and to difficult people until he had brought priests

together to live in community and devote themselves to the apostolate of the missions.

Redemption in Terms of the Blood

The passion (the driving force) of St. Gaspar was “the price of our redemption.” It was so much part of him that he could not do anything without thinking of it and acting under its influence. He was full of it. His whole personality expressed itself intellectually, doctrinally and pastorally always within the reality of the Blood that redeems.

In the pontifical decree¹ approving the Congregation, we find the following passage:

In 1814, with the consent of Pius VII, the priest, Gaspar del Bufalo, established the first foundations of the Congregation of secular priests, and ordered that it should be called the Congregation of the Precious Blood. The pious founder wanted to have proposed for himself and his fellow members, as their aim, the modeling of their entire lives on the sacred canons and the assuring of their own sanctification and that of their neighbor, especially by means of missions and spiritual exercises.

The Congregation was to be called the Congregation of the *Precious Blood*. This was because of the founder’s deep faith. He was convinced that everything depends on the Blood of Jesus, and that the salvation and liberation of the world is the fruit of this, the price of our redemption.

It is enough to look over the second *memorandum*² (sometimes referred to as *memorial*) to get an idea of the love with which St. Gaspar expressed his faith in the mystery of the redemption by the Blood of Christ. Love and faith took him over completely, his emotions, intelligence, will and body. His motives were based on the Bible and on the fathers. He said at the beginning of his

memorial: “It cannot be gainsaid that the Lord in every age has raised up worthwhile and suitable means for recalling souls to the study of Christ crucified, and thus to see in these means *the application of the redemption in his divine Blood.*”³

Here is where his interest is focused: a crucified man-God, who sheds until death all his divine Blood to redeem humanity; the redemption must be applied to souls so that the Blood may not run the risk of being shed in vain.

Sinners make a horrible abuse of his Blood, and the Lord, in the transports of his love, says ‘Of what use is the shedding of my Blood?’ Therefore let there be someone to ensure a solemn cult of adoration to make amends for this and, at the same time, preach its glories to the people and reveal to them that this devotion is a *compendium of our faith*. That is why, at the consecration of the chalice we say: *Mysterium fidei* ‘Mystery of faith.’ Therefore in this devotion is to be found the salvation of souls.⁴

The mere pronouncing of the Lord’s name is not enough to save us. . . . There are two things, two most important things, which must be done in our time. The first is to find a way to placate our eternal Father, and this we have in the merits of the divine Blood—*calicem salutaris accipiam* ‘I will take the cup of salvation’ and together to ensure its *effective application* to souls through missions and spiritual exercises and other good works in keeping with the needs of the times.⁵

In this memorial he quotes the most relevant passages of the Old Testament: Gen. 49, 11b; Ex. 24, 7–8; Ps. 30, 10; and of the New Testament: Acts 20, 8; Rom. 5, 9; Col. 1, 19–20; Heb. 9, 13–14 and 9, 22; and the

fathers and doctors of the Church: St. John Chrysostom: "The Blood of Christ is the salvation of souls." St. Thomas: "The Blood of Christ is the key to paradise." He also quotes contemporary authors: Bishop Strambi, the bishop of Assisi, and the bishop of Nocera. It is a real spiritual treasure house containing the biblical, theological and pastoral realities that inspired him and drove him to action.

The Blood of Christ, An Expression of Love

The Father so loved the world that he sent it his only begotten Son. Love, if it is real love, expresses itself in some way. The only begotten Son is the Father's *agapetos* 'beloved' who "was made flesh" (Jn. 1, 14). "He humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross" (Philip. 2, 8). The "beloved" of the Father is Jesus "the lamb slain from the beginning of the world."⁶ "There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn. 15, 13).

If "blood" indicates the whole person,⁷ the "Blood that was shed" is Jesus, the expression of the Father's agape for humankind: "This is my beloved Son. My favor rests on him" (Mt. 3, 17). "He is the Son of his *agape*" (Col. 1, 13b) which he expresses by the total gift of himself by *kenosis* 'emptying.' Through his obedience, Jesus emptied himself, giving up everything, even his divine semblance and taking on that of a slave. "Being born in the likeness of men, he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross" (Phil. 2, 6–8).

What brings him to undergo a bloody death on the cross is his awareness of being the Son of the love of the Father, whose project it is to save man by setting him free. Flesh offered and eaten, blood shed and drunk, this is how love expresses, realizes and gives itself. It is man's be-all and end-all because the Father is love-for-humankind.

The Mystery of Christ's Blood and the Demands of Love

St. Gaspar is concerned with the need for an effective application of “the redemption of his divine Blood.” It is a burning concern: “Would that I had a thousand tongues to make hearts sensitive to the price of our redemption.” For him, this is not a sentimental need but an explosion of love in the daily reality of the apostolate. It means applying to souls the fruits of redemption through missions, retreats, and those means that are “most in keeping with the needs of the times.” He dedicated himself to this apostolate, and he gathered “ecclesiastics. . . together in community so that they might be, in that period of emergency, a support for the Catholic faith, reviving in the ministers of the altar decorum, good example, godliness and zeal according to the practice . . . of the Church, which insisted on clerics living together in the same residence.” St. Gaspar gathered them together in mission and retreat houses, “making it easier for bishops to provide the salutary practice of having missions, retreats, and other pious works in their respective dioceses. . .”⁸ “It is through these houses that the clergy is called to study and to holiness.”⁹

By establishing residences in the various provinces St. Gaspar’s intention was to call many members of the clergy to detach themselves from everything and everyone and devote themselves to the apostolate for God’s glory. He did not want them to be bound by vows because his Institute was aimed at the clergy.¹⁰

To live together in love and through love and apostolic concern in order to apply the fruits of the redemption to men ransomed not with gold or silver but at a great price, the Precious Blood of Christ (cf. I Pt. 1, 18–19).

Living together in love and through love makes God’s action in the apostolate easier and more effective.

Looking through the documents written before the *Rule* and *Praxis*, we can already notice the need that Gaspar felt. The Father's love made manifest in the Son, dead and bleeding on the cross, impelled him to set up communities of priests to work in the apostolate as a means of applying the effects of the redemption. They were to live in community for the ministry.

THE NATURE OF COMMUNITY (ONTOLOGICAL *KOINONIA*)

The *Rule*

There are three points in the *Rule* that make it possible for us to penetrate into the very essence of community life and discover the mystery it contains.

Article 1: General Praxis

- The Congregation is composed of priests, clerics and laymen
- who prepare themselves for the sacred ministry and take care of domestic chores;
- these form "one body" and should be ruled by "one spirit."

Article 4: Although it is advantageous that the members agree among themselves that this way of life is a permanent one, it would be very risky to abandon the purpose they have undertaken. They are not bound to the Congregation *by any vow*, but *by the bonds of unconstrained charity*.

Article 9: United by a consensus of wills, they are filled with the desire to devote themselves to carrying out the divine will.

In these three articles we find the basic elements that constitute the essence (or ontology) of community:

- They form "a body,"
- they are bound by "a spirit,"

- they are bound by the bonds of a love that is free,
- they are united by a consensus of their wills.

Some Biblical—Ecclesial Foundations

In no. 15 of the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, we find an essentially ontological description of common life and we can note there, in their biblical terminology and organic order, the very elements pointed out by St. Gaspar.

The primitive Church provided an example of community life in which the multitude of believers were of one heart and one mind. . . let community life continue in a sharing of the same Spirit. Let religious, as Christ's members living fraternally together, excel one another in showing respect. . . . Thanks to God's love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit, a religious community is a true family gathered together in the Lord's name and rejoicing in his presence. For love is the fulfillment of the law and the bond of perfection and, where it exists, we know that we have been taken from death to life. In fact brotherly unity shows that Christ has come and from this unity comes a dynamic approach to the apostolate.

The "Historical Report for the Updating of the Constitutions" (Rome, 1968) first examined each article of the *Rule* and then underlined the characteristic features of the Congregation. One of them was community life. Briefly, it says that "the *raison d'être* and core of community life is charity." The bond of charity is "a solution to all Community problems and a source of spiritual progress for individuals and for the Community." The bond of charity takes the place of vow, oath, promise or any other juridical bond because "such a commitment cannot last without charity."¹¹

Therefore, for St. Gaspar the whole essence of the idea of community is to be found in charity, i.e., charity in the meaning of *agape*. The Father meets man through the Son who “redeems and ransoms” by his bloody death. The reason for St. Gaspar’s life is to be found in the love that redeems by blood.

It is also charity in its meaning as *koinonia*—the fellowship of brothers united in the *agape* of the Father, which is manifested through Jesus the *agapetos*, the beloved of the Father, the brother of those brothers whom he has made “sons of God.”

The community is not just a simple group of Christians in search of perfection, each one on his own account. It consists in living as brothers, in being the sign, the proclamation of the great fellowship of charity which the Father wishes to establish among men through his Son.¹² The common life is the implementation of this fraternal *koinonia* of all concerned, through the presence of the Lord Jesus in person.¹³

The community is a *mystery* in the Church, which itself is a mystery. It is a *sacrament, reality, sign*, which reveals to the world the mystery that Jesus has come to reveal and to implement in human history, in this world of ours, through his bloody death and through his resurrection. Indeed, *mystery* according to St. Paul does not mean anything else but God’s plan for our salvation, a plan hidden in God and revealed in time for man through Jesus Christ.

In his letter to the Romans (Rom. 16, 25–27, final doxology) Paul gives glory to God through Jesus Christ for the “revelation of the mystery,” the mystery which is a secret full of wisdom, long hidden in God and now revealed. It is the plan of salvation “wrought through the cross of Christ” (1 Cor. 2, 8), to which “all the nations” are called (v. 26) and which renews the world in Christ, its only head (Eph. 1, 9–10).

This *secret* is now made manifest to the *saints* to whom God wanted to reveal its richness, expressed and summarized in the words, “Christ in you, your hope of glory” (Col. 1, 25–28).

In the Church, and in the community within the Church, this salvation-mystery takes place for those to whom the Church itself is the mystery of salvation. When the salvation-mystery is revealed in the Church to the world, the community becomes sacrament, reality and sign. The ecclesial community (*koinonia*) is a reality made up of the cross and the resurrection because Jesus has recreated unity between men and the Father and the unity of men with their fellowmen.

You were at that time separated, alienated, strangers . . . now you who once were far off have been brought near in the Blood of Christ; of the two he has made one people, reconciling both of us with God in one body through his cross, bringing hostility to an end and giving us access in one Spirit to the Father (cf. Eph. 2, 11–18).

“You who were strangers and enemies he has reconciled through the death of his mortal body” (cf. Col. 1, 21–23). The body of Christ is where this reconciliation takes place, because it brings together in unity with itself the whole of humanity. All men have a place where they can meet among themselves in Christ and with the Father. “You have been called to be one body. Above all else put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3, 14–15). Indeed “you are all sons of God . . . there is no longer slave or free, man or woman, because you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

St. Gaspar stresses the fact that the component elements of his Congregation make up “one body,” “one spirit” through charity freely exercised.

The risen Christ bears within him the brotherhood of men, their fellowship with the Father

and among themselves. The Holy Spirit whom he gives works by spreading throughout humankind this mystery of fellowship and brotherhood of which the source is the Lord Jesus.¹⁴

Through Baptism we enter into this fellowship and brotherhood and are made “sons of adoption” of the Father, “members of the Church,” “brothers of the saints.” Fellowship and brotherhood are a gift of the Father’s *agape*. It is he who introduces us into the brotherhood of Christ Jesus, his only Son.

By sacramental Communion, the Eucharist unites us all in the one risen body of Christ, implants and extends this mystery in us and roots us firmly in brotherhood.¹⁵

Baptism and Holy Eucharist are the two sacraments that establish and develop community. Baptism makes it possible for us to enter the salvation community, the Eucharist becomes part of man’s daily life and destiny, and thus men become “the Eucharistic community of charity.” For St. Gaspar the celebration of Mass and the Eucharistic presence are the source of life. He repeatedly used the words “*Calicem salutaris accipiam*”—“*Mysterium fidei*” ‘I will take the chalice of salvation’—‘Mystery of faith.’ Nearly all the prayers of the Community were to be said before the Blessed Sacrament altar. Only if the Community found its unity in the Eucharist and through the Eucharist, could it really be apostolic, open, an ever-present manifestation, a perfect epiphany and a proof that the Father in Jesus Christ has loved men by saving them and has sown in them the seed of true brotherhood based on their belonging to the only Son of the Father.

The Community, with its special lifestyle, is a “reality” which makes Christ’s presence, his here-and-now presence in fraternity and fellowship, more vivid and more perceptible. For this reason, it is the “sacrament”

of Jesus and the “sign” of ecclesial communion as far as every ecclesial community is a gift of the Father in Jesus and in his Spirit. “It is a sign proclaiming the coming of the Lord.”

Some Theological Considerations

Human Limitations – No Community Is Perfect

The incarnate Word took on himself the whole of human history. He rescued, reconstructed, liberated, and reconquered it in the person of Christ who died and rose again. Consequently “every person is for others a sign of an encounter with God.”

Faith is transmitted and grows from person to person. Community, then, is the theological locus in which man in his reality and totality, taken up and saved by the incarnation-death-resurrection of Christ, in an encounter with the other, becomes the sign (sacrament) of the Christian, transmits and strengthens the faith. The sacramental means will be those that Jesus has offered to his “community” which “he loved and for which he offered himself and bought with his Blood.”¹⁶ It is community with humanity as it exists as its basic element, that humanity whom Jesus loved and cleansed with his Blood. “He loved us and cleansed us in his Blood.”

Men and women, who are part of this community, are limited beings, imperfect, the objects of the love of the Father who continually saves them through Christ in the Spirit, through whom they find the strength to progress in perfection and in an ongoing freeing of themselves. So too, the community to which a person belongs is a limited reality, open to improvement while being the object of a love which drives it along from within with the energy that comes from the salvation which has been revealed to humanity.

We must not, then, delude ourselves. The Community is not a cure-all, precisely because it is not perfect, just as the Church is not perfect. It is absurd to

postulate humanity's perfection while it has not yet been definitely saved. It is equally absurd to postulate the same thing of the Community. What we must continually do is accept our personal and Community limitations. This is not passivity. It is taking on oneself and within oneself this awareness, letting oneself be worked on by the Lord and propelled along the road of salvation, liberation and definitive perfection.

We must bear in mind that the ecclesial community, the community of imperfect and of ordinary people, is something fundamental. Otherwise, we run the risk of what Bonhoeffer describes in the following words:

The yearning for a community of believers separated from the world, for a pure, authentic community, able to face up to tasks and struggles, is understandable in the midst of a Church which has become worldly. Nevertheless, such a yearning is full of danger. All too easily, the concept of an ideal community supersedes the concept of God's real community. All too easily this pure community is understood as being the result of man's efforts.¹⁷

The Enrichment Community Provides

Although this fact of the "limited community" remains, nevertheless community has its own inner power of enrichment and its own inner strength which is a guarantee for the road to be traveled and a sure, dynamic stimulus which leads to salvation and perfection, and becomes the kingdom of heaven already here below in our human history. It is within the context of this history that Jesus became human, that he took over human history and saved it, precisely so that the Father's kingdom might come.

The kingdom comes and within the community becomes its reality and its form when it "bears witness to being a miracle of God."¹⁸ The community's task is to testify to the resurrection of Christ from the dead, to the

end of the law of death in this world, and to the power of God to bring about a new creation.

“The Church is not a community of souls. It is not even just the proclamation of the Gospel. In essence, it is Christ present; the presence of Christ on earth.”¹⁹ The Church is Christ existing as community. “It is Christ himself present.” “The ecclesial community is Christ.” “Christ is the community.”²⁰

The community, then, is not just the sum total of persons, but has a theological and ontological specification: “The flesh of Christ.”

Christ as Community

To reflect on the community, on its being, its ontology fills one with joy, with strength and with hope.

Here we take pleasure in quoting words written by Bonhoeffer in 1933; what he has to say has substance and great beauty.

If, on the one hand, Christ is present as Word and in the Word, as sacrament and as in the sacrament, on the other hand, he is also present *as community and in the community*. . . Christ is the community in the strength of his being-for-me. Between the Ascension and the Second Coming the community is the face of Christ, the only face possible.²¹

What does it mean when we say that Christ as Word is also community? It means that the *Logos* of God *in* and *under* the form of community has a temporary, spatial dimension. Christ, the Word, is present in a corporal—spiritual form.

Not only is the community the recipient of the word of revelation, but it is of its own nature, revelation and Word of God. Only as far as it is itself the Word of God can it understand the Word of God.

The Word is in the community as far as the community is the body to which revelation is addressed. But the Word itself is also, of its very nature "community," in so far as the community itself is revelation and the Word desires to take on a created body.²²

What does it mean when we say that Christ, to the extent that he is sacrament, is also community? It means that Christ as sacrament is present *in* the community and *under* the form of community.

The community is the body of Christ; it does not just *symbolize* the body of Christ.

The concept of "body" applied to the community is not only a functional idea which would refer only to the members of that body, it is a comprehensive and central concept of the manner in which he who is present, clothed in glory and in humiliation, exists.

This Christ who exists as community is understood as being glorified and humiliated in his person.

Christ is not only the head of the community, he is the community itself.²³ Christ is the head, Christ is every member.²⁴

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY LIFE

Every community lives its own religious life. Whatever the practical form this life takes, it must draw its inspiration from the community described in the Acts of the Apostles and from the gift of the Holy Spirit which enables it to be something spontaneous, so as not to be tied down to passing forms and formulas and to be part of the historical scene in which it lives.

What St. Gaspar wanted was an apostolic community that was not fettered by rigid juridical structures that could have hindered the action of the Holy Spirit in any apostolic work undertaken.

Gaspar wanted the clerics living in community to make themselves useful to the bishops

“. . . especially in making it easier for [them] to provide the salutary practice of having missions, retreats and other pious works in their respective dioceses. . .”²⁵

They must call people to the contemplation of Jesus crucified and, by means of missions, retreats and other sound religious practices adapted to the needs of the times, they must effectively apply to them the Blood shed by the Son of God for our redemption.²⁶

The “Historical Report” summarizes in these words the type of community life St. Gaspar wanted:

Community life is planned in such a way that it fosters personal sanctification as a basis for missionary life.

The community environment is ideal for the preparation to the apostolate by study in private and in common, ministry in the Church and helping with the devotional practices.

Exercises in common should be limited to what is necessary, and everything should be done without exaggeration or fuss to facilitate concentration on preparation for the ministry.²⁷

It can be seen, from all that has been said, how life in community and the search for perfection go beyond the individual, and constitute a being-for-others. This is the apostolate: to show forth the Spirit and make in humankind an opening for that Spirit to enter and plant the seed of redemption and liberation. The community is the tip of the plowshare that opens up the furrow in the earth and lets the Spirit in. Because the community is situated in the world, it has a law of its own and it is this: “The will of the Spirit is to be where the community lives and to express himself through the community.”

Just as the Church cannot be an ontological fellowship but must also be a *life of fellowship*, so too

must every community be, especially every missionary community of priests and brothers.

This community must be an expression of the fundamental characteristics of the Church, which are unity of spirit, mutual respect, and bearing one another's burdens. The image that contains them all is that of a "family united in the name of the Lord."²⁸

We find such characteristics in the *Rule*, article 1, *Praxis* ("one body," "one spirit"); article 9, *Praxis* ("linked by a consensus of wills"—"mutually paying one another due respect"—"willingly helping one another"); article 54, *Praxis* ("the superior to whom it pertains to govern the family").

Ontological fellowship (or the community in itself) posits certain demands that must be given expression, precisely because it must not remain an abstraction divorced from human reality of which it is part, or from history within which its life is taking place. These demands are the expression of witness and of sign. They make it possible for individuals and the community concerned to have a lifestyle that must be a sacrament—the reliable and effective sign of the Father's love in Christ with the Spirit.

The demands which fellowship make on the life a community must live are the radical proposals which Jesus lived by, and which he has put before those who want to follow him. These are the demands which the fellowship of hearts and of possessions (Acts 4, 32; 2, 44) and of the will (*Rule*—art. 9), that is, virginity, poverty and obedience, makes on them. Their realization is a declaration that in a human life and a human body, the "fellowship of brotherhood" comes only from God in Christ and that only as a fact of faith can it possibly become a reality. It is then that the community proclaims the kingdom of God to the world because it testifies that it is a "miracle of God."

We will divide the headings in St. Gaspar's *Rule* according to these three requirements, because the *Rule*

provides the necessary indications for implementing them.

**Internal and Family Discipline (Title 2) or
Fellowship of Hearts (Virginity)**
*The Christ—Church,
Missionary—Congregation Relationship*

Like every form of life that is an expression of the love of Christ, virginity also must fulfill its function as a sign.

Virginity must be a sign of the realization of the love of Christ. “Virginal hearts” united in community, in the way they are organized and in their internal relationship to one another, must be a sign of what St. Paul says: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, man or woman, because you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3, 28).

To become “one” in Christ Jesus and do away with all separations and breakdowns, and so as not to reduce virginity to the level of something mean and negative, humanly and religiously immature, it must be understood as the “great mystery of Jesus who gives himself entirely to the Church, his spouse, to make her holy, immaculate, to purify her and make her glorious, without wrinkle or stain” (cf. Eph. 5, 22–23).

A priest, by virtue of the total priestly gift that Jesus made of himself for the Church to which he is united by a virginal espousal through which he identifies himself with his spouse, cannot direct his own life except in the same virginal-total-oblation direction.

Because our Congregation is not one that binds us by vows, it makes it possible for us to implement freely and with greater facility this full and total offering. Indeed, this very oblation, a reality both human and Christian, as the Church is for Jesus, is the actual spouse to whom the Missionary unites his life. With this “community” and with this “Church,” the virginal oblation of a “virgin heart” becomes a reality.

Just as Jesus loved the Church in order that salvation might reach all nations, so too the Missionary, by complete self-detachment and a disinterested and mature offering of himself to the service of others, opens his heart, together with his community, to the ministry of the apostolate. This always remains the aim of our life together as Missionaries. It is, therefore, not a case of locking oneself up within a narcissistic sense of well-being but of opening up our hearts in charity to all those for whom Jesus shed his Blood.

Such a spouse-community will be virginal, holy, immaculate, and pure, without wrinkle or stain, to the extent that the Missionary will make it so.

The oblation-virginity relationship with the Congregation will involve the Missionary in his entire, physical, psychological and spiritual entity. St. Gaspar mentions this in clear, practical terms, but always within a context of great freedom—of that “free-ranging charity” which is always his strong point in so far as it unites secular priests who are not bound by vows.

We should pay attention to these points because they can provide us with food for thought and motives for conversion, and renew us in our virginal love for the Congregation. It will be a love that is always new because it is free, freely renewable and freely renewed every moment of our lives.

Relations within the Community, A Profile of the Missionary

Article 9, and especially the *Praxis* explaining it, is a jewel with the *Rule* for its setting. “It is the gem of the whole *Praxis*.”²⁹

United in a consensus of wills, they must be consumed with the desire to be zealous for the divine will and to foster one another’s progress. Let them pay one another due respect. To gravity in their demeanor and actions, they will add affability.

From these general principles, St. Gaspar descends to practical details, setting down very precisely the community relations that have their origin in the charity and make-up of the Missionary.

- Because the Lord has gathered us together in his holy calling that we may live together we must care for one another and encourage one another to be faithful in God's service and bring about our sanctification,
- therefore let there flourish among us harmony, peace, calm, reverence, tolerance, affection,
- let each one help the other willingly,
- let charity burn away the members' faults and not allow displeasing news to be bandied about from house to house,
- we must carefully avoid all antipathy and undue friendliness too, familiarity, playfully laying hands on others, and
- ambition and presumption.
- Let each one live like an angel in the flesh,
- be an example in doing good for the others,
- be good-humored, serious, reserved, courteous, polite (for politeness is also a virtue), and
- lastly each one must try to behave with simplicity of heart, humility and prudence.

In the first part of this *Praxis* we see that our "coming together" has a divine and not a human cause. By this divine initiative and holy call, the Lord keeps us together to live "collegially." The means to be employed, "caring for one another and encouraging one another," are aimed at bringing us to serve God faithfully and to sanctify ourselves. The list of practical means to be

employed are an amply developed synthesis of the central theme which St. Gaspar had so much at heart—the *vinculum caritatis*—the bond of charity. Let harmony, peace, calm, reverence, tolerance, and love flourish among us. Let us help one another willingly, excuse one another's faults. Let there be no gossip (no carrying of unpleasant news from house to house), no antipathy or exaggerated sympathy, ambition or presumptuousness of the spirit.

In the second part of the same *Praxis*, he gives a description of the Missionary that is not too highly “spiritual,” too estranged from reality. On the contrary he says the Missionary must be a *man of flesh*, who is transfigured and transformed: a happy man, serious, reserved, friendly, well-mannered, one who can be an example; a simple-hearted man, humble and prudent—almost an angel in the flesh.

The Community is of Divine and Not Human Origin.

The reflection that we have just made spontaneously has its roots in theology. It comes across in two words that could make people laugh today, but not if they are taken in such a far-reaching context: “We must carefully avoid all *antipathy* and *undue friendliness* too.”

Community and brotherhood are not of human origin. “The entire Community proclaims that the indwelling love it possesses is not something that comes through the demands of the flesh, but through the action of the Spirit which marks each one with the characteristics of Christ himself.”

We are not the ones who choose who will be our brothers in our Congregation. It is God who does this. If we love them it is not because they please us or not, but because the Father has made them our brothers, giving them, too, the grace of fellowship (*koinonia*).

My brother is not one whom I chose to love but the one whom God, in the work of my salvation, gives me to love.

My brother in the Church is not this or that good man thirsting for brotherhood. It is a man whom Jesus Christ has saved, freed from his sins and called, as he called me, to believe this Good News and to live forever.

[One could fall into what has been called the]. . . intoxication of the interior life, caused by confusing Christian fraternity and a desire for life in a pious community, and by a mixture of that nostalgia for the perfect community which every religious has within him, and the reality in the spiritual order implied by fraternity in Christ.

Brotherhood is not a human ideal, but a God-given reality. It is a reality that belongs to the spiritual order, not to the psychological.³⁰

Community founded on the psychological order clutches at the powers of the mind, at desires, at the natural virtues and possibilities. Community founded on the spiritual order comes from the Holy Spirit, who enables us to recognize that Jesus is our Savior for whom community deploys itself “within a space which has been cleared of all encumbrances and where the human element can fulfill itself freely and creatively.” The psychological community, on the contrary, is conditioned by abstract ideals, rules and principles to which it conforms. Consequently one is based on reality, the other on duty; one is founded “on the clear and evident word that God has spoken to us through Jesus Christ,” whereas the other is based “on all our turbid passions as a whole and on the desires that disturb the human soul.” One is made of calls upon its members because it has its roots in *agape*; the other is crowded with pious souls, being based on *eros*.³¹

Therefore, a community built on the Christological attitude of this “being-for-others” cannot be made up of passive members who lean on one another to make up

for their psychological deficiencies, or to look for the consolations they cannot find elsewhere or otherwise. It must be made up of persons who form an active, working community.

Community has its origin in God and not in humankind.

The Wellsprings of Community Life

Since a "virginal heart" dedicates itself totally and for always to its community, it must have a source on which it can draw. Humans are finite: they become empty and tired. Therefore, they must have recourse to rich and inexhaustible sources that will completely renew their strength. Love must be always fresh, always new and ready to give itself.

Prayer is the source on which a community must draw. In prayer, it feeds on the Gospel, the liturgy and the Eucharist. "Community life nourished by the teachings of the Gospel, the Sacred Liturgy and especially by the Eucharist, must be persevering in prayer" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 15).

St. Gaspar's zeal and love for the liturgy and especially for the Eucharist is well known. In article 10 of the *Praxis*, he speaks of continual prayer, and fixes the various times when the Community is to pray "before the Blessed Sacrament": meditation, examination of conscience, the prayer to be said before lunch and after supper. For meditation he says to make use of authors who are "men of sound doctrine," and during June to meditate on the "mysteries of the Precious Blood."

Every month one day is set aside for "recollection," and every year, ten days for a retreat. The reason for this is that the strength of the soul may become exhausted and, therefore, it must be restored. During these times all apostolic work is suspended, even the hearing of confessions (cf. art. 116—*Praxis*).

Another element for recharging the soul is silence ("Silence fosters tranquility." art. 12), love of

withdrawal and keeping away from worldly company (art. 14—*Praxis*).³²

In insisting on the spirit of withdrawal, he forbids all that could cause distraction (e.g., roaming around the streets or public squares, wasting one's time hanging around public offices); he tells members not to visit private houses unless necessity, utility or good manners require them to do so (art. 14—*Praxis*).

To safeguard the Missionary and help him keep his peace of mind and avoid distractions, St. Gaspar says that women must be received in an open locale, treated "with seriousness," and that "the conversation should be brief and to the point" (art. 13—*Praxis*).

On this point, let us remember the eight letters he wrote to Signora Tamini.³³ They show us the nobility of his feelings when dealing with a lady.

St. Gaspar's passion for silence and withdrawal makes us think. People love silence and value it if they are at peace, because they are quiet. Tranquility is a necessary condition for being effective; silence is the necessary condition for being productive. It is possible to express God's Word in its fullness if the Missionary has first made it part of himself in the silence and tranquility of God.

Community Life and the Missionary's Bodily Needs

The body, too, can become exhausted and needs to recover its physical and mental strength. Article 11 and the *Praxis* go into detail on the question of food, recreation and hospitality.

As regards food, St. Gaspar insists on the proper quantity and quality, and also on the times when meals should be taken. "The treasurer will also see to it that a suitable place is set aside where there is always some bread and wine for anyone who feels the need to take something during the day—provide a variety of food—all, however, should restrain immoderate forms of appetite in the knowledge that the Congregation is

ready to satisfy their needs but not their greed" (art. 9—*Praxis*).

He valued recreation very highly. For him it was part of the "happy" Missionary, "full of holy joy." He stipulated that the Missionaries "relax after meals" (art. 9), and hence should not discuss cases of moral theology, and should avoid problems and differences of opinion ("to create an atmosphere of affability") and all that afflicts the spirit, speaking only of what can cheer it up (cf. art. 9—*Praxis*).

He held hospitality in great esteem. He was a noble-minded man who had been brought up in the Altieri family, and it was his desire that whoever came should be well received. The visitor should eat with the community and if for some reason or other, a visitor had to have special dishes, these should be served in another room where one or two Missionaries would eat with him.

While prescribing the dress of the Roman clergy for members, he adds, "if it is necessary because of the diversity of places and circumstances to make some change on this point, this should be done." He also suggests that, in order to foster mutual respect and safeguard the priestly dignity, members in residence should be fully and becomingly dressed (cf. art. 5—*Praxis*).

Community Cultural Meetings

Great emphasis must be laid on article 17 and its *Praxis*. Here St. Gaspar prescribes something very important indeed, and which has great relevance even today: "On fixed days during the week they will hold a meeting during which they will discuss Sacred Scripture, dogmatic and moral theology, mystical theology, liturgy and sacred eloquence." The reason behind this was that not only should they excel by the example of their lives, but also in their knowledge of things human and divine.

These daily cultural meetings contribute to the community through this communication of knowledge, and

deepen interpersonal relations based on the knowledge of the persons as they are intellectually and spiritually. Even the expounding of some point of doctrine or science will always bear the personal imprint of the one who is speaking.

These meetings also encourage dialogue and, with it, humility and the search for truth. “In discussions they must avoid excessive heat and obstinacy in defending their own opinions. Since in matters still in doubt everyone has the right to his opinion, so too everyone will have the right to expound his opinion ‘politely’” (art. 18—*Praxis*). These study meetings may also be attended by clerics from outside the Congregation on the invitation of the community (art. 17—*Praxis*).

The omission in our day of this practice has perhaps brought us down to a low cultural level, to a lack of knowledge of others, of their real intellectual and spiritual capacities, and through this lack, there have perhaps arisen preconceived and defensive attitudes toward others. If such is the case, this is where individualism and lack of openness have their origin. Attitudes of this kind have definitely no place in a community. Perhaps we could undertake what is recommended here on a local or regional level?

The Bonds of Affection with the Congregation

It has been said that the relationship between the Missionary and the Community is founded on the relationship existing between Jesus and the Church, and thus it is a virginal espousal, characterized by deep love and a spirit of sacrifice. St. Gaspar gives it expression in article 19 and the relevant *Praxis*. He speaks of “our family” whose good name one should care for, and if one has been remiss with regard to the Congregation, one should be happy to accept correction. One should devote all one’s energies to the good of the Congregation, and speak of it and of its members with respect and love. The Congregation is a “work of God” to which we have been called for our sanctification and salvation.

One must, therefore (art. 20—*Praxis*), undertake with alacrity of spirit the responsibilities that have been assigned him. If there is some difficulty about this, one should inform the director, who will judge how well founded the objections are, and give a ruling by which one must abide with docility to and faith in God.

This positive attitude of dedication to the Congregation and to one's confreres tends to eliminate individualism, comfort seeking, and selfishness. The members are not to seek their own ease. God has called them to the Congregation to serve and not to be served, and for this reason, they will make an effort to resist the promptings of self-will (art. 21—*Praxis*), in order to do the will of God.

Some Preliminary Remarks on Poverty and Obedience

Poverty and obedience affect the organizational structure of a community, which is why one could think that the end itself of the poor and obedient man is the institutional structure that, in this case, would become a myth. Therefore, we say that poverty and obedience are the practical means which make it possible to live in community and implement the *caritas* and hence, the *Congregatio*, which corresponds to the ontological fellowship of persons and not to the organizational structure in itself and for itself. Obviously, the structure itself is not excluded, since it is a means which helps the community to live.

Poverty and obedience make it possible for us to reach the goal of our living together: the *apostolate*. That is not an end in itself but is a means and, while it allows us to preach the kingdom of God to the people, it makes us advance along the road toward the realization of brotherly unity, the visible sign of the love of God among men and women.

Administration of Temporalities (Title 4) or Possessions in Common (Poverty)

Another requirement which affects persons at the core of their being is the desire to possess. The regulating of the possession of property or money on the personal level and, as a result, on the community level, involves the question of poverty. A congregation, because it is part of history and for history, cannot avoid dealing with this question. From the personal implications one passes to the implications this question has for the community, because individual members bind themselves voluntarily and cannot avoid putting their material possessions in common, as did the first Christian communities.

This is a requirement which fraternal fellowship within the Community, and the giving of witness to others outside it, demands of us especially if it is to the latter that our apostolate is directed. It is not possible to preach effectively, that is, evangelize in the full and integral sense of the word, unless the Community that proclaims the Word of God bears witness to it by living it and putting it into practice in specific concrete circumstances.

Restricting oneself to the simplest standard of living is a public proclamation that the gift of fellowship and brotherhood which the Father has made to us in Christ Jesus is enough to satisfy our desire to possess. He is the one thing necessary. Each one will find all that is necessary for his own basic personal needs by putting in common within this brotherhood and for this brotherhood the fruits of his labor.³⁴

On the Community Level

Since the Missionary has to devote himself undisturbed "to rendering homage to God through his ministry," he must not have to worry about material things

which are considered necessary. This is why St. Gaspar ruled that every community should have sufficient revenues to be able to go about its ministry freely and without worry. The community is made up of seven priests and five brothers, or of at least three priests and two brothers, and the house must be sufficiently endowed to provide for their upkeep (art. 34—*Praxis*).

If there are other revenues over and above those for the maintenance of the community, e.g., for the church, the mission retreats, etc., they must be administered separately, and every one responsible must keep an account of his administration. With the consent of the *congressus*,^a one house can help another in need, provided this is fair and can be done without recrimination (art. 35—*Praxis*).

The treatment of the Missionaries must, as far as possible, “be the same for all,” whether it be a question of sustenance, furnishings or anything else that is necessary (art. 36). Let the food be good, plentiful and served up neatly. The treasurer must satisfy the community and not himself. Everything must be done “in charity,” especially where the sick are concerned. The house must have everything in good order, with a waiting room suitably but not luxuriously furnished, so also the recreation room and the refectory. Each member must have his own room with a comfortable bed, a writing desk and all the furniture that is necessary or even useful. As far as possible let there be uniformity in all these things, and an impression of the “idea of common life,” “decorum, cleanliness and ecclesiastical respectability” (art. 36—*Praxis*).

^a*Editor's note:* The Latin *congressus* means *meeting*, but in the context of the history of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood it takes on a specific meaning, referring to the meeting of the members of a mission house that was to be conducted according to guidelines spelled out in the *Rule* of St. Gaspar. The author describes the *congressus* later in this article.

As much is said in no. 13 of *Perfectae Caritatis*:

The institutes themselves should . . . bear a quasi-collective witness to poverty . . . Although the institutes have the right to possess all that is necessary for the maintenance of the congregation and of its undertakings, they are, nevertheless under the obligation to avoid all appearance of luxury, of excessive profits and accumulation of possessions.

A communitarian means for controlling the administration of material goods is the house congressus. Just think that in the *Praxis* of article 42 alone, recourse to the congressus is requested seven times as an indispensable, condition. This is a way of giving a meaning to material goods. The Missionaries being met in congressus with their intelligence, common sense, Christian and apostolic life, take poverty, understood as an economic and social condition, and put it through a process which makes of it a spiritual disposition of the Community.

On the Personal Level

Poverty may be understood as an interior disposition of the Community to the extent that every Missionary intends it in this way—becoming one of the “poor of Yahweh.” A Missionary, if he is open to God, must be conscious of his own incapacity. He must avoid showiness and consider poverty “a choice voluntarily embraced in order to follow Christ who, being rich, made himself poor for our sake” (*Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 13). These are the poor in spirit (Mt. 5, 3) who share the life of Christ by whom they are called *blessed*.

Gaspar wanted a free choice made out of love and not by vows. He leaves each one free to possess and to administer what belongs strictly to the needs of the person. Each has his own dignity and should not stoop to recourse to subterfuge (a frequent and practical risk of the canonical vow), and falling into the same slavery as

one who makes use of poverty as an economic weapon, and then as a moral weapon, thus making freedom of personal choice a very difficult matter in everyday life.

For this reason, St. Gaspar (art. 37) leaves to each individual the care of providing his own clothes, retaining the ownership of his goods and of his Mass stipends. It is specified in the *Praxis* that one who has possessions should use them according to justice and charity, bearing in mind the needs of the Congregation, to which he is not obliged to render an account. In the American *Praxis* (art. 37) of 1892, it appears that Mass stipends were to be handed to the superior, in order to provide for the expenses of the Community. As regards expenses for clothing and other things which the Congregation did not provide, the Missionary receives an annual allowance, paid out of the common fund, which is made up of the Mass stipends, revenues, mission stipends, etc.

In the *Praxis* of article 38, it is stated that if a Missionary, inspired by God, wishes to live a more perfect common life, he may give up his Mass stipends to the Congregation. In this case, the Congregation will provide him with clothing and other necessities, as it does for the lay brothers.

In discharging their obligation they [the religious] must feel bound by the common law of labor, and while they thus provide themselves with what is necessary for their sustenance and their undertakings. . . they will avoid all excessive gains and all accumulation of possession. (*Perfectae Caritatis* 13).

St. Gaspar had already stated that every Missionary has the obligation to preach. What this labor brought him (offerings, stipends, gifts) should be handed to the treasurer of the house to provide for its upkeep. Indeed, precisely because in the ministry one must seek only the "things of Jesus Christ," one must avoid all avarice, and not set one's heart in riches, but drive away the

loathsome desire to become rich. This was the reason it was forbidden to take Mass stipends during missions. Those which were received could not be kept for one's own private use (art. 23—*Praxis*). Members were reimbursed for the expenses they had incurred by journeys on business for the Congregation (art. 23—*Praxis*; art. 39—*Praxis*).

The administration of funds and property should be accurately accounted for, and the relevant documents kept in the house archives.

Finally, it must be recognized that healthy administration underlies sound community life (“Historical Report,” 14). For material administration a well-balanced mind is needed, together with a sense of honesty, and love for the Congregation. The house congressus is the instrument of a balanced administration. The central administration is the unifying center of fellowship and helps out the poorer houses, creating unity among all of them.

Distribution of Responsibilities in Each House (Title 6), The Overall Administration of the Congregation (Title 7): The Union of Hearts and Wills (Obedience—Authority)

The short introductory chapter to Title 6 is interesting: “Now we have to deal with the distribution of duties by which such a great variety of things is *brought into unity*.” The duties or functions are what create unity.

Every function comprises authority to serve, and therefore obedience to be observed.

The unity of the Congregation and the community was dear to St. Gaspar's heart and, reading between the lines of the *Rule*, obedience was particularly dear to him.

Through obedience every member tries to orient his own life according to God's plan, as made manifest through the mediation of the congressus and of a confrere. Without giving up the right to one's personal judgment, one seeks to find the will of the Father as

expressed through the will of a confrere and of all the confreres together. This is tantamount to saying how far fellowship and brotherhood can go. Actually, God gives the community, in so doing gives, and reveals himself just as he gives himself by giving his Son.

At this point we will examine articles 7 and 8, which deal specifically with this question.

The Missionary in Relation to Obedience

Article 7 and the relevant *Praxis* state clearly and unmistakably that anyone interested in remaining in the Congregation must not only live according to Canon Law, he must also obey “perfectly.” The Missionary’s holiness consists in obedience.

The relationship of obedience with the superiors is not something external and formal. It is a deeply rooted attitude which affects the mind and heart of each of them. I would say that it should be a relationship of firm friendship.

In article 8 it is stated that the one who presides is the beginning, the foundation “of all order,” and the members should pay him due respect. In the *Praxis*, it is harmony between superiors and subjects that is insisted upon. The superior must act “with all discretion and charity.” The subject must respond to this by being “docile” and “making the sacrifice of his own will.”

In this same article and its *Praxis*, where relations between superiors and subjects are dealt with, St. Gaspar inserts his remarks on the spiritual director and confessor, as if the latter were a “superior.” I think this is correct, because everyone needs a man of God to tell him where the will of the Father is to be found on a purely personal level, and whom one must obey in order to implement this will.

“Let each one have a spiritual director. If they choose a prudent man of the same Institute, they will be acting wisely” (art. 8). They should do the same in the choice of a confessor. Although one is free to choose one

outside the Institute, "it is better to turn to one of our own" (*Praxis*).

The spiritual director is important if one desires to reach the "height of virtue," and therefore one should trust him as one trusts God. One should have faith in him (art. 9) in order to remove all difficulties and cultivate virtue, and should discuss with him all that can further one's spiritual progress according to the gifts which the Spirit gives to each one (*Praxis*).

As regards the spiritual director, it is opportune to say that one would be prudent to take account of St. Gaspar's suggestion. Perhaps it happens only rarely. Nevertheless, if one succeeds in putting it into practice, it would be a sign of community life and of fraternal fellowship, a strengthening and consolidation of the Community, and a guarantee that the spirit of the Congregation continues on: a sign that something is being done.

What must we do to enter into this relationship of trust, confidence, esteem and affection between the Missionaries, in order that one can choose one of them for the sake of one's own spiritual life?

Duties and Competence

In every house seven offices are envisaged, which does not necessarily mean that all seven are to be filled. The situation may vary from house to house.

The first office is that of president, and then comes that of superior. Then there is the vice-superior, the secretary, the mission director, the retreat director and the treasurer. We will consider only the offices of president, superior, and treasurer.

The president's function is a spiritual but very real one. He is appointed to see to the unadulterated observance of the rules and to be their defender (*tutamentum*); he watches to see that abuses do not creep in; assumes all vacant offices; takes care of the sick and administers the sacraments to them; takes charge *pleno*

iure 'with full authority' of the student body and the *probandatus*.^b He is given the first place of honor (art. 53). It is useful to note that when he substitutes for another in one or other office, he does not take the title of that office. His is the readiness of a man available for anything, and this is the salvation of the Community. Father Giuseppe Quattrino, a former provincial director of the Italian Province, once being hard put to find a substitute for some office, said, "What we need is a little group of Missionaries ready to undertake anything, who would form a volunteer reserve for the urgent needs of the province."

Being also the superior of the students and of those in the *probandatus*, the president must be careful to train them to be humble in spirit, to pray and to observe our rules promptly and diligently (*Praxis*).

The superior "looks after the family" (art. 54—*Praxis*). He directs the usual activities listed in the order of the day—exercises in common, prayers—and sees to it that discipline and silence are observed. He must foster peace, harmony and charity among the members of the Community. He must also admonish one who is slack in the accomplishment of his duty, and be watchful to ensure that the monthly retreat is not omitted. The brothers' spiritual welfare and their instruction in the faith fall within his competence. At the house congressus he will assign to each one his share of the ministry of preaching, hearing confessions and presiding at liturgical celebrations.

The treasurer (art. 55—*Praxis*) will cheerfully provide the community with whatever the *Rule* has laid down for it. He must not seek what pleases himself, but

^b*Translator's note:* The *probandatus* would be equivalent to what is now referred to in the *Normative Texts* (article C35) as "a special program of religious formation," often referred to as "special formation."

what satisfies the community. He must show special concern for the sick and the lay brothers. On their part, members must not abuse his goodness and be too demanding; “frugality is to be observed.” The treasurer will also take care of giving alms to the poor.

It must be noted that to the offices of president, superior, and treasurer there is always added as a matter of course the direction of some association. Probably this is to allow them to breathe the air of the apostolate, and satisfy what is required of them as priests, instead of allowing them to become desiccated in certain specified tasks. The president will be the director of the “Sodality of the Apostles,” the superior, of the “Sisters of Charity,” the vice-superior of the “Children of Mary,” and the treasurer, of the “Farmers’ Association.”

For the other positions, like the director of missions, retreats, etc., there was no need for this because they are directly priestly and apostolic.

Government: The House Congressus—Superiors

The *congressus* is an original contribution of St. Gaspar’s. Today one feels the need to meet in assemblies of various kinds, that people can dialogue, have a confrontation of ideas and make decisions. In his *Rule*, art. 57, St. Gaspar had this to say: “Since the stability (*firmitas*) of an active life consists in the fact that all the parts ‘agree among themselves,’ the members meet at the request of the superior ‘to take counsel in fellowship.’”

The essential element of this means must be emphasized: *consensus of all the parts and fellowship*.

The meeting can be formal or informal, as the case would demand. Even the last Missionary in order of precedence can ask for it to be convened.

It is necessary to demonstrate the need for dialogue and democracy in the *Rule*. The congressus proceeds by secret vote and ballots must be taken until a decision has been reached (art. 59). All have the right “to say

what they think," and if all reach a consensus, the matter ends there; otherwise a vote must be taken (*Praxis*).

The moderator general, on the occasion of a visitation, will make the appointments to the various offices, after consultation of the members by secret vote (art. 56).

In the general administration of the Congregation also, great attention must be paid to these two requirements—dialogue and democracy—while preserving unity because of obedience to a "government." All the houses are united among themselves by the central government, but each one retains its own autonomy (art. 61—*Praxis*).

Every year or every three years the moderator general visits each house either personally or through a vicar substitute of his choice (art. 64). Here we have subsidiarity.

The visit must be a meticulous one. The visitor must listen to all without exception: Missionaries, brothers, students. Here we have dialogue: listening to others.

In article 64 and the *Praxis*, it is visualized that a Missionary to whom the moderator general delegates vicarious powers, especially for "distant regions," would be called a "special vicar." Here we have co-responsibility, which becomes closer through the definitors and consultants (art. 66), who can also make use of the help of some competent Missionary (art. 67—*Praxis*).

One of the general administration's principal tasks is to establish unity among the individual mission houses, so that they form "one body" under "one governing body." This is of the greatest benefit, and clears the way for work on a very broad front in the Lord's vineyard (art. 61). It is a guarantee of vitality and progress.

When the general administration has to interpret the *Rule* on some doubtful point, it must be guided by the inspiration of the *Rule* (art. 68—*Praxis*) and not by purely juridical considerations.

When making new foundations, it will choose those “most conducive to the glory of God and the salvation of souls” (art. 58—*Praxis*).

The moderator general was elected by secret vote, in order to obviate all ambition and partisanship (art. 71). The definitors were nominated by the moderator general. It was, however, decided in the general chapter of November 15, 1872, that they, too, would be elected just as the moderator was, but this was not confirmed by the Holy See (art. 71—*Praxis*).

The definitors and consultors were to be prudent, of sound doctrine, and experienced (art. 66—*Praxis*).

Those who took part in the election of the moderator general were the special vicars, the definitors, consultors, and representatives of the Congregation at large, one per province, elected by the Missionaries. The criteria which were to guide them in their choice were juridical (a Missionary who had been at least ten years in the Congregation, and was at least thirty years of age) and moral (one who had discharged his offices in the Congregation in a laudable manner, who possessed virtue and wisdom, especially gentleness, kindness, charity, zeal, “outstanding prudence” and dignity). This is required by the very nature of the Congregation, which has no juridical bond, having been instituted for the secular clergy (art. 71d—*Praxis*).

Reflections on the Government of the Congregation

As the government was devised by St. Gaspar, “it tempers with wisdom the requirements of individuals with those of authority.” The two practical instruments for realizing this are the house congressus and the directors.

The house congressus had first place. It “regulated every case concerning the house, the Church and the ministry. In the *Constitutions* (until 1968) the superiors had, on the contrary, acquired greater autonomy in making decisions” according to the “Historical Report” of 1968.³⁵

Community life, however, according to St. Gaspar, is regulated:

1. *By the house congressus*

- from which all co-responsibility, harmony, and proper ordering of activities derive;
- to which are linked all charges, coordination and control of one's own work;
- in which are brought up the nominations to offices coming from the moderator general.

2. *By the superior*, who, within the context of the congressus, loses nothing of his authority, but gains in favor among the subjects and finds his task made easier.

All the other offices, beginning with that of president, foster respect for the *Rule*, by maintaining the order necessary to community life, and avoid the concentration of authority in the hands of a few or of a single person, by widening the area of collaboration.³⁶

Perfectae Caritatis, no. 14, says that the competent authorities are primarily the general chapters, "The official authority, indeed the supreme authority," says Father Tillard, "for the whole Institute; Provincial Chapters for the province or district." Thus even the council has recognized the very great importance of the assemblies that the various religious institutes have set up, even on the local community level, something which we have always had.

As far as the superiors are concerned, *Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 4, says: "They must consult their confreres and listen to what they have to say." Father Tillard makes this comment:

It is a question here of listening and drawing out opinions, in order to know through the members what the Lord really wants of the community. . . God reveals himself within the community by means of its members; the superior receives from him the responsibility of

leading to perfection this community of baptized Christians, and has the duty of trying to quicken the Word that the Father *here and now* pronounces through this community, and to understand all its shades of meaning.³⁷

He should not cease to consider himself as superior because he dialogues with those in his charge. . . With his own particular charism, he should try to discern the line of force which the Spirit of God has chosen among all that reaches him from the depths of his community, and which often tends to go in divergent directions. He must obey the Spirit (the Spirit who has expressed his will through the subjects), not the subjects . . . The formal purpose of consultation is not to please everybody's taste, but, in all truth, to provide for the good of the institute as a whole.³⁸

In our *Rule*, dialogue and listening to everyone is prescribed, and throughout all its articles a healthy democratic influence finds expression (house congress, relations between superiors and those in their charge), for the precise purpose of finding out what the Spirit is saying to all to whom he distributes his gifts as he pleases (*Rule*). All this in order to discover what is the will of the Father for each one as regards "his sanctification and salvation" within the Congregation and, outside the Congregation, to apply, through the ministry, the "price of our redemption" to the souls of men and women.

CONCLUSION

The Congregation is the work of God and St. Gaspar planned it to be a community of priests and brothers not bound by vows, as he himself stated in the *Rule*. Thus I think it opportune to conclude this paper with the last

words of that *Rule*, in order to foster an ongoing sense of responsibility for the choice of *community* which each one of us has made.

What is set out in the *Praxis* must be held as dear as the *Rule*. Let none grow weary in observing it, because the sacrifice of one's own will is for the glory of God, for the good of our Congregation, and for the personal, spiritual benefit of each one. Should anyone feel differently about this, in God's name let him choose another path. As the Apostle said, not all are prophets, etc. . . .

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Fraternal Life in Community

Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S.

INTRODUCTION

Once, while speaking with one of our members about different issues concerning our life as Missionaries of the Precious Blood, he said to me: “Barry, you know what our main difficulty is? The main issue is not living the spirituality of the Precious Blood or about rediscovering our missionary charism, but rather, “life in community” is our real challenge.” While I might not completely agree with his affirmation that living our spirituality and rediscovering our missionary charism are not major challenges, I do agree with him, however, that the daily struggle for many of our members lies in living together in community.

St. Gaspar might well agree. After all, he did write to one of his Missionaries: “Community life demands a certain degree of virtue and mutual compassion” (*Letter 2877*). Also: “[In community] there is a diversity in natures, a diversity in temperaments, and, consequently, in that lies the great balance of the practice of virtue” (*Letter 2666*). Again, in another letter he affirms: “In community living, much patience and composure are needed; otherwise the devil will win out. All must be done with a gentle and ingratiating zeal” (*Letter 2428*). Gaspar’s remedy? “Charity keeps everything balanced out” (*Letter 2576*).

In this article, I will reflect on the theme of *fraternal life in community* in the light of two important Church documents which have been issued on the subject of religious life in the last eight years, and which constitute instruments which each community should use to evaluate its own journey of faith and progress in communion. These documents are: *Fraternal Life in Community* (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 1994); and *Consecrated Life (Vita Consecrata)*, the post-synodal apostolic exhortation of John Paul II, (1996). I will reflect on some of the key elements in these documents in light of the spirituality of the Precious Blood and from the perspective of the challenges that community life poses to us as a society of the apostolic life.

The Church as Communion

“Before being a human construction, religious community is a gift of the Spirit. It is the love of God, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, from which religious community takes its origin and is built as a true family gathered together in the Lord’s name.” No. 8 of the document *Fraternal Life in Community* thus sets the foundation of community life as a gift from on high which is rooted in “the very heart of the blessed and sanctifying Trinity, who wills it as part of the mystery of the Church, for the life of the world.”

The Church is essentially a “mystery of communion.” “The fraternal life seeks to reflect the depth and richness of this mystery, taking shape as a human community in which the Trinity dwells, in order to extend in history the gifts of communion proper to the three divine Persons” (*Vita Consecrata*, 41). It goes on to state that the fraternal life, understood as a life shared in love, is an “eloquent sign of ecclesial communion” (*VC*, 42).

In *Vita Consecrata* we read: “Consecrated persons are asked to be true experts of communion and to practice its spirituality as witnesses and artisans of that

plan of communion which stands at the center of history according to God” (VC, 46). Religious are reminded that one of our tasks is that of spreading the spirituality of communion, “first of all in their internal life and then in the Church community, and even beyond its boundaries, by beginning or continuing a dialogue in charity, especially in those places where today’s world is torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence” (VC, 51). Communion leads to mission. In essence it is a “communion that is missionary” (VC, 46).

This first point, then, reminds us that the basis of our “fraternal life in community” is not human attraction, compatibilities, or mere affinities, but rather, it is a vocation, a call by God, and a mission. In the *Rule* approved in 1841, we read: “Since the Lord has brought us together . . . therefore we live together in community.” The *Rule* then goes on to elaborate on our obligations to one another.

The Church thus calls us to live as “sacraments of Christ’s love” for one another and for the world in which we live. Just as married couples are called to reflect for others the faithful and generous love of God for us living in covenant love, so we religious are called to be sacraments for the world of God’s inclusive, all-embracing love, by reaching out to all and by witnessing to a life of communion in diversity. This is made possible by the love of God which abides in us and which calls us to communion. Religious life then becomes a “place for becoming brothers and sisters,” a true “school for communion.”

The Importance of Communication

In the past, before the renewal following Vatican Council II, the pivotal point that structured community life was often the strict observance of the *Rule*, that is to say, conformity to external rules and regulations. Those of us coming from the United States and schooled in the spirituality of Fr. Brunner remember by heart the motto that appeared in all of our houses: “Observe the *Rule*,

love the Mother of God; pray for the poor souls in purgatory." Absent was any reference to community life, to our mission, or to the spirituality of the Precious Blood.

Today, community life no longer emphasizes "perfect conformity" to the law nor the rigid and inflexible observance of norms. Today, the person, with his or her rights, duties and aspirations are taken into account. The document *Fraternal Life in Community* states, "in the renewal of recent years, communication has been recognized as one of the human factors acquiring increased importance for the life of a religious community" (29). Today, more importance is placed on intercommunication and the interrelationship between the members in a process of dialogue and common discernment. Healthy interpersonal relationships are the basis for good community living. The same document goes on to say: "in order to become brothers and sisters, it is necessary to know one another. To do this, it is rather important to communicate more extensively and more deeply" (29). Later on it states that "the lack of or weakness in communication usually leads to weakening of fraternity" (32). If our communication centers merely around problems and issues of marginal importance, rather than significant sharing of what is vital and central to our journey of consecration, then our relationships can easily become superficial and anonymous, as well as create true and very real problems of isolation and solitude. In no. 32, the document speaks of the painful consequences that can result from this superficial experience of community and communication:

. . . then spiritual experience imperceptibly takes on individualistic overtones. A mentality of self-sufficiency becomes more important; a lack of sensitivity to others develops; and gradually, significant relationships are sought outside the community.

Our Challenge

St. Gaspar did not want the strict vows of traditional religious orders as a way of joining us together, but rather called us to “live in the bond of charity.” We often cite this phrase when describing our “fraternal life in community.”

In Vol. I of the *Spiritual Writings of St. Gaspar*, published by D. Beniamino Conti, we find a compilation of spirituality suggestions given by St. Gaspar to his Missionaries during the spiritual retreats and compiled by one of his Missionaries. In them we read:

Love God and love your neighbor. The Lord also wishes the second thing: *Diligite alterutrum* ‘Love one another.’ Every Christian is required to do this, but even more so the priest, the Missionary. Still more, one who lives in a Congregation that has no other bond than that of charity. I do not want *frati* ‘friars,’ the Venerable used to say, and I do not want bonds such as promises or vows with my members; the only bond is the bond of charity.

According to the 1983 Code of Canon Law, there are three defining elements to a society of apostolic life: 1) the apostolic aim of the society; 2) fraternal life in community according to its proper constitutions; and 3) the striving for perfection in the life of charity.

Our commitment to community is rooted in and is nourished by the wellsprings of our own identity in the spirituality of the Precious Blood. That Blood brings together, unites and harmonizes. The Blood of the covenant forms us into family, brings together a non-people into community, and confers on us an identity. It is the Blood of the New Testament, shed on the cross in order to reunite everyone in one family. It is the Blood shared in the Eucharistic cup that commits us to be forgers of community, willing ever to put out our best energies in order to make God’s dream of communion a reality in today’s world.

To live in *covenant relationship* is more than merely a legal pact to live together as brothers when we sign our incorporation papers. The covenant relationship as a biblical concept is more about the heart than about legal agreements or pacts. In fact, we can speak of the “covenant bond” as a “bonding of hearts.” It is a bonding of the heart, first, with God as we are called into communion with him; it is a bonding of the heart with one another, with our brothers in community.

Let us look now briefly at this covenant bond in its double aspect.

Bonding with God

Through the covenant, we are a people who “belong” to God. We are bonded to God in a love relationship. Our response to God’s invitation is our “yes” to live according to God’s law. For the children of the New Testament, it is not conformity with a set of external laws that effect sanctity but rather faith in Christ, who evokes a faith-filled response. It is the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “I will write my law on your hearts” (31:33).

Our community life must be one that builds upon Christ, the foundation upon which the construction rests. I will never forget what the psychologist told me after working intensely for a month with a formation community that was having a very difficult time in “bonding.” His diagnostic: “Father Pepe, the basic problem here is one of faith. These men need to deepen their commitment to Jesus Christ.” This is not to say that when we live by faith, all our problems will disappear magically, but I have become convinced that many of the challenges we face in community life, could be overcome if we simply lived more faithfully the Gospel that we profess and which we so enthusiastically preach to others. St. Gaspar reminded his Missionaries: “Preachers, preach first to yourselves.”

To bond with God, to enter into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, remains our most fundamental

calling in community life. Prayer, the Scriptures, the celebration of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, days of recollection and our annual retreat, spiritual reading and meditation, spiritual direction, personal and communal prayer, are all means that nourish and strengthen this basic covenant bond, this relationship with Jesus Christ, which lies at the heart of our call to religious life. As Missionaries of the Precious Blood, a special moment for living this covenant bond with Christ and with one another is in sharing the Eucharist cup, as we renew our commitment to live as a covenant people with God and with one another.

Bonding with One Another

This bonding with God is the foundation of the bonding with one another that takes place in the covenant. Through bonding with God, we share in God's life and we live according to God's spirit. The same bond that links us to God links us to one another. Through the covenant, we are formed into a people. In the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians 2:13, "you who were once far off have been brought near by the Blood of Christ." The Blood of Christ, which seals the new covenant, is that which unites us in community. We belong to God and we belong to one another. We are a covenant people marked by the Blood of the Lamb. As such, our life in community should afford us a place for renewing and strengthening our covenant bond.

We are called to be together in covenant relationship with one another, united in God's boundless love. God initiates it. God calls and forms us into community. This enables us to look beyond our differences, beyond our diverse personalities, our political and theological orientation, in order to discover in our companions in community, true brothers. It is through the power of the Blood that we can overcome our differences and difficulties and live in true love.

To live this aspect of the spirituality of covenant means that our houses are more than mere hotels where we gather to eat and to sleep. It is a place of sharing, of belonging, of communication. In other words, we try to care for one another as in a family. Our covenant pledge becomes a cohesive force more powerful than any juridical bond. As a free bond, our covenant pledge cannot be strictly regulated and imposed. It is in my heart, where, day by day, this bond is strengthened and drawn tighter.

The call to live in covenant community urges us to discover ways to strengthen the bond of charity which is the glue that holds us together. When we responded to our call to follow Christ in community, we pledged our support to one another. We promised to be there in good times and in bad. We promised to hold one another up. We promised to form community. The question, which arises in my mind then, is this: How do we bond with one another? How do we strengthen this bond? How do we show our commitment to one another, whether we live alone or in one of our existing institutions, or whether we live in a small community house of two or three?

We quickly learn that community life is not always as ideal as it appears in our written documents. We soon discover that even when members are gathered together “in the common life” under the same roof of a parish house or an institution, many times they are not really “bonded” to one another, other than sharing, perhaps, the same meal schedule or structured prayer time. We discover very quickly that we are a very diverse group of people, due to differences of age, of theological formation, of pastoral experiences, of world-views, and political positions. This is our reality.

A Sanctuary of Dialogue and Sharing

Nevertheless, we are committed to being a covenant people. To achieve this goal in our daily relationships in community requires of all much virtue, as St. Gaspar reminds us. Community ought to be a sanctuary of

dialogue in which the members can share their dreams and their joys, their sorrows and their failures. In order to achieve the kind of communication so essential to building community, we need to develop the ability to listen. We must have open ears and open hearts in order to enter into dialogue with our brothers to discover their inner movements and to be in solidarity with them. It also means that we approach one another in community with great respect, born of reverence for the mystery inherent in each of us. When we open ourselves up to others in community, we are entering into the sacred ground of the inner sanctuary. We are to take off our shoes and walk gently. Only thus, in a spirit of deep trust and confidence, can we forge those bonds essential to a covenant relationship. In this way, we experience community as a place of hospitality and of welcoming, a safe place where one can open up to the others, a place where we can “entrust” to the other our innermost yearnings.

Likewise, our houses, as *mission houses*, should be places where companions and friends are welcome to come to unburden their hearts and to share moments of prayer and reflection with us, so that we might hear the cry of the blood and discern our response to that cry as a family united in the Blood of Christ.

For those of us living together in community we must seek those moments together when we can do some significant sharing. We need to recover the wise practice of the community *congressus* envisioned in our first mission houses. In the congressus, important aspects of our life together and of our mission can be openly discussed in a spirit of brotherly love. Talking only about the weather, religion, and politics keeps our relationship on a very superficial level. It will not create the kind of bonding which we are called to, as a people of the new covenant. We need to foster those moments when we can share at a deeper level: our faith, our prayer, our dreams and visions, and our disillusion and failures.

Sometimes, in the best of situations, this kind of sharing happens spontaneously. However, we know that more often than not, this is not the case.

Just as married couples must consciously work toward maintaining their sacramental vows, so do religious have to make efforts to sustain their covenant pledge to God and one another. Major Community feast days and Community gatherings should have a priority on our list, since they might be the only time that we can “connect” with our fellow Missionaries in order to renew ties, to deepen friendships, and to make new ones. They are precious opportunities to strengthen the bond, which holds us together. The bond is not just on paper: we bond to concrete people, people with a face, a name, a history, and a life to share, a friendship to treasure. Moreover, we not only wait for “that special occasion” to occur to get together. If we feel a real *bonding* to our brothers in community, we will search for ways and invent reasons, if need be, to seek them out and to communicate. In a world where almost instant communication is at the fingertips of all of us, due to the phone, fax, and now internet, we really have no excuse to live isolated, lonely lives. These modern means of communication can become invaluable instruments in our hands, precious means that enable us to maintain and to strengthen the bonds that unite us.

Our life in community gives living testimony to the Blood of Christ that has made us one in a new covenant. We would be making a grave mistake to interpret our covenant bond merely as a challenge to achieving a more welcoming and communicating community among ourselves. We would suffer the same atrophy that young married couples often suffer if they never move beyond the romanticism of looking into each other’s eyes. We are an apostolic Community, a Community in and for mission. Our objective is not to form some kind of cozy, cuddly Community interested only in feeling loved and accepted. We witness in our apostolic approach to the

all-inclusiveness of Christ's love, promoting a true communion of relationships, among the people of God and in society.

Our communities should thus be open, hospitable places where the other feels at home and welcomed. Thus, we welcome guests, especially priests and brothers and other religious, who can find refreshment in us and among us.

From Me to Us

The document *Fraternal Life in Community* (39 and following), points out a very important challenge we face in formation: that of "seeking a just balance between the common good and respect for the human person, between the demands and needs of individuals and those of the Community, between personal charisms and the Community's apostolate."

In this light, a particular challenge for formation communities is to help the individual identify his gifts and talents and his personal project and then through discernment see how he can share his gifts to enhance the Congregation's mission. Admittedly, this balance is not always easy to achieve. The Congregation has to be more than just a composite of individuals each living his own personal project. We are in this together as a body. The elaboration of a Congregational project or mission statement is an important step in overcoming our excessive individualism. To learn to share and to plan together how we can best serve the corporate mission is of utmost importance during the formative years.

In no. 40c of the document we read:

Each institute has its own mission, to which all must contribute according to their particular gifts. The road of consecrated men and women consists precisely in progressively consecrating to the Lord all that they have, and all that they are, for the mission of their religious family.

Multicultural and International Communities

As members of an international Congregation, we are also called to move beyond our small world to connect to the bigger picture. We are encouraged to stretch our horizons and to reach out in creative ways to bond with our sisters and brothers around the globe. The present day openness to our internationality, this call to think globally, is a sign of the times in our Congregation. I believe this trend is irreversible and we should welcome it.

Most of us have heard about some of the challenges multinational and multicultural communities face. As the Congregation grows in its openness to collaborate and to cross boundaries, we need to prepare our members for these encounters with cultures other than their own. We need to face the challenges of living in a “global village” in creative ways.

First, we need to take an honest look at ourselves, as formators, and to identify our own personal prejudices and veiled racisms and stereotypes, as we accompany evermore culturally diverse groups of candidates. We must avoid at all costs racially tinted jokes and degrading comments about the culture of the other. Vocation and formation ministers must be particularly sensitive to cultural issues when planning prayer services and liturgies. They also need to be prepared to deal with conflicts and tensions should they arise in our Communities.

Culture is a very complex reality. It lies at the core identity of a human person and designates a person’s way of life. It is the expression of the whole person, involving one’s “criteria of judgment, underlying values, points of interest, ways of thinking, sources of inspiration and patterns of human behavior” a description of culture used by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (19).

We need to incorporate into our seminary programs opportunities to study cultures and their dynamics.

Many of us, especially we who are older, never had such preparation and probably never experienced much “diversity” in our seminary days. Others, who might have had a more culturally diverse group in formation, may well not have had the necessary tools to face the challenges of living in a multicultural community. Today, this becomes an urgent and necessary aspect of our formation programs. It is even more urgent for a society of apostolic life, called to mission by the “cry of the blood” which often leads us into strange and foreign lands, even within our own countries of origin.

Helpful to this process of growing in cultural sensitivity and appreciation would be to offer our students the opportunity during their formative years to experience the culture of others, through experiencing the mission and community life of other areas of our Congregation. We are doing this now in some units of the Community, but I think it should become a common policy for all of our students at some point in their formation process.

We need to use the best of modern-day technologies for communication to forge stronger ties, to bond in love with our brothers around the world. As we encounter other cultures, we will become more and more aware of our diversity as well. The language barrier is one of our primary challenges, as some of you have experienced in international gatherings of the Congregation. Once again, I want to emphasize the need to implement courses in our formation programs to assure that our members learn at least one other major language spoken by our members.

In societies where the diversity of cultures is already the cause of much tension, violence and bloodshed, we should be living witnesses, sacraments of unity for the rest of humankind. As we face our own cultural diversity within the covenant bond, we can become a true sign and sacrament in the world in which we live and of which we are a part, of the call to communion that

is at the heart of God's plan for all peoples. We also become sacraments of "that new order of things which the great Son of God came to establish through his Precious Blood" (St. Maria De Mattias).

To give credible witness to communion in diversity will demand of all of us a process of conversion. We need to experience the purifying and reconciling power of the redeeming Blood that cleanses us and helps us to overcome our prejudices and all that obstructs living in the covenant bond we profess. As we gather around the Eucharistic table to break bread and to drink from a common Communion cup, we renew with hope our commitment to one another and we accept with joy the mission of furthering community in our fragmented society.

To live the covenant bond of love is to live in solidarity with one another in a deeper communion that is forged in a strong personal relationship with the Lord and which can only come about at the price of the cross, because it is only through the cross and the shedding of Christ's Blood, that "those who were once far off are brought near" (Ephesians 2,13).

Or, in the words of *Vita Consecrata*: "communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony" (no. 51). In the document *Fraternal Life in Community* we read that such "fraternal communities become missionaries of this love and prophetic signs of its unifying power" (no. 56).

Along with the mission of reconciliation, I believe that witnessing to covenant love, being true communities of love in our diversity, is one of the most relevant aspects of living our charism needed in today's world.

Religious communities, aware of their responsibilities towards the greater fraternity of the Church, also become a sign of the possibility of living Christian fraternity and of the price that

must be paid to build any form of fraternal life (*Fraternal Life in Community*, no. 56).

We, as Missionaries of the Precious Blood, are well aware of the price to be paid to attain those covenant communities and to reconcile our differences and to gather all into the embrace of God's all-inclusive love.

A Particular Challenge for Societies of Apostolic Life

All of this is very nice. It is certainly an ideal to pursue, a goal to be achieved. However, as a society of apostolic life, which has as its goal the mission activity, we are well aware of the challenges of living community in the way I have described it. There is frequently the tension between living in community and our apostolic commitments. In the late Fr. John Klopke's article, "Gaspar del Buffalo's Idea of the Mission House," found in this volume, we read of Gaspar's ideals and how community life was lived in the early days of the Congregation. However, the ideal of the mission house as conceived by St. Gaspar can seem for many a distant reality for us in our day.

Because of the diversification of our apostolic activities, our Missionaries today more often than not live in very small communities. In fact, in some countries any number of them live alone and at times at great distances from another member of the Congregation. Nevertheless, the idea of the mission house is resurfacing and some interesting experiences are being lived today. We would do well to begin imagining and discussing what a contemporary version of the mission house might look like.

Authority in the Service of Fraternity

Fraternal Life in Community dedicates a whole section to the role of the formator. One of the principle responsibilities of those of you having the delicate

mission of accompanying our men in their initial and advanced stages of formation is:

. . . to create a climate favorable to sharing and co-responsibility; to encourage all to contribute to the affairs of all; to promote, by your respect for the human person, voluntary obedience. You are called to listen willingly to the members and to promote their harmonious collaboration for the good of the institute and the Church. You are to engage in dialogue and offer timely opportunities for encounter. You give courage and hope in times of difficulty and you look ahead and point to new horizons for mission. Above all, you are to be an authority which seeks to maintain a balance among the various aspects of community life—between prayer and work, apostolate and formation, work and rest (50).

Yours is the mission to assure that our formation houses are not merely places of residence, or a collection of subjects each of whom lives an individual history, but a “fraternal community in Christ” (*CIC*, Canon 619).

St. Gaspar once wrote to one of his Missionaries concerning his ministry in formation:

Here we are a community of twenty-five. These young men, who are newly ordained priests, others deacons or subdeacons, are my delight. I think that cultivating these plants is something contributing to the greater glory of God; it is something better than anything else I could do in any other of our houses (except for one or the other Mission) (*Letter 1309*).

May St. Gaspar guide you and assist you in accompanying our students, whom he once described as being “the pupils of his eyes.”

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Gaspar del Bufalo's Idea of the Mission House

John Klopke, C.P.P.S.

Impelled by the love of Christ, manifested especially in the shedding of his Blood, and sensitive to the need of the Church, St. Gaspar del Bufalo founded a priestly Institute. He attracted from the diocesan clergy a group of like-minded priests and united them by a bond of charity only, instead of by vows. Living together in mission houses they were a source of continual renewal for the priests and the people, mainly by preaching missions and retreats.

In this nucleus the Society of the Precious Blood had its origin, and from it derives its spirit (*Normative Texts*, art. C 1).

This essay is an attempt to contextualize the opening article of the C.P.P.S. *Normative Texts* just cited. It deals with what perhaps is Gaspar's most original contribution, namely, the *mission house*. Its mode of life and operation provide the frame for "the Work" as Gaspar conceptualized it. In fact, in a very real way, the mission house went "on the road" with the Missionaries. Its lifestyle was theirs whether they were in the field or at home.

Was the Mission House Gaspar's Invention?

As I remarked elsewhere in an essay, Gaspar's was not an original mind. He himself said so. For instance on August 20, 1824, he writes to Cardinal Cristaldi: ". . . [the retreats] are carried out in accordance with the regulations of St. Ignatius Loyola, the Father of these retreats (*Esercizi Spirituali*).” Somewhere, too, although the reference eludes me, he speaks of his method of the missions as derived from that of St. Leonard of Port Maurice.^a However, in the 1831 memorandum to Gregory XVI, Gaspar says: “For missions, the system of the Jesuit Fathers, recently published in Rome, is to be used.” Whether this represents a change is hard to say because Gaspar does not add any further description.

To return to our theme, there is little to indicate that Gaspar derived the idea of the mission house from something already existent. For instance, during that part of his exile which he spent in Bologna (1810–1813), Gaspar became familiar with the *Opere delle Missioni* founded by the Venerable Bartolomeo Dal Monte.¹ But this group of Missionaries did not live in community. Rather, they formed *ad hoc* teams to fulfill their preaching assignments.

Then, too, in the famous *memorandum* (sometimes referred to as *memorial*) to Leo XII (*Letter 1214*) Gaspar compares the Society to other apostolic groups who live in common and, in each case, finds something wanting

^a*Editor's note:* There are several references in the writings of Gaspar to St. Leonard of Port Maurice (1676-1751), a great popular preacher of his era. He was a Franciscan who preached in many of the same areas as Gaspar and strongly promoted the Way of the Cross. Klopke may be thinking of a document of Gaspar's entitled “*Memorie estratte dal regolamento fatto dal B. Leonardo per le Sante Missioni*” ‘Memoranda from the Rule for the Holy Missions by B. Leonard [of Port Maurice]’ in *Scritti Spirituali di S. Gaspare del Bufalo I*, edited by Beniamino Conti (Rome, 1995).

in their sort of organization. For instance, the Oratorians of St. Philip Neri limited their apostolate mainly to the evening oratory, whereas the Congregation adds to their most praiseworthy objectives the giving of missions and spiritual retreats, either publicly or privately. Gaspare goes on to write:

It [the Society] differs from that of the Oblates of St. Charles insofar as they are required to assume bonds that hold them in conscience and, as a consequence it is not easy for them to engage in a rapid and necessary propagation of the faith. It likewise differs from the Missionaries of St. Vincent de Paul, because they too are bound by the sacred vows [is Gaspar mistaken here?] and, abstracting from the apostolate of the Missions and other pious works undertaken by their foundations, they do not have the flexibility to put into practice what shall be described in detail in these pages, not ordinarily making use of a public church for each of the sexes, so that all of the souls are given an equal portion of nourishment of the divine Word. . .

One must now also cast a glance at the foundation of the Liguori Fathers. . . in order to point out that this congregation in the Papal State does not engage in an extensive propagation, it, too excludes those programs that make the Society that we are discussing here plausible. The Houses of Study for priests. . . having an even much broader idea of the Apostolate than the spirit of the now-deceased Doctor Bartolomeo del Monte . . .

Later we will return to the memorial but it is evident that, for Gaspar, the mission house is not a religious foundation centered upon living out the consecrated life. Rather, in a very real sense it is an essential

component of the Work and the Work in turn, is conceived of as nothing less than total evangelization. In other words, just as the idea of the Congregation does not fit exactly into the pattern of the religious congregations that Gaspar reviews, so too the “fit” of the mission house is not exactly that of a religious foundation.

That, by the way, is why Gaspar was always preoccupied to get the Congregation recognized as an Institute by the Holy See; there was the constant danger that, otherwise, it would get swallowed up by something else. For instance, on April 28, 1828, he writes to Cristaldi:

Likewise, remember to establish our exemption from the reports of pastors. As far as our interior structure is concerned, we are similar to the Filippini Fathers, and as for our external structure, we carry out the ministry of giving Retreats and other ministries contemplated by St. Ignatius, while also following St. Charles in whatever pertains to the House of Studies, something quite distinct from seminaries. So, this calls for maintaining the idea that we are a true institute (*Letter 1737*).

Up to the time of this letter, the only semi-official recognition of the Society as an Institute was a passing mention of it in an apostolic brief of Leo XII (July 12, 1826) assigning the goods of San Felice to the mission house belonging to the group “*cui nomen a Pretiosissimo Sanguine*” ‘whose title is of the Most Precious Blood’ (See note to *Letter 1898* of Feb. 14, 1829 to Betti. Gaspar’s concern continues in his letter (2113) of January 1831 to the same addressee.)

Returning to the original question, was the mission house Gaspar’s own invention? In a preliminary way, the answer seems to be “yes.” As we shall see, especially in the documents that Gaspar wrote in defense of the Society, the mission house was more like a center of

spirituality open for both priests and laymen to share in the spirituality of the missions. (Unfortunately the house was not open to laywomen because the temper of the times would simply not permit it.) To put it differently, there was no spirituality nor were there devotional practices that were strictly “community” as opposed to those spiritual resources such as the “true devotion” of St. Francis De Sales that were available to the whole Church.

Why Emphasize the Documents Which Gaspar Wrote in Defense of the Society?

My reason is twofold: First, these documents present a reflective Gaspar, a Gaspar who had to take a step back in order to contemplate the Work. Second, two of them, namely the memorandum to Pius VIII (June 1829) and the memorandum to Gregory XVI (March 31, 1831) were never previously available in English. Thus, these documents have both an intrinsic and a historic interest. Of course, there were other, less formal descriptions on the functioning of the Institute at that time. For instance, in a letter (no. 410 of April 4, 1821, to his friend and spiritual daughter Lucrezia Ginnasi), Gaspar writes:

Each one of us is well aware of the need that exists for reform. The means to be used for achieving that are Retreats and Missions. Consequently, in accordance with the ideas of the Holy Father, we establish in the different dioceses and provinces, a pious House with those objectives under the direction of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, namely, the priests drawn from the secular clergy. In our churches, we promote the Oratory, that is, services each night only for men; on feast days, the organization for young people dedicated to St. Aloysius Gonzaga; then,

too, for the women, there is the organization of the Sisters of Charity etc., etc., etc. Finally, in addition to giving Missions, we set apart a section of our House for the making of Retreats. There, many of the clergy as well as the laity can withdraw from time to time to pursue that knowledge which is the knowledge of the Saints. Our printed regulations will bring these points out more clearly. With our priests, we insist on continuous study, all following a definite method that is arranged and directed carefully.

Writing to Bellisario Cristaldi, Gaspar affirms that “. . . our Houses are continuous Missions, open to all . . .” and “our churches are open Missions” (*Letters 1309* and *1466*).

From just what we have read, we can already see the justice of these two sentences excerpted from letters dated January 26 (*Letter 1309*) and July 15, 1826 (*Letter 1466*). What is interesting is the connection between the mission house and its accompanying church and that Gaspar uses the word “open” to characterize them both. In a word, house and church form a well ordered service-unit. Of course, the Missionaries also used the house for needed rest and, let it be noted, for needed study.

Could it be that Gaspar discerned an element of “closedness” (if such a word be allowed) in the various religious foundations he describes at the beginning of the memorial to Leo XII? It would bear out my contention that, for Gaspar, a religious foundation always involves an esoteric element (using “esoteric” in its root sense) which was just not part of his “open” spirituality derived as it was from the common founts of spirituality, especially priestly spirituality.

**Letter of October 20, 1821,
to Cardinal Della Somaglia**

Giulio Della Somaglia was cardinal-bishop of Velletri where Gaspar had given a mission in April of 1820, and where, in January of 1822 a hospice of the Congregation would be opened. If he was not already prefect of Propaganda Fide, he would become so prior to 1826 and, in this capacity, he invited Gaspar to send Missionaries to the Ionian Islands. Either he or the future Gregory XVI would be Gaspar's superior during his stint at Propaganda from May to October of 1826. (We know that there was a change of command sometime during 1826. I would like to think that it took place in October and provided Gaspar with the opportunity to escape from a job he found distasteful.)

The "letter" is really a formal paper presented to this prelate by Gaspar—one supposes in reply to an inquiry made by him.

It begins by putting the Congregation in its context, namely, the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood instituted by Pius VII in order to enliven the clergy and people. Somewhat artfully, Gaspar continues by asking:

But, how can that be accomplished if not through the two great means of reform, namely, Retreats and Missions? So to achieve that most important objective, the founding members of the aforementioned Archconfraternity, joined together in Mission and Retreat Houses, afford the facilities for the application of these same means to the greater glory of God and the welfare of souls (*Letter 483*).

This contextualizing of the Institute within the Archconfraternity was, in Gaspar's mind, never more than a means for giving it some sort of ecclesiastical standing. For instance, it was as "Missionaries of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood" that Bonanni claimed the house of San Felice in Giano. But to be

honest about it, once Gaspar was satisfied that the Congregation had been recognized as a true Institute in Leo XII's brief of July 12, 1826, Gaspar admitted that the Archconfraternity only served as "cover" for the Society which, legally, was always an independent entity. For instance, in a letter (no. 1634, of June 1, 1827, to Fr. Gisueppe Bellisari) Gaspar says directly:

One observation with regard to the report and this is, in short, a matter of history. The Archconfraternity was erected even before the period of my exile. Its beginnings, at least, go back to that period of time. After the exile, the union of the Missionaries to it took place so as to make use of its means for their objectives. This, however, was a pure accident which is not of value.

However, this is not to mean that Gaspar was being dishonest. He was taking advantage of the fact that, on December 27, 1817, he was elected first "promotor" and missionary of the Archconfraternity and, at that time, his Missionaries enrolled in the organization. Nor should it be forgotten that on May 8, 1826, it was decided that all the members of the Society were to be considered "born brothers" of the Archconfraternity. Thus, even in the memorandum to Gregory XVI (1831) Gaspar does not hesitate to identify the priests as "primary members of the Archconfraternity." However, more of this later.

Therefore, to return to our topic, Gaspar continues his presentation to Della Somaglia by pointing out the "openness" of the Society's apostolate:

. . . the life of these evangelical workers is directed to no other purpose than that of sustaining the primary objectives of the ministry, by contacting the various groups and classes of people in a way proportionate to their status. . .

Besides missions and retreats, he points out other examples of the Missionaries' zeal: conducting the nightly oratory for men, sponsoring the various organizations for young people, visits to hospitals and prisons. Once again, Gaspar emphasizes study:

Within the House itself, assiduous study is made of the basic ecclesiastical subjects, and, in the communication of ideas, one cannot sufficiently describe what advantages accrue to the Society. . . Everything is in conformity with the Sacred Canons, the practices of the saints, and is, indeed, the support of the episcopal ministry during these difficult times in which we are living.

Although the phrase "communication of ideas" is open to several interpretations, it may well refer to the prescribed theological conferences which kept the Missionaries' minds sharp and to which the diocesan clergy were cordially invited. It is another example of the openness of the apostolate of the mission house. This supports our contention that the mission house, in Gaspar's mind, was more like a center of evangelization than a religious foundation. Thus, Gaspar concludes:

Therefore not only do they seek to train (by setting up pious organizations) the people where the mission house is located, but by traveling about to neighboring towns, they try to stabilize and make perfect in them the fruits of a holy Mission. This is the great good that these evangelical ministers supply in various ways.

Memorandum of July 29, 1825 to Leo XII

By the time this document, so important to the history of the Congregation, was written, the final element of the Work was in place, namely, the houses of study, the first of which was opened in the previous year. As is

well known, at this moment, the existence of the Society was quite precarious and it needed defense on all fronts from its very constitutive idea, its title, and its very existence as an ecclesiastical entity.

We have already quoted from the memorial in order to establish the central point that Gaspar did not conceive of the mission house as a religious foundation but rather as a center of evangelization. What sort of evangelization? Let us continue our quotation of the “general idea of the Society”:

While other institutes, such as the Fathers of the Company of Jesus, have as their primary objective the education of youth, our Mission and Retreat Houses offer whatever is necessary to bring about, with the greatest possible rapidity, the conversion of souls, good example from the grown-ups, and, in short, an apostolate directed towards every sort of grouping of people in the various dioceses which will then evaluate, facilitate and consolidate the education given.

For “education” read “evangelization” and I think what Gaspar has in mind becomes clear. The mission house is “open” in two senses: 1) it does not restrict its functioning and influence to a specific group or social level; 2) nor does it aim at less than total evangelization in order to present to the institutional Church a people prepared for witness, dare one say for ministry?

There is yet more as Gaspar focuses on the ministry of the mission house. Let him speak for himself:

There will be no fear that the clergy will fall into a state of inertia, for, excluding the pastors, the canons and other sacred ministers necessary for the respective places, the other clergy will gradually be brought together into a union bonded by dedication to the ministry and they

will activate this apostolate which is for the greater glory of God. Their own personal affairs will not deter them, since we do not forbid proper ecclesiastical assistance. Nor can being advanced in age make them at times fearful of the fulfillment of their sacred duties, since those who are more vigorous will apply themselves to the giving of Missions and those who are not so strong in health can take care of the internal forum, thus enjoying that peace which the Houses of our foundation can offer. In these Houses, in a special way, the soul is lifted to God in prayer. Also, ignorance, at times, may be the cause of complaints, but even with all that, one moves ahead by the provision of scholarly conferences which, in a way, make up for the past and eventually prepare them for whatever may be relevant.

In a word, Gaspar expects that—with the exception of those clergy whose assignment requires residence—the ideal of the mission house will be so attractive that all other clergy will become zealous participants in the Work! Moreover, in the process, they will not only become sanctified but also educated.

This is surely an extreme example of that Salesian optimism which permeates Gaspar's spirituality. And yet, has not the Society, to some extent, neglected its ministry of outreach to the diocesan clergy? Admittedly, there has always been a tradition of hospitality, a sense of fraternal kinship with the local clergy (see *Normative Texts*, art. C 12). However, Gaspar conceived the mission house as something more: an invitation to a shared spirituality and, at times, an invitation to enter fully into the Work motivated by that spirituality.

So we conclude that in these foundations, already put into motion by the now-deceased Supreme Pontiff Pope Pius VII, the clergy find a

haven and the longed-for reform of the clergy itself is promoted so that they can become a beacon of holiness for the people.

For the rest of the memorandum Gaspar tries to institutionalize the title—and thus the Society—by references to the ecclesiastical approbation of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. This is followed by a petition for a re-granting of the privileges granted to the Missionaries of the Archconfraternity. This latter is by no means an idle move on Gaspar's part. If the Holy See re-grants these privileges, it implies recognition of this group of Missionaries as an ecclesiastical entity of some sort, i.e., an *Institute*.

In his observations on the Archconfraternity, we can learn much about Gaspar's views on the history, appropriateness, and applications of Precious Blood spirituality all of which might be the topic of another essay. However, since these have nothing directly to do with our topic, we will pass on to the next of Gaspar's formal presentations of the Society, namely, the memorandum to Pius VIII.

June 1829 Memorandum to Pius VIII

I am accepting the date assigned to the memorandum (*Letter 1946*) by D. Beniamino Conti, indefatigable editor of the *Epistolario*. But, as I have argued elsewhere,² I think it should be assigned a later date closer to the end of the short pontificate of Pius VIII (March 31, 1829–November 30, 1830). In any case, its intent is clear: to have the papal subsidies granted by Leo XII restored. These were the subsidies which Pius VIII had suspended under the mistaken belief that Gaspar's methods of conducting missions were, somehow, coercive.

Gaspar makes his aim explicit in the second-last paragraph of the memorandum: "Thus, now it is urgent that the one to whom the Lord has given the government of the Church should lend a helping hand to this Society . . ."

What leads up to this statement is a history of the support given to the Society by the previous pontiffs, namely, Pius VII and Leo XII.

Effectively, Gaspar makes Pius VII the founder of the Congregation, although here and in the memorial to Gregory XVI he credits Albertini with the basic notion and plan of the Society. (Gaspar never considered himself the Society's founder although, after November of 1819 when Bonanni resigned all authority, it was evident to Gaspar and to all that he was its sole director.)

The Congregation, then, was to be Pius's instrument of evangelization to repair the ravages of the Napoleonic occupation.

In view of the fact that one of the purposes of the Archconfraternity was that of having our brother-priests dedicate themselves to the apostolic ministry of giving holy Missions and Retreats, that beloved Pontiff wished to make use of them for this project for God's greater glory and through their services to promote also that most important devotion to the Divine Blood.

And next comes a reference contextualizing the mission house in the light of this papal determination:

Eventually, he recognized that it was of the highest advantage to establish residences in the various provinces so as to facilitate assistance to the bishops in the holy ministry of God, and, at the same time, to afford a sacred haven in those localities for anyone who would wish to make a Retreat.

Note, then, that for Gaspar the mission house, though independent of diocesan control, does not function as if it were independent of the pastoral program and planning of the local church. Already article 27 of the *Rule* of 1841 says: "When, therefore, houses are

established for us, the members should promote all forms of piety in the local community and should have a greater concern for the people with whom they live.” Our current *Normative Texts*, art. C27, emphasize this need: “Coordinated apostolic action will bear fruit if it conforms to the directives of the Holy Father and the bishops, and is supported by cordial collaboration with the diocesan clergy, the religious and the laity (canon 738 §2).”

If there was one thing that Gaspar insisted upon in the apostolate, it was coherence. As we have already seen, Gaspar wrote to Lucrezia Ginnasi eight years previously: “With our priests, we insist on continuous study, all following a definite method that is arranged and directed carefully.” Evidently, this is not just an internal coherence of lifestyle and apostolate; it is also an external coherence with the pastoral planning of the hierarchy. A cynic once asked me: “What if there is no pastoral plan?” My reply was that there always is one, albeit it may be implicit and, regrettably, may be cause for the Congregation to abandon a foundation. That, however, is another story.

To return to our theme, what comes next is one of those serendipitous bits which confirms my claim that our spirituality is basically derived from the masters of classical priestly spirituality rather than from those who wrote on religious life. Gaspar says simply: “He [Pius VII] did not wish to have an Institute with vows since the Society would be directed to the clergy and for the clergy.”

At last, a positive statement rather than a weak apologetic for not taking the vows. The *fontes* ‘sources’ of our life are simply diverse from those of institutes of consecrated life and there the matter ends. In this connection, one might note the very first article of the *Rule* of 1841 “Therefore, it is the intention of the Society that its members, who belong to the secular clergy, conduct their actions and their whole life in accordance with the

precepts of the sacred canons . . .” The same point is made again in article 7: “But there is no reason for seeking the rules for right conduct in a great many documents, since, as we have inferred, these are to be sought in the pontifical decrees.”

What follows next is an overview of the foundations with special stress upon plans, never realized, for the Society’s expansion into the foreign missions under the pontificate of Leo XII. (As already noted, Leo gave great impetus to the foreign mission activity of the Church.³)

In addition, as already mentioned, Gaspar concludes by asking the pope’s support: “Thus, now it is urgent that the one to whom the Lord has given the government of the Church should lend a helping hand to this Society. . . .”

Convinced, finally, that Gaspar’s missionary practice was not coercive, the pope restored the badly needed subsidies.

March 1831: Memorandum

D. Beniamino Conti assigns a date of March to this memorandum (*Letter 2140*) because of its non-defensive tone. After April 20, Gaspar was aware that the Society once again needed defense. However, there is no evidence that Gaspar did anything more than write this document. Perhaps he felt that it spoke for itself. In any case, there is a particular quality of serenity in Gaspar’s correspondence of this time.⁴ Although Gaspar was conscious of the accusations against the Society, he simply continued with the Work.

In the preface, Gaspar sounds a theme so typical of him, one which will find its echo in the preamble to the *Rule* of 1841:

In the upheaval of our times, times which God has been pleased to reserve for us, and in the need for reform of the people, the Lord, rich in mercy, has willed to bring forth a powerful

means to be used in setting up a rampart against the torrent of iniquities and to provide us, at the same time, with means that are salutary for attaining eternal salvation through the sanctification and the spiritual cultivation of souls.

What is this “powerful means”? One would expect to hear “missions” and “retreats.” But, surprisingly, Gaspar says “Mission and Retreat Houses.” In this memorandum, Gaspar chooses to present the Congregation not in the abstract, but descriptively, that is, in terms of the day-to-day functioning of the mission house and the rule of life followed by the Missionaries residing there. Here, then, we have an important anticipation of the *Rule* of 1841.

Gaspar begins by speaking of a similarity between the “norm,” i.e., the overriding concern put forth by Benedict XIV for promoting the Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine and that chosen by Pius VII for promoting the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. Both organizations call clergy and laity to involve themselves in a most important endeavor: in the former case, the giving of instruction in doctrine; in the latter, zealous evangelization.

To this second concern Gaspar adds something new:

In addition, the Holy Father [Pius VII] wanted the priests, as the primary members of the Archconfraternity, living together in community life after the pattern of the Filippini Fathers [Oratorians], but with a different extension of objectives, to constitute, in the urgent situation of the times, a supporting force for the Catholic religion, reviving in these ministers of the sanctuary, decorum, good example, holiness and study. It was to be similar to the practice of ancient discipline in the Church, emphasizing strongly the idea of the priests living in union.

Aligning himself with this same attitude was St. Charles Borromeo when he founded his Oblates. This is likewise true of St. Philip Neri as he instituted his congregation.

After thus locating the Society in its proper canonical constellation, Gaspar continues by pointing out previous papal recognition of it as a proper Institute in the historical line of pious unions, confraternities, etc., dedicated to the Precious Blood. All this, of course, shows Gaspar's constant concern to justify the Society and its title.

Now begins the functional description of the mission house. Gaspar begins by distinguishing seven offices: the *praeses* 'president' (also responsible for the priests' association), the local superior (who had the brothers as his particular responsibility), the vice-superior (responsible for the archives and library and also house secretary and director of the girls' group), the director of missions (also director of the nightly oratory), director of retreats (also responsible for the boys' group), the prefect of the church (who also assists with the boys' group), and, finally, the treasurer.

In the *Rule* of 1841 these offices survive practically intact except that the president becomes the "rector" and the care of the church falls to the retreat director. In addition, no mention is made of specific responsibilities regarding the various associations or the nightly oratory.

For anyone unfamiliar with the initial structure of our Institute, it should be mentioned that the president was a sort of spiritual leader, a mature Missionary to whom the rest could look up. The other offices seem self-evident. More often than not, a number of these offices were combined because the usual staff of a mission house was no more than three or four Missionaries. For instance it was quite common that the vice-superior was also the treasurer and the director of missions was also

director of retreats. However, the president was never the local superior.

At first, it seems that all this is of purely historical interest. However, it reveals Gaspar's real convictions about what it takes to make a mission house run effectively. Some of it is "nuts and bolts" administration. Obviously no enterprise can run without some sort of administrative authority and some way of controlling expenditures. Nor can an enterprise devoted to missions and retreats function without someone to direct the work. Nor can a church used for continuous religious functions be effectively used without someone to see to its upkeep and availability.

However, as one moves from this immediate level of responsibility, one can see Gaspar's concern for the coherent functioning of the mission house on a deeper level. There is concern for the archives; something needed in order to provide the director general with the detailed information he needed in the highly centralized administration envisioned by Gaspar. There is concern for the library. As mentioned many times, Gaspar wanted his Missionaries to be informed as well as holy. (Whether the library was available to the retreatants, I have not been able to determine, but I suspect it was available to the local clergy invited as they were to participate in the Missionaries' theological conferences.)

There is concern for the various associations—priests, men, young people—even though in the *Rule* of 1841 responsibility for them is assigned to the mission house as a whole. (This was probably a matter of good sense since what can guarantee that a good treasurer, for example, will also be good in handling a group of lively boys?) Putting aside all the nineteenth-century details, this reveals that Gaspar thought of the mission house as a place of constant spiritual formation no matter what forms future associations might take. In this sense, today's Companion program in North America and other lay associate programs are the apt inheritors

of this ministry of the mission house. Unfortunately, nothing comparable seems to have succeeded the ministry to priests envisioned by Gaspar.

And what of the president? Has canonical tidiness deprived us of this form of spiritual leadership? I think not. If one removes the inserted canonical terminology of the first sentence of article C61, the office of moderator general as stated in the *Normative Texts* does retain this important idea of Gaspar:

The visible sign of unity in the Society is the Moderator General, endowed with the authority over all Provinces, houses and members invested in him by Common Law, the Constitution and the General Statutes. His first duty is to vivify and renew the spirit of the Society, and to promote its expansion. Working in the closest harmony with the other major superiors, he coordinates the whole life of the Society and promotes unity among members and Provinces.

The memorandum to Gregory XVI continues with a section titled: "The Missionary's Method of Life," which, basically, lays out the Missionary's day. It begins with private mental prayer in his room, continues in the church where one member celebrates the first Mass (during which another Missionary leads the Chaplet of the Precious Blood for the laity in attendance). The Masses of the other Missionaries then follow.

Silence is a practical necessity in a house where retreatants are present although Gaspar mentions that there are "other reasons" for it as well.

Gaspar then explains how responsibilities for Confessions are determined. Something tells me that women's Confessions were heard only in the morning with opportunity for men's Confessions after working hours. In any case, in the way Gaspar's mind seems to be working, this is one of the daily ministries of the mission house church. So, too, would be visits to prisons,

hospitals, etc., by the Missionaries. In this regard, Gaspar insists that the Missionary never go out alone but always with a companion, be it another Missionary or a brother-in-service.

These, then, were the normal morning activities of the mission house. They concluded just before midday, on signal, with a private particular examination of conscience followed by a public recitation of the Angelus in the house chapel followed by dinner. This was always accompanied by spiritual reading.

There is no implication that this reading lasted for the whole meal. On the missions, it was the custom for the Missionaries to invite a promising young cleric to read for half the meal after which there followed conversation. It is not clear whether the young reader was invited to participate in the conversation; in any case, it gave him a "close-up" of the Missionaries and, perhaps, encouraged him in a Missionary vocation.

After the midday meal there followed a period of recreation and then a time for rest. On signal, the afternoon tasks of the house began, e.g., visits to the hospital, travel (this is probably to nearby places in order to continue the work of a mission), etc. All participate in the nightly oratory for men. (One should remember that "all" may well have meant one or two since the Missionaries were seldom all at home. Then, in addition, one may be misled by the term "nightly." In an age where artificial illumination was provided by expensive candles, the oratory probably concluded around sunset.)

The Community concluded its day with a meditation in common followed by supper accompanied by spiritual reading. After a period of recreation, there was an examination of conscience in the chapel plus the customary Community prayers.

In passing, Gaspar mentions "For Missions, the system of the Jesuit Fathers, recently published in Rome, is to be used." Does this represent a change from the system of St. Leonard of Port Maurice used up until now?

Unfortunately, Gaspar's remark is too brief to determine the matter.

In the second title of the *Rule* of 1841, all these practices of piety survive but without as much detailed scheduling as that given in the memorandum. However, what is striking is how similar all of this (even to some of the schedule) is to the experience of my own seminary days. And if anything was evident from the seminary training of, let us say, thirty or forty years ago, it was that it was designed to inculcate habits of priestly spirituality. As I said before,⁵ it never crossed Gaspar's mind that anything else was needed to sanctify his Missionaries.

In the next section of the *Rule* entitled "Sacred functions which the Institute promotes," Gaspar speaks of weekly, monthly, and yearly spiritual services provided by the mission house church, e.g., weekly adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on Thursdays, Stations of the Cross on Fridays, etc. This is that "promotion of all forms of popular piety" called for in article 27 of the *Rule* of 1841.

Of greatest interest is the description of Sunday: "On Sundays, there is the urban mission. Thus, it is that our churches offer the idea of a continuous urban mission, providing a continual and shared cultivation of the people." At times, Gaspar can be infuriatingly elliptical as thoughts tumble over each other in his writing. Does he mean that, Sunday after Sunday, the hearers are treated to a series of sermons based upon themes, which, in a regular mission, would be treated intensively within a period of roughly two weeks? By "shared" does he mean that the hearers are exposed to the ideas and styles of all the Missionary—members of the house? If so, in a very real sense, they never came off the mission; the Work continued even when they were at home.

Every month conferences were scheduled for the various organizations and there was held the monthly day of recollection in preparation for a happy death

(another memory from my seminary days) and—in an age not noted for frequent Communion—a general Communion.

Every year public retreats are available for the people just as the Community itself made its retreat in preparation for the feast of St. Francis Xavier.

When one thinks that, in general, all this was carried on by three or four Missionaries, one sees that life in the mission house was scarcely a cloistered retreat. The demands of preaching called for a wide repertoire and, as is evident from Gaspar's correspondence, this repertoire could often be called on unexpectedly.

Gaspar adds that some of the mission houses are also houses for ecclesiastics "who are being called to the ministry of giving Missions" and gives the pope some idea of the course of studies being followed. It consisted of the inculcation of those theological principles that are definitively established along with passing references to "other opinions" in order that the young clerics have both solid knowledge and a "level sense of judgment." They are also "given training in the basics of preaching, following the pattern that is so laudably practiced by other sacred Institutes and especially by the Fathers of the Company of Jesus."

The memorandum closes with an evocation of those who contributed to the foundation of the Society: Albertini, Bonanni, Strambi, Marchetti, and, of course, Cristaldi. Gaspar was never a person to overlook what he owed to those others who so generously helped him on his way and who believed in him and in the Work.

A FINAL OBSERVATION REGARDING A CONTEMPORARY MISSION HOUSE

Naturally, if a segment of the Congregation decides to found a mission house today, no one expects that it will reproduce, point by point, the mission house of the early nineteenth century. With that in mind, I should

like to make one final observation: In Gaspar's time, the Work was tightly focused—and if it got unfocused, Gaspar saw to it that the situation was corrected. Which meant that, allowing for differences of talent, a Missionary could pretty well function in any mission house. In fact, Gaspar moved them around rather regularly and this resulted in some leaving the Society.

Putting it a bit differently, this meant that all the members were involved totally in the Work; there was nothing else to be involved in! However, today, with the work of the Congregation having expanded into different fields, this is no longer the case. This means, then, as far as I can see, that there are two possibilities.

First, a mission house apostolate might be one among the apostolates of the Congregation and its staff would be exclusively charged with carrying out this apostolate. Second, a mission house, since it embodies the central thrust of the Congregation, be made, somehow, into the apostolate of the whole segment of the Congregation which sponsors it. In this case, all the members of that segment and not just the staff of the mission house would be prepared and trained to share in its functioning.

Perhaps this can be clarified by means of an example: The Italian Province has as its stated policy that every member, according to his talents, should be able to be called from his assignment in order to assist the province's central core of Missionaries in the giving of a mission. For instance, I know that when I was stationed in Rome, I was called several times to celebrate Mass at Santa Maria in Trivio because one of the men stationed there was away helping with a mission.

My preference, obviously, is for something like this involvement of all in a mission house. It is a concrete way of recalling us to our vocation as it is so admirably summed up in the *Normative Texts*:

The Society dedicates itself to the service of the Church through the apostolic and missionary activity of the ministry of the word (article C3).

The late Fr. John Klopke was a professor of philosophy, parish priest, and secretary general of the Congregation. He had published two books of "Essays in Honor of St. Gaspar del Bufalo" prior to his death. This article was part of a projected third volume of essays.

Forming For Community in a Multicultural, International, and Multigenerational Congregation

Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S

INTRODUCTION

This paper intends to offer further reflection upon the constituent elements of our Institute's charism: mission, community, and spirituality in the framework of being a society of apostolic life. It is essential to the ministry of vocation and of formation to be able to articulate for the prospective candidates and for those in formation, who we are and what we are about. Church documents have repeatedly reminded us that a "clear identity" is essential for vocation and formation ministries.

I will reflect on three aspects of our life and what they mean for formation; namely, the fact that our Congregation is multicultural, international, and multigenerational. Although these three aspects of our Congregation have long been with us, we are more keenly aware of them today than ever before. We need to reflect on each of these three facets of who we are in order to make our formation programs more responsive to our membership.

How do we form in a diversity of cultures, nationalities, and ages? I do not pretend to have the answers, but I would like to offer some insights largely from my own

experience. I do so in the hope that these reflections will contribute to our dialogue since all of us live in or have lived in multicultural, international, or multigenerational communities. Our collective experience speaks clearly of the timeliness of the theme.

Community Life

I begin by recalling that some kind of *life in common* is one of the characteristics of all societies of apostolic life and it certainly was an important element in Gaspar's dream for the C.PP.S. Gaspar was convinced of the need for a band of itinerant missionaries to live in community in order better to accomplish their mission. It is also clearly expressed in our own *Normative Texts* (C 6), which state that our community life is grounded in the Blood of the new covenant. In the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, we find our deepest motivation for life in community. The Blood of Christ brings us together, unites and harmonizes. The Blood of the covenant forms us into family and confers on us an identity. It is the Blood of the new covenant that was shed on the cross in order to reunite everyone in one family and it is the Blood shared in the Eucharistic cup that commits us to be builders of community, willing to put forth our best energies in order to make God's dream of communion a reality. As Missionaries of the Precious Blood we wish to proclaim with our lives God's call to communion and we commit ourselves to being instruments of communion in today's fragmented and individualistic societies.

Our *Normative Texts* also postulate the "bond of charity" as the basis of this community life (C 7). Young people coming to us today to discern their vocation are indeed looking for community. This is a desire that I have heard repeated frequently during my visits and dialogue with the candidates of the worldwide Congregation.

However, forming community and promoting healthy relationships within such variety is a very

challenging task. Let us turn now to examine some of the areas we need to pay attention to as we work toward achieving our goal. While not pretending to present an exhaustive list of all that is needed, I would like to offer some insights that I have gleaned from my own experience of living in cultures other than my own for the past thirty years.

Interculturality

We all know of the diversity of cultures in which we C.P.P.S. Missionaries find ourselves in different regions of the world. I preface my remarks about forming for life in a multicultural community by recalling a very basic fact that we need to keep always before us. “God has spoken to us in many and varied forms throughout the history of the world and in the fullness of time in Jesus.” (Cf. Hebrews 1: 1–2) There are *semina Verbi* ‘seeds of the Word’ in every culture of the world.

At the same time, however, no one culture can claim to identify fully with the Reign of God. This may seem like an obvious statement, but the first thing we have to leave behind, the first *kenosis* ‘emptying’ we are called to experience when interrelating with another culture is any sense of “cultural superiority.” A sense of cultural superiority has been the cause of the extinction of peoples, of ethnic cleansing, of racisms and of prejudices with which we are all too familiar and which constitute one of the most anguishing “cries of the blood” in our world today. When we stand before a person of another culture, we must do so with the attitude of Moses when he stood in God’s presence (cf. Exodus 3: 4–6). He took off his sandals for he was standing on sacred ground. We must grow in our sense of respect as we share the lives of others who come from cultures different from our own. We are on sacred ground.

In my own experience in formation ministry in Chile (where I once lived in a formation community comprised of Chileans, a Peruvian, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans,

and myself, a North American) I learned that this is one of the most basic virtues we need to acquire: respect for what is different, for cultures which are foreign to our own. Most of our problems in the house of formation were due to cultural tensions and misunderstandings and a sense among some that their culture was superior to the others. This need for respect not only applies to diverse foreign cultures, but there are often diverse cultures within the dominant culture itself. For example, in our community were several men in formation from the middle class, others from the more impoverished social class, and one from a higher economic class. Cultural prejudices and a “superiority complex” were clearly at work in the interpersonal relationships and this caused many different challenges for community life.

It is very important for us as formators to take an honest look at ourselves and to be able to identify our own personal prejudices and veiled racisms and stereotypes. We as formators must avoid at all costs racially tinted jokes and degrading comments about the culture of another. We must be the first to create this atmosphere of respect. We need to have formators and vocation personnel who are sensitive to cultural issues and who are freed from racisms and prejudices and who are able to detect such attitudes in others. Our own Fr. Clarence Williams has developed seminars about such issues in his ministry in the United States and in other parts of the world.

Culture is a very complicated reality and it lies at the core identity of a human being and designates a people’s way of life. Pope Paul VI, when speaking of evangelization of culture, refers to the need to evangelize “with the force of the Gospel the criteria of judgment, the underlying values, the points of interest, ways of thinking, the sources of inspiration and the patterns of human behavior” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 19: cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 53). Thus, culture is an expression of the whole person. To deny a person his culture and cultural

expressions and even more so to ridicule them or to suppress them is to strike the very heart of the individual and to deny the very core of his identity.

As Missionaries of the Precious Blood we are called to proclaim the Word of God, the Gospel of the Blood of Christ. That Blood speaks of the *preciousness* of every human being. It is the Blood that Christ shed which “breaks down the walls which separate us” (cf. Eph. 2:11–12). To live the spirituality of the Precious Blood is a deep motivation for us to develop attitudes of deep respect and appreciation of cultural diversity. We must announce this “Word of God” with the testimony of our personal lives together in community.

I would like to suggest now a few things we might do in order to develop greater cultural sensitivity.

- **Tools for Cultural Analysis and Understanding**

The understanding of cultures and cultural sensitivity is something relatively new in our times. None of us was ever prepared for the cultural diversity that we are experiencing today. Many of us come from villages or towns in which there was only a single culture or at least a single dominant culture. There was little cultural diversity in our formation houses and we had little or no contact with the international community. Thus, one of the elements which we should incorporate into our formation programs is the study of cultures and their dynamics. Otherwise, it will be hard to understand many of the internal dynamics going on within our multicultural formation communities, or in the Community at large.

- **Study of Languages**

As we grow in cultural diversity, the need to study at least one language other than one’s language by birth becomes more and more a necessity in community and in ministry. In the United States, for example, seminarians should study Spanish, since it has become the second language of the country. The Spanish-speaking Catholic

population now makes up approximately 30% of the Catholic Church in the United States. I will return to this point when discussing our internationality.

Anyone who has participated in an international workshop of the Congregation knows the importance of knowing another language. A common reaction of members at such meetings is to remark how much more enriching such gatherings would be if each could communicate directly in the language of the others.

The soul of a people is reflected in their language. Words, style, and idiom of language, the many forms of literature, myths and symbols, customs and traditions, the particular philosophy of life—all are constitutive elements of a given language. During the years of formation our candidates should be obliged as part of their preparation for mission to learn at least one language other than their native tongue. This will only enhance their capacity for intercultural and international dialogue and exchange.

- **Intercultural Immersions**

A way to growth in understanding and respect for cultures is to have the opportunity of experiencing another culture first-hand. Some of our provinces, vicariates, and missions/delegations have incorporated this into their formation programs. Each candidate at some point before definitive incorporation or ordination must have a cross-cultural experience. I think that this should be an obligatory part of the formation programs of all of our C.PP.S. Congregation, since we are a missionary Community and we are growing closer together in many ways.

Such cross-cultural experiences have a twofold benefit. First, they benefit the person who journeys into the sacred space of the other's culture by giving that person an experience of the life, the food, the language, the religious experiences, the value system, and the traditions of the other. Through immersion in the cultural experience one can better capture the spirit and flavor of the culture and come to appreciate it better.

At the same time, it affords the person the opportunity to understand his/her own culture better. It affords the opportunity to view one's own culture from a distance. Getting a perspective on our cultures-of-birth by observing them from the perspective of other cultures can be very enlightening. The person venturing into another's culture becomes the "stranger in a foreign land," experiencing a great sense of vulnerability, and has to face his/her own insecurities, fears, and prejudices. Affording cross-cultural experiences to our candidates, under the supervision of people experienced in multicultural living and with the proper evaluation, can be a very valuable tool in preparing our future members for living in a multicultural Congregation and society.

- **Cultural Inclusiveness**

In a multicultural formation community, it is important that the diverse cultures have the possibility for their expression in liturgies, through music and language. The same recognition of cultural variety should also have its moments of expression in the food we share and in our Community celebrations. To celebrate the distinct feast days and holidays of the different cultures involved speaks to all of our respect and appreciation for their cultures. The inclusion of artifacts and pictures and the art of the different cultures in our houses of formation is another way of showing our respect for those cultures and of helping the members experience a true sense of "belonging" to the Community.

- **Cultures and Class Difference**

It is necessary to say a word also concerning the preparation for our mission of evangelization to those excluded by our society and our Church, to the poor and the oppressed. Often our houses of formation become safe and comfortable havens, far removed from the poor and the needy we are called to serve in a special way. Anyone who has had contact with those environments knows that their culture is different from the middle-class or upper class culture of most religious houses.

How do we prepare our candidates, then, for mission with the poor and marginalized? How do we raise their social consciousness? It is important that our candidates have concrete experiences of venturing into these very diverse cultures in order to know them and understand them, in order to learn their language so as to be able to accompany them and to speak the Word of God to them in a language they will understand. Put in another way, how do we prepare our candidates to be sensitive to the “cry of the blood” in our own societies? The period of formation of our candidates is an opportune time to train them in this consciousness, in their ability to hear the cry and to discern therein the call of the Blood. We need to offer our candidates opportunities to bridge the culture of our formation houses with the cultures of the poor and needy around us.

We need to ask ourselves as well fundamental questions about the lifestyle of our houses of formation. Do the physical structures of our houses and our style of life help to prepare our candidates for a commitment to accompany the poor and outcast, or do our houses tend to isolate them from reality, creating a kind of comfort zone and security, removing them from the very people we are called to serve? Is it possible to “hear the cry of the blood” behind the walls of our seminary complexes and in comfortable homes in our middle class neighborhoods?

- **Christ the Missionary**

Not only should we be concerned about the technical aspects and study of cultures, but we can also learn much from meditating on the figure of Christ, the Missionary and how Christ interacted with cultural diversity. We also reflect on our Precious Blood spirituality which speaks of covenant, of community-building, of reconciliation, of the basic dignity and value of each individual, of the new fellowship we celebrate in the Eucharist, to name some aspects pertinent to our theme.

- **Cultural Enrichment**

All that has been said above will help the candidates to grow in their appreciation and respect for the other cultures they encounter within the formation community and in the larger Community of the incorporated members, as well as prepare them for future ministry as a Missionary of the Precious Blood. When we later encounter cultural diversity in our ministry, we will welcome this as an opportunity for enrichment rather than judging a different culture as inferior or as threatening. Differences will not be feared but will help us to see the world in a different light. Our life in covenant community will become a communion in our diversity, a diversity that will be viewed and esteemed enriching for all.

Internationality

Our C.P.P.S. Community is growing in awareness of our internationality. The meetings of major superiors begun in 1969 and held at regular intervals ever since then have contributed greatly to this growing consciousness. The international spirituality workshops in the late '70s and early '80s, as well as the workshops for formators usually held every six years, have also helped us to grow in this awareness and to connect the diverse geographical sectors of our Congregation, developing interpersonal relationships, friendships, and increasing correspondence among the membership, aided now by the facility of modern technology, such as the internet and electronic mail. All indications are that this trend to grow closer and closer will only increase with the passing of time. The ease with which we can travel from one place to another is another significant factor that has helped us to grow closer together.

Our "provincial" mentalities are giving way to awareness of the wider community. We are part of something bigger than just our province, vicariate, or mission/delegation. In this respect, we can expect that this awareness will only become more acute as we move into

the twenty-first century. We need to prepare ourselves for this growing contact, communication, and interchange. All that I said above under the title of “intercultural” also applies here, but I would emphasize a few areas under the aspect of “internationality.”

- **Workshops and Exchange Programs**

Efforts should be made to promote intercultural and international experiences at different levels of the formation process. Opportunities to spend a prolonged period in another culture have become invaluable for learning a language and for discovering the culture of another.

These exchanges are enriching both for the person coming into the culture as well as for the host culture. In the ensuing dialogue between the two cultures there is a reciprocity, the mutual exchange of gifts. Invaluable insights into our C.PP.S. charism can be gained by all as we discover how the charism is being incarnated in diverse situations in response to the particular needs of that area. Dialogue between the history of our foundation and its new incarnations, listening to the stories of our traditions and to the stories of the living incarnation of the charism today, is both enriching and stimulating. It challenges us to remain a vital Community in an ever-changing world. I hope that our formation programs in all of our countries will permit and promote such experiences. This too will be a way of preparing our candidates for mission.

- **Awareness of Global Concerns**

As we grow closer together as an international community in an increasingly interconnected world, through our correspondence, publications, workshops and meetings on the international level, we can all grow in an awareness of the global concerns and discern in them the “cry of the blood.” For example, developing countries who are suffering in a very direct way the consequences of the international debt issue can educate the first world countries about their situation. Issues such as the

death penalty, assisted suicide, and others can be openly debated, and our mission in defense of life, which emerges from the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, can be discerned together. Community publications, such as *The Cup of the New Covenant*, published in five languages and sent to each member of the Congregation, are meant to be tools to help us grow in the awareness of our internationality and to move toward the development of a common language when speaking about our charism.

Intergenerational

With the growing number of our older members and the relatively small number of younger people entering our Congregation especially in the older units of our Community in Western Europe and in North America, there is a growing generation gap among our members. During the period of formation it is important that an atmosphere of respect be created in which the special gifts of each generation are identified and appreciated. It is important to recall that who we are today and what we have today is the result in great part of the lives of dedication of the generations, which have gone before us.

One way of doing this is to promote dialogue with different members of the Community, inviting them to share their stories, to share their faith journey, to communicate their vocational story. This helps to create confidence and trust and promotes fraternity in the bond of charity. At the same time, we need to help our older members in Community to understand the present generation, to understand where they are coming from, what their concerns and aspirations are. As formators and those engaged in vocation ministry, we are called in many ways to live the spirituality of the Blood of reconciliation, being bridge-builders, forging connections between our candidates and the incorporated members and between the different generations.

When I was in Guatemala as director of formation, an elderly priest came to do missionary work in our parish and took up residence with our formation community. Fr. Bill was seventy-six years old when he came and he lived among twenty young energetic, boisterous seminarians, for the most part in their early twenties. It was edifying to see Fr. Bill sitting outside in the evenings, with the young seminarians sitting around him on the ground listening to his stories. Fr. Bill lived in one of the small houses with six other seminarians, sharing a common bathroom. Sometimes he would come to my room with a piece of paper and would give it to me saying, "Read this later and then throw it away." He had written on the paper all his complaints about the high volume of radios playing, doors slamming, screaming in the halls, etc. Writing his feelings out was a way for him to work out his frustrations and sometimes anger. His presence among us was edifying and we all loved him.

I share this to point out the fact that different generations can live together. We need to be creative to find the ways to build bridges between them and to enrich one another by the special gifts each generation brings to the Community. In societies that are efficiency-oriented and that tend to put little or no value on the lives of the infirm and elderly, we are called to instill a profound respect for life in all its stages (cf. *Vita Consecrata*, n. 44). It is a mandate of the spirituality of the Blood of Christ.

At the same time, we need to recognize that there is a difference between the generation of the formators and those entering formation today. We must be careful not to impose our generation's problems and concerns on the newer generations. Many members of the present generation (those born between 1960 and 1979, commonly known today as "Generation X") come from families that did not remain intact. Their expectations of community life may be quite different from those of our generation.

This also presents special challenges to us as we struggle to build community with them.

Perhaps dialogue with our lay associates and Companions can help us to deal with the challenges of building community in a multigenerational situation. They could share with us their wisdom and insights gained through their daily experiences.

CONCLUSION

In order to facilitate all of the above, we need formators who will accompany the candidates with discretion and who themselves have a deep respect for and appreciation of cultural diversity. They must have an open and healthy sense of our internationality. They must be able to build bridges between generations. Above all, we need formators who have a clear sense of their own identity and who are comfortable with that. Such formators will not feel the need to impose their own cultures upon others and will be open to dialogue.

To forge true community in such diversity is indeed a challenge. Nevertheless, it is a task made possible by the presence of the One who calls us to community, Christ, the center, the cornerstone of our life together. By living the spirituality of the Blood of Christ we will find the resources we need to build such a community. Living in respect and appreciation of cultural diversity is a concrete way of living in the bond of charity as we move into the twenty-first century.

Our communities can become “communities in mission” (mission houses) that will be a true preparation for our life together in an international congregation and in a society which is evermore becoming multicultural. In the words of Pope John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata*, n. 51:

Placed as they are within the world’s different societies—societies frequently marked by conflicting passions and interests, seeking unity

but uncertain about the ways to attain it—communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony.

In the document *Fraternal Life in Community* (from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life), we are reminded that

. . . this love that unites is also the love that leads us to extend to others the experience of communion with God and with each other. In other words, it creates apostles by urging communities on their path of mission, whether this be contemplative, proclamation of the Word, or ministries of charity; . . . and so, fraternal communities become missionaries of this love and prophetic signs of its unifying power (#56).

Finally, as I stated at the outset, I do not pretend to exhaust this complex and challenging theme, but hope to have offered some guidelines to spark your imagination and creativity. I hope that this presentation will further dialogue on how we form our candidates to live in communities that include people of different ages and different races, members with different cultural and theological formation, and with those who have had widely differing experiences during these agitated and pluralistic years (*Fraternal Life in Community*, #32).

The above article is based on a presentation given by Moderator General Barry Fischer at a workshop for formators in July 1999. He has published several books on the spirituality of the Precious Blood as well as collections of selected writings of St. Gaspar arranged by themes.

The Apostolate of Our Society According to the Charism of Our Founder

Beniamino Conti, C.PP.S.

THE APOSTOLATE OF ST. GASPAR: AN ANSWER TO THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF HIS TIMES

The choice of apostolate that St. Gaspar made for himself and for his Congregation was a concrete answer to definite needs of his time. This assertion is borne out by the very writings of St. Gaspar himself.

How did St. Gaspar see his own times? “I have become more and more aware of the confusion amidst which we live in these wretched times” (*Letter 146*).¹

This caused him to cry out in sorrow, “Alas, what a sad picture we see before our eyes!” (*Metodo delle Sante Missioni . . .*, Roma, 1819, p. 3, hereafter referred to as MM.) “I weep in God’s presence when I see the miserable state of affairs in our time” (*Letter 1165*).

This wretched situation was for the most part the result of the philosophy of Enlightenment that characterized the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic tyranny as well as the narrow-minded reaction of the Restoration. All this had social, economic and political effects, which St. Gaspar often touches upon in his writings. He denounced the political upheavals (*Letter 1770*)

provoked here and there by the liberal movement, the causes and excesses of brigandage which began with the introduction of compulsory military service during Napoleon's time, and assumed even greater proportions because of "the prevalent lust for wealth and the personal rivalries and vendetta" that existed (*Letter 876*). Another contributing cause was the mutual loathing between the poor and the well-to-do, especially where their own interests were concerned (*Letter 1168*).

However, St. Gaspar's chief preoccupation was the moral consequences of these upheavals. Because of the influence of the philosophy of Enlightenment, "godliness, good manners and dependence on the Church have declined" (*Letter 1167*). Indeed, "the so-called philosophism" (MM, p. 3) as he called it, spread "among nations complete indifference in sacred and religious matters" (*Letter 1270*) to the extent that, if in other periods of the Church's history "there may have been opposition in one place or another to some dogma of the Church, or, in other parts of the Catholic world there may have been contempt for sacred things, never before except in our own miserable times has the crisis and the perversion of moral standards and behavior been so general" (*Letter 1215*).

This profound religious and moral crisis had affected not only the faithful but also the clergy who were their guides. "The Lord," wrote St. Gaspar, "is not pleased with the sacred ministers. Holy Orders are conferred too quickly. The clergy receive no spiritual training" (*Letter 1171*) and live in idleness. "The poor clergy," he exclaimed, "what a need it has of learning and holiness!" (*Letter 1167*).

That these were not merely St. Gaspar's own pessimistic impressions, but unfortunately the bitter reality is borne out by a report drawn up by Bishop Luigi Bottiglia, papal delegate to Benevento in 1815-1816, on the state of that duchy. He writes:

I have been sent, to a forest inhabited by wild animals rather than by men endowed with reason. Not much is known here about the sixth commandment and I regret to say that, from this point of view, the body ecclesiastic has been defiled by this pitch, to the great scandal of the city and of the whole duchy (*Notizie del Fondatore*, vol. I, 347).

As may be seen, it is mainly from the spiritual and moral angle that St. Gaspar looks at the wretched times in which he lived, while at the same time feeling great anguish of soul at the sad, inevitable consequences.

Gaspar's Answer

St. Gaspar was not content with a passive appraisal of the situation, but gave his own generous answer to the needs of his time: "It is necessary to call men back to penance, to sincere amendment and to God's love" (MM, pp. 3-4). At a time of general indifferentism and crisis in the faith,

the nourishment of God's word must be provided for all, for by it the faith has already been spread among the people and from it we expect a revival. Faith comes from hearing but hearing comes through the word of Christ (*Letter 1214*).

This is what St. Gaspar urges Canon Giuseppe Ottaviani to do:

Press on more and more with inculcating moral culture and with activating pious associations so that the Lord may have pity on us. Preach the word with insistence. Faith comes from hearing but hearing through the word of Christ (*Letter 1496*).

At a time when the Lord "is not pleased" with his priests, it is necessary to revive "in the ministries of the

sanctuary dignity, good example, sanctity, scholarship” (*Letter 2140*).

We must now develop this synthesis and discover its essential elements in order to see more clearly what St. Gaspar’s apostolic charism really was.

THE PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD, WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON DEVOTION TO THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

I have just said that St. Gaspar was of the opinion that, in order to revive the faith which was going through a crisis in his time, it was necessary to nourish the souls of men with the Word of God and thus retrace the very path by which the Christian faith was first spread throughout the world.

This then is the first section of his choice of apostolate, and it has very important consequences for the lifestyle of our Congregation.

The Preaching of God’s Word

First and foremost, St. Gaspar wanted his Missionaries to be men dedicated to the preaching of God’s Word. The personal, communitarian, and apostolic life of the Missionary finds its center in this basic nucleus.

The specific ministry of the Institute—missions and retreats—demands a special preparation, competence and involvement with regard to the Word of God. “He who undertakes missionary work,” wrote St. Gaspar, “must, according to the measure of his ability, exercise the ministry of the word several times a day” (MM, p. 33).

A man’s attitude towards preaching was one of the screening tests for admission to the Congregation.

The constant preaching of missions and retreats shows that he who has no inclination for the

study of the art of preaching, has no intention of joining an Institute such as ours, nor should the Institute admit him (*Letter 619*).

For this reason, every priest in the Congregation, according to the measure he has received of the gift of Christ, should be capable of preaching missions and retreats to people of all classes (cf. P., 2). To acquire this ability, the Missionary must dedicate himself wholeheartedly to the “art of public speaking” (R, 30); i.e., to the practice of preaching in all its various forms, from the discourse delivered on solemn occasions to private conversations with the sick or the imprisoned, so as to become a master whom others can imitate (cf. RP, 30).

With this in mind, St. Gaspar recommended to his followers the study of sacred eloquence (cf. RP, 17), encouraging them to concentrate on the study of authors whose reputation was beyond question. Here is what he wrote to Father Carlo Gazzola, December 13, 1829:

You must hold in high regard the eloquence of Segneri, our Italian Cicero. His references to mythology are no longer in fashion today and were out of place even in his own times, but the general consensus of scholars, leaving aside the intrinsic reasons, is an irrefutable argument in favor of the authentic sacred eloquence of this famous priest. Let each one then zealously pursue his preaching career, and the God of all kindness will grant him special blessings. Holy humility and prayer, backed by scholarship, will, so to speak, become engrafted in our sacred duties (*Letter 1993*).

Good oratory must go hand in hand with solid subject matter. Therefore, preaching should be backed up by unremitting study so that the Missionary may acquire the learning he needs (cf. MM, p. 6). In fact, St. Gaspar wanted his Missionaries to surpass others in human and

sacred learning (cf. R, 17). With this in mind, the Missionary, in addition to the private study he undertakes on fixed days during the week, will apply himself to the study of the Scriptures, dogmatic and moral theology, spirituality, liturgy and sacred eloquence together with the other members of the community (RP, 17). Study of this kind, undertaken as a community, and open in a spirit of service and incentive even to priests outside the Congregation (cf. P, 17) was highly recommended by St. Gaspar.

Here is what he wrote to Canon Adriano Tarulli:

This kind of study can be done in the evening, although it will usually take place in the forenoon, even if only a few people are present. I would prefer that it not be omitted in order to save time for the hearing of confessions and for preaching (*Letter 642*).

These meetings were a source of ongoing updating, and St. Gaspar required that the moderator general should draw up a bibliography of the authors to be studied, recommending that they be men of sound and substantial doctrine as the spirit of the church demands (cf. P, 17), so that the Missionary may expound in clear and accurate theological terms only what is certainly revealed, and not merely the opinions of theologians (cf. R, 18; 24).

All this notwithstanding, the intellectual and spiritual formation of the Missionary as minister of God's Word must come to maturity above all in constant contact with the Sacred Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church (cf. p. 24). In this way, the message that the Missionary brings to the faithful is not restricted to a few truths but is coterminous with the Word of God as interpreted by the authentic tradition of the Church and scrutinized in depth by theology.

The Preaching of Devotion to the Precious Blood

This message had its own characteristic proclamation: Preaching and the spreading of devotion to the Precious Blood. St. Gaspar undertook this task right from the beginning of his Congregation. Here is what he wrote on March 1, 1815, to Father Gaetano Bonanni:

Monsignor Cristaldi urges me to set up our Institute under the name of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus, and made this very relevant point: Those who work for the spreading of the Gospel are at work so that the Blood of Jesus may be applied to men for the salvation of their souls and hence these workers must offer it unceasingly, begging God to pardon sinners. Therefore, while other institutes undertake to propagate some other devotion, this Institute of ours should be committed to the spreading of that devotion which includes all the others, namely, the devotion which proclaims the price of our redemption. By his Blood we are saved. I have nothing but praise for the prelate's suggestion and make his reason my own. Our work, then, is entrusted to the merits of the Blood of Jesus. (*Letter 105*).

As already emphasized in the preceding chapter, the spreading of the devotion to the Blood of Christ is part of St. Gaspar's charismatic answer to the spiritual needs of his time. He had this to say on this point: "We live in an age when the whole world must be cleansed in the Blood of the Lamb" (*Letter 1620*). "For the times in which we live, what we need is the devotion and cult of the Precious Blood" (*Letter 2285*). "There is no doubt that the spiritual weapon to be used in our day is devotion to the Precious Blood" (cf. *Letter 2159; Letter 484; Letter 1021*).

Gaspar also writes, "In times when the mysteries of our redemption and the love of Jesus, who redeemed us

at the price of his Blood, are forgotten, the Church is trying to inspire in each one of us a love of our crucified Lord” (MM, p 3).

Reminding people of such an important devotion rouses them from the fatal torpor of spiritual death into which they have sunk. . . . Through the application of the inestimable price of our redemption may the sinful soul find a supernatural motive which will inspire him with hope for mercy and pardon. May the penitent soul find in it an incentive to grow in virtue and holiness and, finally, may the just man draw from it a most ardent and zealous desire to save souls for the Lord.²

St. Gaspar’s apostolic involvement in devotion to the Blood of Jesus was not restricted to spreading devotional practices in honor of the Most Precious Blood. It consisted primarily in preaching the mystery of the Blood of Christ. His preaching, as I have tried to explain elsewhere,³ was based on a profound scriptural, theological and spiritual outlook which aimed at bringing souls back from a life of sin to the life of grace and to the highest summits of the mystical life.^a

^aWhat place did devotion to the Most Precious Blood hold in the purpose of the Congregation of St. Gaspar? In other words, was the purpose of the Congregation of St. Gaspar the preaching of the Word of God or the spreading of devotion to the Blood of Christ? Keeping in mind that the Congregation of St. Gaspar sprang from the project of Canon Francesco Albertini and from the Holy Association of Gospel Preachers (*Santa Lega degli Operai Evangelici*) of Father Gaetano Bonanni, it would seem that the following schematic reply must be given that question:

a) According to the intention of Albertini the purpose of the Congregation would be that of promoting devotion to the Most Precious Blood, since the priests dedicated to the

The Administration of the Sacrament of Penance

In St. Gaspar's plan for the apostolate, the ministry of preaching was closely bound up with the administration of the sacrament of Penance, because the purpose of the Missionary's preaching is to convert sinners. In such conversions he gives pride of place to sacramental Penance. The following is quoted from his *Method for the Missions*:

O my dear brothers, how important is this undertaking to which God has called you. How dear to the divine Heart are the fatigues you endure for the conversion of sinners and, at the same time, how great is the joy which you feel when you cleanse penitent souls in the Blood of the innocent Lamb, slain from the beginning of the world (MM, p. 4).

Actually, for the task he undertakes, the Missionary must not only be able to preach, he must also be a competent minister of this sacrament, so that he may carry his share of the ministry of the Congregation (cf. P, 2).

This explains the apparently strange insistence by St. Gaspar on the sacrament of Penance in the *Rule*, when he deals with the training of Missionaries and also

missions were called "primary brothers" of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood, erected in St. Nicholas in Carcere;

b) According to Bonanni, the primary purpose of the Congregation would be only the preaching of the Word of God in the missions;

c) According to St. Gaspar it seems that we must affirm the coexistence of both these purposes: that of preaching the Word of God in the missions, and of promoting devotion to the Most Precious Blood. To eliminate the one or the other element would be to disfigure the specific characteristic of the Congregation of St. Gaspar (cf. Conti, B., op. cit., pp. 63–66; 79).

when he talks of the practice of this sacrament (cf. RP., 25; 26). A Missionary should, both as a preacher and as a confessor, be capable of becoming a master to be imitated especially by younger priests (cf. P, 17; 30).

THE APOSTOLATE OF MISSIONS AND RETREATS

The first characteristic, then, of St. Gaspar's apostolate is the preaching of the Word of God with special emphasis on the cult of the Precious Blood in order to bring about conversions.

Within this context of preaching God's Word, he made a further choice: the preaching of missions and retreats.

In the second article of the *Rule*, after having laid down that members of the Congregation should carry out all those duties common to every faithful minister of the Lord, he goes on to say: "But their chief care will be to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to those holy undertakings called missions and to instruct the faithful by giving retreats." Therefore, in St. Gaspar's choice of apostolate, the ministry of the Word takes the specific form of missions and retreats.

The preference which he gives to these two forms of the apostolate which will meet the needs of his time is quite categorical and definitive: "Missions and retreats are the two great means of reforming the world" (*Letter 299*), as he wrote to the bishop of Camerino, Monsignor Mattei, July 2, 1820. On September 1, 1825, he wrote as follows to Leo XII: "Sacred missions and spiritual retreats are certainly the main foundations of reform" (*Letter 1220*). And to Mother Nazzarena of Piperno, in 1829: "Is there a reform to be carried out? There is. And the two great, or at least the chief, means of implementing it are missions and spiritual retreats" (*Letter 1880*).

The Motivation Behind These Means

Why did St. Gaspar's choice fall on these two means which he defines as the two chief means, at least, as far as the spiritual reformation of his time was concerned? The answer is a complex one, but one which I shall attempt to answer in outline.

The explanation of this choice must be looked for, on the one hand, in St. Gaspar's personal charism later confirmed by the mandate of Pius VII and, on the other hand, in the fact that these two methods of apostolate were for various reasons more opportune and effective for the implementation of the aims St. Gaspar had set for himself in his campaign for the renewal of the Church and the society of his day.

In the first place, therefore, we find that St. Gaspar has a distinctive apostolic charism. We know his zeal for the preaching of missions, and how he suffered when, for a time, he was prevented from dedicating himself to this work. Furthermore, it is beyond all doubt that this was a charism which St. Gaspar wanted to hand on to his Congregation. There is no lack of evidence on this point. I will quote only one statement. It summarizes all others: "There is always one grace which I constantly ask from God" (letter to the future Cardinal Bellisario Cristaldi, June 5, 1820), "and it is that I may always preach missions and die in this holy ministry" (*Letter 293*).

This apostolic charism had its roots in the zeal which was always a feature of St. Gaspar's personality since the time when, before being deported by Napoleon, he devoted himself to a variety of apostolic tasks in Rome. It was, however, during the time he spent in prison, especially 1813–1814, that he clearly recognized this charism for what it was. During his imprisonment, St. Gaspar, in collaboration with Canon Francesco Albertini, thought about founding a congregation of missionary priests as well as a congregation of sisters of the Most Precious Blood. The period, 1813–1814, was one of

deepening maturity for St. Gaspar, and he decided to give his preference to the mission apostolate.^b

On June 17, 1813, the Feast of Corpus Christi, Father Gaetano Bonanni gathered around him in Rome some priests who were interested in the nightly prayer meetings in Santa Maria in Vincis (they were also friends of St. Gaspar), and set up the “Holy Association of Gospel Preachers” (*Santa Lega Degli Operai Evangelici*). The aim of this society was to preach missions to the people. In August of the same year he read the life of the great Franciscan missionary, St. Leonard of Port Maurice (cf. *Letter 77* of August 19, 1813). His first explicitly formulated intention was to dedicate himself to the ministry of missions dates from the following month. In the second half of September 1813, he wrote as follows from Lugo to Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi:

Let us meet often and always in the most intimate union with the most loving heart of Jesus, and there let us continue to seek, as always, our spiritual progress in virtue. I, in a very special way, stand in great need of it, particularly if the Lord grants me the health and strength *to undertake the ministry of preaching missions* (*Letter 79*).

^bI say “preference to the mission apostolate,” since St. Gaspar also had a profound apostolic zeal for the project of Santa Galla; that is, to material and spiritual assistance for the poor who were taken care of there. He wrote to Father Luigi Gonnelli, August 12, 1813: “I cannot tell you how dear to us are our projects, our poor ones, etc. These shall form, at least in desire, the object of my consolations to my dying day, and I beg you to stir up always in our zealous Workers a most generous concern for them also, so that that fire of charity, already lit by the untiring zeal of our V. De Rossi, be always kept alive” (*Letter 75*).

On December 29 of the same year Father Antonio Santelli, the secretary of the Holy Association of Gospel Preachers, wrote to St. Gaspar to invite him to join the association. St. Gaspar accepted immediately. In his written answer from Florence, January 14, 1814, he said:

The holy work of preaching missions has always been the object of my yearnings. I am, it is true, lacking in any of the talents required for such an important ministry, but God's goodness is my comfort, and his mercy which is beyond all telling refreshes my spirit. I, therefore, accept quite willingly and *with the greatest pleasure* what you propose in your esteemed letter, and I thank you for your charity toward me in bringing me to share in the great merits you are acquiring by your zeal for God's greater glory, together with your worthy fellow workers and confreres whom you will kindly inform of how I feel about this undertaking (*Letter 87*).

This is a valuable piece of evidence because it reveals St. Gaspar's deep spiritual desire for mission work and for the opportunity thus provided which would make it possible for him to realize this desire. From this time forward, he lived only for this missionary ideal. On July 2, 1814, he wrote to Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi: "have always the missions and my Xavier in mind" (*Letter 102*).

The year 1814 marked the beginning of St. Gaspar's missionary career with a mission he preached in the month of December in San Nicola in Carcere. It was there that he had made his debut in 1808, as the Apostle of the Precious Blood, and now, in 1814, he was to give his first mission there!

St. Gaspar's choice of apostolate was confirmed and approved by Pius VII who, in September of 1814, appointed him to preach missions in the Papal States,

dissuading him from joining the Jesuits who had just been reestablished. St. Gaspar always considered that he was mandated by the pope and, consequently, always called himself an “apostolic missionary.”

The reasons for his choice of this particular apostolate—missions and retreats—must be sought not only in his personal charism, but also in other motivations. The first of these is to be found in the second article of the *Rule*: “And these two types of work produce very good results.” As Gaspar sees it, immense benefits for souls are attached to these two forms of the apostolate. In his *Method for Missions* he writes,

Everyone is aware that the mission is one of those extraordinary means, of which divine providence makes use and through which God, our Father, calls people to repentance and sincere amendment. Such an occasion is called ‘the acceptable time’ and while it lasts, there is a remarkably abundant outpouring of God’s blessings on souls (MM, pp. 14–15).

St. Gaspar is convinced that “God always supports our ministry with the special assistance of his mercy” (MM, 34). For this reason the Church, which “tirelessly calls souls to Penance and sincere amendment while endeavoring to inspire a love of our crucified Lord in all,” approved the apostolic ministry of missions as the one which “best” achieves these objectives (cf. MM, pp. 3–4).

St. Gaspar believes that missions have a very special intrinsic effectiveness for our salvation provided that, on the part of the Missionaries, there are the required organization, learning and virtue. In fact, in 1829 he wrote to Merlini:

We are channels or aqueducts. God is all in all. Experience has shown us that in a certain locality it was believed that if I was not there the mission would be a failure, whereas we saw that

it was very successful. It helps when we tell of such incidents so that God may be praised in all things and all may know that God alone performs wonderful deeds (*Letter 1932*).

Besides this, it was St. Gaspar's intention in using this method of apostolate, to reawaken zeal for souls among priests by putting before them "examples of the apostolic life" (*Letter 196*).

Missions and retreats reanimate so many priests, who thus are a great help to their bishops. This shows the importance of firmly implanting the two great means which divine providence has provided for the reform which is under way in the Church (*Letter 307*).

But St. Gaspar nourished also a secret hope that other priests would become members of his Institute: "I see quite clearly that the holy missions will be a means of awakening in others a holy desire to join our Institute" (*Letter 130*). The history of the finest vocations in the Congregation proved him right.

A third motive justifying St. Gaspar's choice of apostolate is his intention, through missions and spiritual retreats, to reach the greatest possible number of people. In fact, he himself defined popular missions and retreats as "an opportunity for dedicating oneself to the people" (*Proc. Ord. Alb.*, I, 135).⁴ "The mission," he wrote, "is a draught of souls" (MM, p. 44). If we consider, then, that St. Gaspar gave missions to whole regions, dioceses or provinces, and if we take into account the fact that his Missionaries were always on the move and were always ready to go where they were called, "preferably to those who for so long had not even faintly heard the voice of a Missionary" (*Letter 99*), we can easily understand the very wide scope of this ministry of missions and retreats (cf. *Letter 1891*).

The religious crisis was a general one, and hence the need to adopt a kind of apostolate which would bring the

invitation to conversion to the greatest number of people. Once achieved, this conversion could be more deeply implanted by what were called “works of perseverance.”

Another reason that induced St. Gaspar to adopt this form of apostolate was the fact (which he could see for himself) that, in his days there were few religious institutes that dedicated themselves to this apostolate. This was especially true in the Papal States (Cf. *Letter 1214*), where he singled out the Redemptorists for praise.

Writing to Bellisario Cristaldi in January 1826, St. Gaspar stressed the following points:

The fact that other institutes are engaged in this apostolate (thanks be to God) makes it more of a harmonious, cooperative effort. I am, however, compelled to say that very, very few can really get missions going because they are short of men. I myself find that vocations to the religious life today are very scarce indeed (*Letter 1309*).

Finally, it is noteworthy that especially from the end of the French Revolution onward, the mission ministry, particularly in France, was favored as the means best adapted to calling men to conversion and to living a Christian life.

Consequently, St. Gaspar’s choice of a specifically mission- and retreat-oriented apostolate was motivated not only by the deepest aspirations of his own soul, but also by the particular effectiveness this apostolate provided for contacting the greatest possible number of people. Another motive was the scarcity of apostolic men, especially in the Papal States, who were, in those days, dedicated to a ministry that St. Gaspar judged so fruitful and so timely.

What “Missions” and “Spiritual Exercises” Mean

However, what does St. Gaspar mean when he speaks of mission and retreats?

Mission

By *mission* St. Gaspar meant that extraordinary means of preaching to the people which had “many ramifications and purposes, all of which pertain to the sanctification of mankind” (MM, p. 19). This is what he wrote in his *Method for Missions* published in 1819 and inspired by the example of the great missionaries of the past.

The mission should be a clarion call to a change of heart and to the renewal of Christian life. This call makes itself heard in a variety of ways: it may be supernatural action (divine assistance, prayer, penance); or the way the mission is basically organized and the order in which this organization is implemented (“the mission must tick like a holy clock” (*Letter 160*) is what St. Gaspar wrote); the witness the Missionaries give of their godly life; the proclamation of the Word of God in a variety of ways (homilies, *fervorini*, catechetical instruction, full dress sermons, reminder talks, retreats, meetings for various classes of people); and religious ceremonies (processions and other expedients adapted to the sensitivity of the faithful and in keeping with the circumstances of time and place).

St. Gaspar’s missions got the entire population involved. They came either on their own initiative or because someone had deliberately gone to ask them to come. St. Gaspar used to repeat that during the mission the Missionary is both hunter and fisherman (*Summ. Proc. Ap. Rom.*, 115)⁵ and, for this reason, must bring to completion what he has set himself to do either personally or through others in private residences, hospitals, prisons, convents, colleges, on the streets or in public places, and not confine himself to the church. To make it possible to contact everybody, the mission had to last some time, usually two weeks (cf. *Letter 2650*). A shorter period, e.g., one week, would have jeopardized the success of the mission (cf. *Letter 1061*; *Letter 3053*).

If we take into account the specialized preparation of the Missionaries, the detailed organization every mission called for, and the active zeal deployed during the mission, we can understand without any difficulty at all that every mission must have been a real spiritual earthquake. Those who wanted to discredit the mission ministry called it a mere temporary success (cf. *Letter 239*), and their accusation would not have been completely unfounded if the mission had merely concluded with a sermon of the things to be remembered or the setting up of a memorial cross. However, wherever St. Gaspar went to preach a mission, he insisted on establishing associations for the various classes of people: priests, men, women, youths and boys, so that the effects of the mission would be maintained and fostered⁶

From time to time, the Missionaries went back to the localities where they had given missions. Such occasions were appropriately called “visiting sermons,” and they gave the Missionaries the opportunity to check up on the parish and to encourage people to persevere in the good which had been effected. Such complete involvement in the mission was bound to produce sure and lasting results.

Retreats (Spiritual Exercises)

By *retreats* St. Gaspar meant exactly what we today mean by this term. For example, here is a definition from the Italian Federation for Spiritual Exercises:

A strong experience of God in prayer, in listening to the word and making it our own, under the action of the Holy Spirit with the help of a spiritual guide in view of our conversion and conformation to Christ through an ever increasingly authentic gift of ourselves to God and to our brothers in the Church, against the background of our everyday life.

This is what St. Gaspar is talking about when he mentions retreats given to particular groups or institutions, to the clergy, to religious or to lay people (cf. P, 31). These exercises could be given inside or outside the retreat houses for the normal period of ten days, or, if so required, for a month (cf. P, 32). As far as was possible, the Ignatian method was followed (cf. R, 31).

This notwithstanding, it remains true to say that when St. Gaspar talked of spiritual exercises, he meant retreats for the people (cf. P, 30; RP, 31); i.e., an extraordinary preaching of sermons to the people, based on the specific plan of the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius. Although these Exercises can sometimes be given in the form of a mission, i.e., interspersed with some religious ceremonies, normally they took the form of one or two catechetical instructions daily, a meditation, and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. On the final day there was general Communion in the morning and, in the afternoon the preaching of the final admonitions and the singing of the *Te Deum* (cf. P, 31). These exercises to the people were given in the houses of the Congregation on the occasion of the feast of the patronage of St. Francis Xavier, protector of the Institute (cf. P, 16), or from Passion Sunday until Palm Sunday in those churches where the Missionary had preached the Lenten sermons (cf. P, 30).

Other Forms of Preaching

In addition to what we have already said thus far, St. Gaspar extended the meaning of missions and retreats to other forms of preaching, but they had to be exceptional forms. Thus, the *Praxis*, article 30, notes: "Under the nomenclature of missions and retreats are also to be included tridua, seven-day courses of sermons, novenas, Lenten and Advent courses of sermons." As we can see, the field is a wide one, but always within the context of an out-of-the-ordinary preaching to the people.

The preaching of Lenten sermons, however, could only be undertaken in a locality where there was a mission house or in another locality near enough to permit the Missionary to travel there and back the same day. This was to ensure that the missions would not be neglected, since they were more frequently requested during Lent (cf. P, 30). Only on this occasion were the Missionaries permitted to preach panegyrics, because such a form of preaching was not within their terms of reference (cf. P, 30).

The Principle of Mobility

The mission and retreat apostolate demanded of the Missionary both great mobility and great availability to go wherever the spiritual needs of people called him. On February 24, 1825, St. Gaspar wrote as follows to Fr. Domenico Silvestri: "Missionaries are not rooted to one spot like statues. They serve wherever God calls them" (*Letter 1063*). Hence, one of the basic provisions in the organization of St. Gaspar's Congregation is this: the ministries that have been specifically chosen, namely, missions and retreats

. . . require that the members be free from anything that could encumber them so that they may be ready to travel throughout the various localities as Christ's ambassadors. Those who are tied down by their official duties are prevented from undertaking such work (R, 3).

This is the principle of mobility.

The *Praxis* for this article of the *Rule* lists some of the offices incompatible with this Missionary mobility: parish priest, teacher, ordinary confessor to sisters, etc., and it therefore orders that our churches must not be parish churches. We find similar provisions clearly expressed already in the *Transunto 'Summary,'* the first rule drawn up for the Institute and printed in 1822.

It is not in the line of our Institute to teach school and it is therefore, forbidden to do so under any pretext whatsoever, even privately. With the exception of those religious houses where one or more Missionaries teaches moral theology, dogmatic theology, logic or sacred eloquence, according to the rule of the house. *The Missionary must be interested only in spiritual matters.* Surely, everyone knows that the office of parish priest or some similar position is quite *incompatible with that of full-time Missionary* (art. 33).

St. Gaspar chose the preaching of retreats and missions for himself and for his Congregation because he was convinced that this was the best way to meet the spiritual needs of his time. In all truth, if we examine his own activities and those of his Missionaries as seen through the canonical procedures and the reports of the different missions that were given, we can only say that his choice was exactly the right one.

THE APOSTOLATE IN MISSION AND RETREAT HOUSES

The apostolate carried out in the houses of missions and retreats constitutes another important element for the understanding of the plan for the apostolate that St. Gaspar intended to draw up for his Congregation.

The Principle of Stability

As we have already pointed out, St. Gaspar's intention was to call the Church of his time, a Church in crisis, to mend its ways, and the establishing of mission and retreat houses was one of the means of implementing this intention.

As a matter of fact, in his memorandum to Leo XII (July 1825), in which St. Gaspar gives an overall idea of what work he had in mind, he wrote as follows:

In these confused times which it has pleased God to reserve for us, and which involve a necessary reform of the people, the Lord, rich in mercy, wished to provide an effective means for stemming the torrent of iniquity and reordering the heart of man, by furnishing helps most suitable for the sanctification of souls and their continuous and lasting improvement. One such means is the establishing of more Mission and Spiritual Retreat Houses for the secular clergy (*Letter 1214*) i.e., ‘directed by the secular clergy’ (*Transunto*, p. 4).

St. Gaspar had already expressed similar ideas in the *Transunto* (cf. pp. 3–5). He was to repeat them in his memoranda to Pius VIII (cf. *Letter 1946*) and to Gregory XVI (cf. *Letter 2140*).

Consequently, the mission houses, in St. Gaspar’s pastoral perspective, were not just jumping-off points or rest camps for the Missionaries in their unending apostolic journeys. They were centers where an intensive apostolate was going on for the sanctification of the souls who were present in the house. Here again, St. Gaspar finds differences between his Institute and other institutes doing similar work (cf. *Letter 1214*).

The mission house under the direction of the secular clergy was, first and foremost, a center of renewal for the secular clergy themselves. In the above-mentioned memorandum to Leo XII, St. Gaspar mentions that the establishing of mission houses had as its purpose “to revive (in the clergy) decorum, good example, study and holiness” (*Letter 1214*), but not only to renew the ancient discipline which strongly insisted that the clergy should live in a common residence (*Letter 1214; Transunto*, p. 4), but also to recall “many ecclesiastics to detachment from everything and everyone” and get them involved “in the apostolate for the blessed glory of God” (*Letter 1946*).

In addition to this, the mission houses were to be centers of renewal of the Christian life among the people of God. St. Gaspar wrote:

The mission and retreat houses offer everything that is necessary for bringing about in the shortest possible time the conversion of souls, good example among adults; in a word, the apostolate among the various classes of the different dioceses in whom good living is strengthened, made easier and consolidated (*Letter 1214*).

This aim and purpose of the mission houses, to be centers of renewal for clergy and people in those places where they are established, explains the existence of another basic principle for the Congregation founded by St. Gaspar, over and above the principle of mobility already mentioned. It is the principle, which, for verbal contrast, we can call that of stability, regulating, that is, the efficiency of the apostolate in the area where the house is founded.

Article 27 of the *Rule* lays down that:

When we have established houses for the purpose of fostering piety in the places where they have been established, the members must take special care of the people among whom they are living. They must see to it that while sending some members to preach the gospel in other places they leave enough capable men at home for taking care of discipline within the residence and doing work outside.

That is to say, the exterior apostolate should not cause any diminishment of the apostolate inside the house. Rather, the latter should have the preference (*potiorem curam*) since the precise purpose of founding of these houses is to revive the feeling for religion in the places where these foundations are made.

Taking into consideration the purpose of the mission houses, and before mentioning the apostolate which was carried out there, it might be of interest to give an idea of what a mission house was like, because this will make it easier for us to understand the scope of this apostolate.

The Mission House Itself

The mission and retreat house was a complex establishment. First, it was the residence of the Missionaries: seven priests and five brothers, or at least three priests and two brothers (cf. P, 34). This was the mission house (cf. P, 32) adjoining a church open to the public which, as we already know, was not to be a parish church. St. Gaspar made this requirement of a public church basic to the establishing of a mission house. In his letter to Leo XII, when he emphasized the differences between his own Congregation and other similar congregations, St. Gaspar had this to say:

It is also different from the Missionaries of St. Vincent de Paul, who normally do not have a church of their own open to men and women, where they can provide the food of God's word to all (*Letter* 1214).

The ministry the *Rule* prescribed for the mission houses necessarily required a public church. Besides, the very name *mission house* does not so much mean the residence where the Missionaries live, as much as the Missionary apostolate which was carried out in the church of the locality in which the mission house was established. "Our churches," wrote St. Gaspar, "give the idea of a permanent city mission by the ongoing organized activity which is prepared for the people" (*Letter* 2140).

Besides the mission house, there was, "for those who wished to withdraw for retreats," the *retreat house* (*Transunto*, p. 5) which could be either completely

separated from the mission house, or connected to it, in which case only a part of the house was reserved for retreats (cf. P, 32).

There could also be a *domus convictus*, i.e., the house in which young men were studying to prepare themselves for the priesthood in the Congregation. This house, too, could be completely separate from the mission house, or could be connected to it, in which case the house of studies had its own organization (cf. P, 48).

Finally, there could also be *domus probationis* 'house of formation' in which young men who had completed their ecclesiastical studies in the house of studies, or young priests who had requested to join the Congregation, were prepared for special ministries (cf. P, 45).

As can be seen, the mission house was a complex establishment, but a church and retreat house were its invariable constituent elements, so much so that every house of the Congregation was called "Mission and Retreat House of the Congregation of the Precious Blood." This title was usually placed above the main entrance to the house (cf. P, 36).

The Apostolate in the Mission House

The description which we have given of the mission and retreat house already gives us the idea that it was the center of a very busy apostolate. For a practical man such as St. Gaspar, structures were there only to serve the ongoing activity.

Let us try to go into the details of this apostolate so as to get an idea of what contribution the mission houses made to the renewal of the clergy and of the faithful according to what St. Gaspar had in mind. Obviously, when we speak of a mission house we mean primarily the *missionary community*.

In general, we can say that the mission house brought about this renewal in a variety of ways: through the witness of the Missionaries' own life, through the

unremitting preaching of the Word of God to all the people and to the various classes of people who had formed associations, through the assiduous administration of the sacrament of Penance, the various religious functions, through private or public retreats. For an easier way to deal with all these points, we will group them under two subheadings: the witness of the missionaries' life and apostolic action.

The Witness of the Missionaries' Life

The first pages of the *Method for Missions*, the numerous references to be found in his letters, and especially the subtitle of the *Rule* give a spiritual portrait of the Missionary and of the *missionary community* St. Gaspar had in mind.

It was his firm conviction that "the people think Missionaries are holy men and this is also what the Church expects of them" (P, 7). Missionaries therefore must be, more than anything else, living witnesses of the Word of God which they preach. In the *Method for Missions* he says:

The one who yearns to dedicate himself to the apostolic missionary life should think over carefully, before God, the qualities required in one who is to be a worker for the Gospel . . . holiness, learning, good health. In addition, he must have an unceasing desire to grow in holiness every day and study unceasingly what priestly perfection demands (MM, p. 6).

"For such work," St. Gaspar wrote to Bellisario Cristaldi, the future cardinal, January 26, 1819, "requires men of spirit and fit for the ministry; we are dealing with an undertaking as important as that of the missions, and with giving the clergy patterns of apostolic life" (*Letter 196*).

This lofty idea that St. Gaspar had of the Missionary explains why he was so severe when admitting anyone

into the Congregation. As he wrote to Father Luigi Locatelli, March 1, 1820:

One does not give a man credentials as a missionary without having tried him out in a mission and made very confidential enquiries of the bishop of his diocese. I esteem them all, but you are well aware that the highest ministry does not consist in that (*Letter 359*; cf. *Letter 2091*).

This idea also underlies various attitudes taken in the *Rule* with regard to the Missionary's growth in perfection (cf. R, 9–13), and his own witness to a life marked not only by warmth but also by austerity. Thus, the Missionary was forbidden to leave the house unless accompanied, to wander idly about the country, to assist at public games, to go to other people's houses without a serious reason, etc. (cf. P, 14). This way of life was in direct contrast to the usual spectacle of idleness and thoughtlessness given by the clergy and even by prelates, as St. Gaspar wrote in a few pages he sent to Cristaldi in 1825, entitled "Reflections on the Needed Reform of the People to be Considered at the Foot of the Crucifix":

Alas, what do we see today, generally speaking! They spend their time in lively conversations, at dances and evening receptions. How is this possible? How can it be reconciled with the reserve required of ecclesiastics. . . ? How can ecclesiastics prevail on lay people to give up many things which lead to effeminacy and the like if a prelate or church dignitary, for example, at times is mentioned in the newspapers in the detailed accounts of certain entertainments as having been present? Is not this damaging to their dignity with which these entertainments have nothing in common (*Letter 1167*)?

The community of Missionaries in such a lax atmosphere had to give powerful witness by living according to the Gospel. Moreover, it generally did give this witness if we are to judge by the esteem, the affection and the respect with which both clergy and people surrounded them.

The Missionaries' Apostolic Action

We already know that the mission houses were so called because in the churches attached to them there was frequent preaching of God's Word to the people in general and, in particular, to the various associations of the faithful, and the sacrament of Penance was continually made available. Article 28 of the *Rule* laid down that

. . . the members will render assiduous service in the churches and carry out in as dignified a manner as possible both the ordinary ceremonies and those performed at special times or in special circumstances or places; similarly, on Sundays and Feast Days they will instruct the people by catechizing them or preaching to them. Besides this, they will wholeheartedly promote devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary during the month of May, and to the Most Precious Blood, the Price of our Redemption, during the month of June.

The *Praxis* of this article, of articles 30 and 31, the memorials to Leo XII and Gregory XVI⁷ and the ritual which was in use in the mission houses enlighten us on the scope of the Missionaries' apostolic activity in their places of residence.

To give an idea of this activity I will quote the words St. Gaspar himself wrote in his memorial to Leo XII, to inform him of what exactly our purpose was. He uses the word *functions* to indicate apostolic activity, and subdivides these functions into "annual functions, monthly functions, weekly functions and daily functions."⁸

Annual Functions

Public exercises are not to be omitted; especially at Christmas and before Easter catechetical instruction must be given; also the Three Hours of the Agony in memory of the last three hours Jesus spent in agony on the cross, thus bringing the people to show their tender love to our most loving Redeemer.

During May the devotions to Our Lady are to be held, and during the month of June the people must be incited to meditate on the mystery of the love of Jesus who redeemed us by his Most Precious Blood.

It is not necessary to mention the other good works to be encouraged, as these will be in keeping with the localities concerned and the needs of the people.

Monthly Functions

General Communion under the form of a retreat in preparation for death. This follows the lines of what is carried out in Father Caravita's Oratory.

Catechetical instruction to soldiers and prisoners must not be omitted nor other ministerial activity, bearing in mind local needs, such as preaching occasionally to neighboring localities

...

On one Friday during the month the missionary must be present at the meeting of the Men's Sodality and of the Women's Sodality. He should give a detailed instruction on their respective duties and encourage them to live a devout life and give a good example. In the same way, on Thursdays after lunch, and at least once a month, there is the instruction for the clergy. . . ; and to put things in a nutshell, for all the various classes of persons, the

missionary must try to provide a proclamation of God's word proportionate to the needs of his audience.

They must not omit giving an instruction once a month to the Sisters of charity, whose sodality is governed by the rules laid down for the various sodalities.

Before we quote any further, I would like to make an observation I deem important. When St. Gaspar talks of gentlemen, clerics, of the Sisters of Charity and, in general, of "the various classes of persons," quite obviously he is referring to the so-called *ristretti*, or pious associations of the faithful. The *Praxis*, article 30, mentions them, as do the *Regulations* printed for this purpose. The above mentioned *Praxis*, introducing the list of these associations, each with its own special aim, begins with these words:

To provide more fully for the people's spiritual welfare . . . taking the various localities and circumstances into account, pious groups of faithful or sodalities may be established in our churches. These sodalities are known as *ristretti* in the common tongue.

So then, the purpose of these associations was to mature the faith of their members and, as was laid down in the respective regulations, to bring them to take a greater part in the apostolate and to train them to be the collaborators of the Missionaries in the apostolate.

The words "may be established," then, should not lead us to think that the establishing of these sodalities in their totality was optional. If not all the sodalities could be set up, a choice could be made of those most suitable for the locality concerned. This is made quite clear by the *Praxis* of this same article 30, which also tells us what these sodalities were: the Association of the Apostles for priests, the Sodality of St. Francis Xavier

for men, the Sodality of the Sisters of Charity for women, the St. Aloysius Sodality for boys, the Daughters of Mary for girls. There were also others according to local requirements.

Weekly Functions

Besides the regularly recurring work of missions and the admission of the retreatants into the various classes, there is on the Sunday of every week a public explanation of the catechism after which there is the preparation for a happy death. Where the parish priests ask for it, assistance is given in their respective churches for catechizing the adults.

On Thursdays there is adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in memory of the institution of this great mystery.

On Fridays there is the Way of the Cross.

On Saturdays, devotions in honor of Our Lady and litanies.

In addition to the above, on all feast days the meeting for young people, under the patronage of Mary Immaculate and of St. Aloysius, should not be omitted.

Daily Functions

Holy Mass every morning at daybreak before the people go off to their affairs. During Mass the acts of faith, hope and charity are to be said with the people. The exercise ends with a salutary reminder to sanctify the day by doing all for the glory of God.

Every evening there is the Oratory for the men. It follows the rules laid down by Father Caravita.

On Fridays and Sundays all are in the confessional, usually dealing with the men first and then with the women. On the other days

the missionaries take turns in the confessional in order to have time to deal with the duties of their ministry at their desk.⁹

As can be seen from this long and valuable quotation, the scope of the Missionaries' apostolate in the localities where they resided is quite clear. This apostolate, however, has its center of gravity located in the proclamation of the Word of God in order to bring about the conversion of the faithful.

To complete this description given by St. Gaspar, we must add what is said in the *Praxis*, article 30:

At the request of the bishop or of the ecclesiastical superior, the missionaries will willingly undertake the duty of preaching the Gospel any week in seminaries and similar institutions, and also once a month to Sisters or to those in their convent schools. . . They should visit the sick and console those in hospitals and speak to them of Christian teaching and make a point of hearing their confessions.

Moreover, at the request of the bishop, the Missionaries may undertake solving cases of moral theology submitted to them by the diocesan clergy (cf. P, 17).

What has been said brings out quite clearly the enormous amount of apostolic work that went on in and around the locality where a mission house was founded. Hence, St. Gaspar's definition of a mission house is more than justified: "City missions, continuously going on, for the good of the people" (*Letter 259*; cf. *Letter 780*; *Letter 1123*).¹⁰

If now we add to this tremendous amount of work, the unceasing ministry which the Missionaries carried out in other localities, the eventual establishment of the house of studies and house of formation, we can easily understand St. Gaspar's exclamation in his letter to Signor Giovanni Francesco Palmucci, May 5, 1827:

The aims of the Institute are: missions, retreats, apostolic work, the solving of moral cases if the bishop so requires, the study of sacred theology for young clerics who would like to withdraw to a house of studies where they can board. Over and above this, nothing! The scale is already well loaded (*Letter 1622*)!

THE APOSTOLATE OF FOREIGN MISSIONS

To tell the whole truth, we must mention that in St. Gaspar's letter to Palmucci, quoted above, one task dear to his heart had slipped his mind, one which has to be taken into account in the balance sheet of his Congregation—the apostolate in missions abroad. Was this a secret desire he had nourished in his heart from his boyhood through contact with his “great Xavier”? The fact is that in his letter to Leo XII of July 1825, he tries to give the pope an idea of the work the Congregation and has this to say:

Consequently, this spiritual plant, growing ever stronger, will produce, as its noble fruit, vocations for the missions directed by the *Propaganda Fidei*. These will be staffed by apostolic workers endowed with solid virtue, competent scholarship, men completely detached, and thus the glory of God will be wonderfully promoted (*Letter 1214*).

In fact, only a few months after St. Gaspar had written these words, he realized his desire by sending to the Ionian Islands one of his own colleagues, Father Gaspare Carboneri, at the request of the pro-prefect of the Propaganda, Cardinal Giulio Della Somaglia. Father Carboneri, unfortunately, “was not able to remain in the mission territory for long on account of bad health.”^c St. Gaspar, however, emphasizes the fact with a certain pride. This is what he wrote in his memorial to Pius VIII:

The Sovereign Pontiff Leo XII . . . had already sent word to the now Cardinal Cristaldi but at that time the General Treasurer, that he should seek some locale in Rome to set up our Society there, and likewise, to arrange for the study of languages to be used in foreign missions, thus providing new support for the major concerns of his Pontificate. As a matter of fact, he sent one of our Missionaries to the island of Santa Maura, but this man was subsequently called by God to the eternal years, a victim of the sufferings encountered during that mission (*Letter 1946*).

This proposal made by St. Gaspar to offer those of his Missionaries who would be willing, and were endowed with the necessary talents for the work of

^eFor further information about the request to send a missionary to the Ionian Islands, cf. *Lettere di San Gaspare del Bufalo*, I, note on pp. 207–208, which speaks of the negotiations to send Missionaries to North America. For information concerning Carboneri, cf. op. cit., II, I, pp. 29–31. However, one must add another important item to these: Father Carboneri, besides being the first Missionary of the foreign missions of our Congregation, is also the first Missionary pastor. In fact, with a decree of June 22, 1826, Luigi Scacoz, Bishop of Cefalonia and of Zante, named Father Carboneri pastor of St. Maura and dean of the Leucadi Islands, assigning to him as assistant pastor, the Dominican, Father Mattia Abela (cf. the Decree of Nomination in the *General Archives, C.PP.S.*). Father Carboneri took possession of the twofold office July 13, 1826, and, because of sickness, handed in his resignation January 22, 1827. The accepting of the office of pastor is not contrary to the prescriptions of the *Rule*, since the missionaries in foreign lands were at the complete disposition of the Ordinary (cf. e.g., the decree of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith for naming Carboneri Apostolic Missionary, f. 338).

spreading the faith in pagan lands or among heretics, was strongly endorsed in the *Rule*:

Should one of the members who has a gift for preaching be led by the grace of God to desire to preach the true religion to pagans and heretics, he should inform the Moderator General who, having discussed the matter in council and given all other necessary information, will petition the Sacred Congregation and recommend this Father for missionary work (art. 33).

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to reconstruct, under the guidance of the documents of our Congregation and of the *Rule* in particular, a picture of the apostolate which St. Gaspar had outlined for his Institute. This apostolate, as we said at the beginning of this article, may be summarized thus: It consists in the proclamation of the Word of God, with particular emphasis on the mystery of the Blood of Christ, specifically through missions and retreats and the founding of mission houses. It also includes foreign missions for those members who feel called to this work.

We could give another description, looking at it from another viewpoint and say: It is a convincing proclamation of God's Word through missions and retreats in order to bring about the renewal of the ecclesial community in the localities where houses for this purpose have been founded, the Missionaries being also generously disposed to preach missions and retreats in other localities, especially where there is a special need to arouse and reinvigorate the Christian faith. This availability may also lead some members to go and work in foreign missions.

This is a well-defined outline with clear-cut apostolic options that give the Institute St. Gaspar intended

to found its own particular physiognomy and a specific personality to its members.

Reflections on Renewal since the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council believed that it had the duty, as expressed in the document *Perfectae Caritatis*, to call institutes of religious life to a profound renewal and to rediscover their own identity and function in the Church according to the inspiration and purpose of their founders and according to sound traditions:

It serves the best interests of the Church for communities to have their own special character and purpose. Therefore, loyal recognition and safekeeping should be accorded to the spirit of founders, as also to all the particular goals and wholesome traditions which constitute the heritage of each community (no. 2, b).

A similar renewal is also requested by the Council with regard to the work of the apostolate:

Communities should faithfully maintain and fulfill their proper activities. Yet, they should make adjustments in them according to the needs of time and place and in favor of what will benefit the universal Church and individual dioceses. To this end they should resort to suitable techniques, including modern ones, and abandon whatever activities are today less in keeping with the spirit of the community and its authentic character. The missionary spirit should be thoroughly maintained in religious communities. . . (no. 20).

The Council, therefore, with regard to the work of the apostolate, invites the institutes:

- To maintain and to carry out faithfully its own special work for the good of the universal Church and of

the local church, and especially to preserve its missionary spirit;

- To adapt this work in its various forms by making use of the most suitable means and even using new means as the needs of the times and localities demand;
- To give up those activities which no longer correspond to the spirit and specific character of the institute.

The Council, therefore, wants every institute to have activities of its own, adapted to the requirements of times and places, in keeping with the spirit and character of the institute for the benefit of the universal as well as the local church.

It is to this expressed desire of the Council that we have begun to respond with the updating of our *Normative Texts*, and we continue to respond to it as we continue our research into the charism of our founder.

Basing ourselves on the directives of the Council, in our research into the apostolic charism of our Congregation in order to adapt it to our times, I think that there are three excesses we must avoid:

1. Going back blindly to the letter of the plan for the apostolate drawn up by our founder;
2. Carrying on with the present status quo without suitable discernment;
3. Leaving ourselves open to any kind of apostolic activity which is deemed valid according to the charisms of individual members of the Institute.

What we need, on the other hand, is to rediscover the nature of the plan for the apostolate which our founder drew up, fit it into the present needs of the Church and implement it in clear-cut apostolic options which are in keeping with the character of the Institute and portray its distinctive features today.

This is a long and difficult undertaking. It demands a willingness to accept a kind of death. It is a labor that calls for pruning and grafting, but one certainly full of

hope and life. Prudence is required and we must proceed systematically, and then we must have the courage to implement the results of our labor.

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The translation is by John Molloy, S.M.M., and William A. Volk, C.PP.S.

Mission: Challenges for the Future and Consequences for Formation

Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of a four-week course for formators of the Congregation held in July 2003, the participants drew together their experiences from their formation ministry and what they had learned in the course. They reflected on how what they had learned would impact the formation programs in their provinces, vicariates, and missions. The discussions leading to this final stage of the course grew out of exchanges based in some instances on geographical and/or language regions (e.g., North America, Latin America and Iberia), or among regions which found themselves in similar situations but in different parts of the world (thus, India, Tanzania, and Guinea-Bissau). In the case of Europe, while Poland, Italy, and the Teutonic Province worked in separate groups, Italy and the Teutonic Province spent some of their time working together.

In an international Congregation with foundations in nineteen countries, it is hard to give an overview which does justice to the richness and the diversity of strengths, issues, and challenges of so many different parts of the world. Yet a point stressed in many of the presentations was the commonalities discovered in the process of four weeks of exchange, of hearing from one

another, and of speaking together. Certainly, a common thread is the C.PP.S. patrimony, the charism given to us by our founder, St. Gaspar, and the common faith in Christ and the commitment to serving the Church and the wider society. A picture emerges of shared commonalities, and rich diversity.

The purpose of this final synthesis is to highlight both of these dimensions: ideals and dreams held in common, and also the diversity of experiences. Both dimensions are enriching. Participants found themselves strengthened in common commitments, and motivated to seek new possibilities in the diverse experiences with which they came into contact. While a summary cannot do justice to the entirety of what was presented, it can serve as a stimulus to continue thinking about the challenges which have been raised, and serves also as an invitation to explore new avenues suggested in the presentations.

What follows here uses the framework of the questions each of the groups used in organizing their reflections. This framework began by sketching first the context of Church and the wider society in which the C.PP.S. finds itself. It then presented something on the qualities of the candidates who are coming to us in formation.

In a second step, it examined the resources of the C.PP.S. patrimony or heritage, which can address the needs of Church and society. Specifically, it presented what had been learned about that patrimony in this formators course, how this led to highlighting elements in the "Profile of the Missionary," and what elements of the spirituality of the Blood of Christ received emphasis as a result of all of this.

This led to a third and final step regarding how all of this would lead to a reformulation of the plan for formation in the different areas of the Congregation. Here a host of concrete suggestions were brought forward—some specific to different areas, but also other suggestions, which appeared repeatedly in the reports.

The Needs of the Church

It seemed appropriate to begin by looking at the needs of the Church in the areas where the C.P.P.S. serves, since it was the needs of the Church, which prompted St. Gaspar to found the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in 1815. At the same time, the sheer size of the Catholic Church (about 1.1 billion people) makes it hard to generalize about needs. Looking at commonalities and distinctive features will give something of the picture of the needs of the Church as the C.P.P.S. finds them at the beginning of the 21st century.

A recurring theme was *evangelization*. In places such as India, Tanzania, and Guinea-Bissau, this means especially first evangelization, that is, helping people hear the Good News of Jesus Christ for the first time. In India, a country of a billion inhabitants, only 2.1% of the population is Christian. At the same time, however, the parishes which the C.P.P.S. serves in that country are extraordinarily large.

What Pope John Paul II has called the new evangelization is a challenge for the Church in North America, Latin America, and much of Europe. The new evangelization is about strengthening the faith of those who already are practicing their faith, and calling back to a greater fullness of faith those whose practice of faith is diminished or has disappeared altogether. It was noted, for example, that unchurched Catholics constitute a larger group of Christians in the United States than any single Protestant denomination. In secularized Europe, many have stopped any church involvement, either because they feel they can live without God, or out of sheer ignorance of their faith. Poland represents here a special case, in that church participation continues to be very strong, and is something upon which the C.P.P.S. in that country can build in a special way.

The Church faces a variety of challenges in different parts of the world at this point in history. The Church in the United States has been shaken recently by scandals

regarding sexual abuse of young people by the clergy. The Church in other parts of the world has had to deal with these challenges as well, albeit not at the same level of intensity. In Latin America, the bishops appear to have pulled back from the commitment to the poor and marginalized, a prophetic movement that had been an example to the entire Church in the latter part of the twentieth century. There the Church has retreated more into itself. In a number of instances, the Church is beset by a clericalism that makes the Church aloof to the problems that engage most of its members. It also inhibits lay people from greater participation in the life of faith.

The rise of groups and movements in the Church, which have been divisive of the Body of Christ, is also a feature of recent years. Groups like Opus Dei and the Neocatechumenate divide parishes and regions. In struggles over the direction of reform in the Church in Central Europe, there has been a growing intolerance between progressive and conservative elements.

An important development in the past two decades has been the rise of charismatic forms of faith. These forms are present both within the Catholic Church but even more so outside of it. Within the Church, there are often strong divisions about how or whether these forms should be welcomed. Pentecostal groups outside the Catholic Church try to lure Catholics away and are sometimes hostile to Catholicism itself. Clearly, we need to make greater efforts to understand this phenomenon, weigh its positive and negative aspects, and prepare our candidates to engage this reality.

In those instances of scandal and of indifference to the suffering of the poor, the Church has become alienated from its own people. Where the laity are made to be passive recipients of Church ministry or experience the Church as ritualistic and removed from the concerns of the people, we find people leaving the Church in search of something more satisfying. Consequently, there is a great need for reconciliation and healing which

addresses the wounds people have experienced, and offers the possibility of greater communion.

At the same time, the Church enjoys admiration and respects in certain parts of the world. The way in which the Church stood with the people and protected a cultural heritage in Poland gives the Church high regard there. The way the Church has embraced reform and addresses itself to the needs of society has gained it similar esteem in Portugal. How missionaries stayed with the people in the midst of a civil war has accorded the Catholic Church in Guinea-Bissau special respect.

The need for evangelization in all its different forms is a theme that strikes a special chord for C.P.P.S. Missionaries. We define our mission in our Constitutions as the apostolic and missionary ministry of the Word (C3). Reconciliation is also a theme that has come to the fore in recent years in our spirituality. The C.P.P.S. worldwide finds itself therefore, in different ways, at the center of the needs of and challenges to the Church today.

The Needs of Society

The needs of the Church are at least in part reflections of issues in the larger society in which the Church finds itself. Given the C.P.P.S. presence in nineteen countries, the range of needs of society is bound to be diverse. Nonetheless, there were some recurring themes which, as C.P.P.S. Missionaries, we are called upon to address. There are three such themes, which stand out especially.

First, in North America and Europe one finds largely *wealthy and stable societies*. While this would seem to result in prosperity and contentment, the picture is far more complex than that. The wealth and stability of these societies are largely the result of the forces of modernity that have been at work over the past three centuries. Wealth was created by a shift away from agricultural to industrialized forms of societies. These

economic developments went hand in hand with the development of democracy and an acknowledgment of human rights and individual freedom.

Modernity has been committed to an ideology of progress and greater autonomy of individuals within society. The achievement of progress and autonomy has, however, not led to the utopian dream that fueled such ideas. A number of the presentations from these regions noted some of the negative features that have emerged out of this.

Greater wealth and freedom have often led to individualism and a vision of the human being as consumer, rather than as someone responsible for the well-being of others. Assuming the stability of social structures has made it possible to ignore the needs of others. In what is now called postmodernity, those negative consequences become clearer. The bonds of solidarity in society become increasingly weakened. The sheer breadth of choice leads to fragmentation, the relativization of values, and indifference to others around us.

On the other hand, postmodernity has had its merits. Modernity was often hostile to religion, especially in Europe (this has been less the case in North America). The fragmentation of postmodern society has made it possible for religion to find a place in human life, but it has also fostered the fragmentation of religious traditions, leading to highly individualist forms of faith, New Age phenomena, and experimentation with Satanism and other debased approaches to the transcendent.

Second, *poverty* is the experience of most of the world's population outside North America and Europe. As the reports from Latin America, Africa, and Asia noted, poverty not only diminishes the flourishing of human life, but also brings in its wake greater conflict, corruption, breakdown of families and social life, and escape into destructive behavior (such as alcoholism and drugs). In some of these places, the Church at the level of the hierarchy has retreated from solidarity with the poor and turned in upon itself.

The *effects of globalization* constitute a third phenomenon in society today. Three features are affecting rich and poor countries alike. Migration is a major feature of societies around the world today. It is creating, on the one hand, multicultural societies that raise new challenges for social coherence and stability. Canada and the United States are now the second and third most multicultural countries in the world (Australia is the first). Europe is experiencing profound changes in countries, as immigrants become a prominent feature of once fairly homogeneous societies. People have to cope with a great deal more diversity and difference than had been the case before. Poor countries are experiencing depopulation of rural areas, and the loss of some of their best educated young people to wealthier societies elsewhere.

A second feature of globalization is the spread of neo-liberal economic forms. For the poor countries, this has meant disruption of local economies, loss of control over national priorities, and even greater poverty in some instances. It has divided poor societies within themselves, as the gap between rich and poor grows ever wider. Even wealthy countries, who are the major beneficiaries of neo-liberal economy, suffer disruption as well. People in those settings have less job security, and the gap between rich and poor grows. Nonetheless, poor countries are the hardest hit by these developments.

Third, globalization is shot through with paradoxes. While making the world more and more alike in some ways, it has heightened local resistance to these homogenizing forces as well. The sheer speed with which it moves destabilizes societies. This leads to the experience of dislocation and fragmentation. In addition, globalization, as a social phenomenon, has no goals other than more globalization. Progress and change become values unto themselves, and do not have a clear vision of what it means to be human, other than to produce and to consume.

Missionaries of the Precious Blood find themselves engaged with all three of these aspects of the world today—of wealth, poverty, and globalization. In wealthy countries, they struggle with developing consciousness and care for the disadvantaged. In poor countries, they work toward greater solidarity with the poor in their suffering. Globalization leads to greater plurality, multiculturalism, and conflict in society, and the C.PP.S. is in the midst of all of this.

The Candidates Coming to the C.PP.S.

The candidates coming to the C.PP.S. reflect the Church and the world of today. In North America and Europe, they are concerned and committed, but often ignorant of their faith. The pressures of a wealthy and secular society mean that committing oneself to a religious vocation is to struggle against the mainstream of society. Consequently, the numbers of candidates in those areas is quite small. In places where the Church seems to have turned in on itself or away from the poor, people committed to social justice may look elsewhere than to a Church vocation. In poor countries, vocation to ministry can become conflated with seeking better education or higher social status (as was once the case in Europe and North America). This sometimes results in high numbers of candidates, but the dropout rate is likely to be high. The instabilities caused by globalization are evident in all of our candidates as well. Some seek respite from constant change by embracing a rigid or authoritarian lifestyle. Others are seeking a haven from bewildering change and choice.

Many of the regions pointed to special challenges in working with candidates today. A good number of candidates come from dysfunctional or broken families. Consequently, a good deal of “remedial” work must be done in their human formation before they are able to move more deeply into aspects of spiritual, community, and ministerial formation. In areas where there are few

candidates, the differences in age, experience, and education of the few candidates can also pose major challenges for forming these candidates as a group together.

Some places, such as Poland and India, noted the effects of accepting candidates who had been previously with other religious orders or with dioceses. Often their previous experiences of formation become disruptive in our formation programs.

At the same time, it was noted that candidates come to us eager to serve and to learn. They carry with them their past as both resource and as burden. Helping the candidates to understand themselves and the larger society in which they find themselves is an important part of formation work, so that the call to service and to witness can flourish and be to the benefit of bringing about the Reign of God.

The Resources of C.PP.S. Patrimony and Heritage

A recurring theme in the reports was that this formators course opened up for many the breadth and the depth of the C.PP.S. reality. Greater understanding of the origins and history of the C.PP.S., and appreciation for the variety and range of C.PP.S. presence and witness in the world today, expanded everyone's horizons. This new awareness is something nearly everyone wanted to carry back to their candidates.

Along with this appreciation of the C.PP.S. reality, a number of elements of our spirituality were frequently noted. One such area was the interplay of *devotional practices* and *spirituality* of the Blood of Christ. There was a greater awareness of these two dimensions, of how they interact, and of the potential and the limits of both. There seemed to be widespread interest in exploring these two dimensions further. Interacting with that was the challenge of charismatic forms of prayer in a variety of settings, apparent in nearly all parts of the C.PP.S. except North America. Exploring the positive and negative dimensions of charismatic faith, and preparing our

candidates to deal with this, was something many wanted to see addressed in greater depth.

Among the themes of C.PP.S. spirituality (covenant, cross, cup, reconciliation), *covenant* and *reconciliation* found special resonance. The fragmentation of society and the loss of solidarity in many societies, as well as the increasing multicultural and multireligious realities, make the theme of the covenant especially salient. The alienation and conflict of societies give reconciliation a new centrality to our spirituality. Other themes, such as the Lamb and the wound in the side of Christ, were mentioned as needing further exploration as well. Some noted that a new appreciation of Mary in our spirituality was emerging.

Future Directions in C.PP.S. Formation Programs

The experiences and the reflections of these four weeks prompted much thinking about future developments in C.PP.S. formation programs around the world. A number received special attention.

Perhaps most striking was the call for greater *collaboration* among regional formation programs and even internationalization of aspects of the formation programs. North America and Latin America already have extensive collaboration in their respective areas. Both groups called for a greater enhancement of this. European seminarians have been meeting on a regular basis in recent years. The development of an explicitly international component, emphasizing our common heritage and appreciating more explicitly our cultural differences, came from a number of countries in this area. Tanzania and India are already investigating a common year of formation together.

Equally frequent was a call to *acquire an additional language* or languages to permit greater communication and collaboration in the future. Along with this, greater exposure to different cultures was also seen as an important value. All of this calls formation directors to be

trained in skills of intercultural communication and intercultural living. Attention to this area is something which has emerged in religious formation in general only in the past two decades. It is incumbent upon the Congregation to see to the preparation of formation directors in this important area.

Certainly, this matter of greater intercultural and international collaboration needs further study and exploration. It needs to be on the agenda of formation programs in the years ahead. This will involve not only setting up programs of exchange, but also in learning the skills of intercultural communication and living. Important especially for formation directors will be the skills to accompany candidates as they undergo movement both into new cultures, but also in accompanying them in their return to their home culture.

For countries where preparation for the priesthood is almost exclusively academic, the need to have greater pastoral exposure and a variety of pastoral experiences in formation was also noted.

Another feature which touches both the training of priests and the training of all future members is the need to involve *brothers in the Congregation* and also dedicated laypersons in the process of vocational discernment and in the formation process itself. This is already happening in some parts of the Congregation, but needs to spread to all regions of the C.P.P.S.

Continued emphasis on the *preparation and training of formators* was also voiced. An appreciation for the wealth of the C.P.P.S. heritage, the many dimensions of the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, and the greater sense both of being missionary and being part of an international Congregation was voiced by many participants.

Much progress has been made toward preparing candidates as Missionaries of the Precious Blood, of immersing them in the charism St. Gaspar has bequeathed to us. At the same time, some noted that

what it means to be a priest in the C.PP.S. needs greater attention. Correlative to that is the need, in some areas, to appreciate the vocation of the brother as a Missionary in his own right is needed. All the human dimensions of formation, while best viewed within the specific cultures in which candidates are rooted, will continue to need attention.

A final theme, which recurred repeatedly, was that of forming candidates for *community life*. Community life is always a point of contention in a society of apostolic life, oriented as it is in the first place to mission. Many look to a revival of the concept of the mission house as key to a greater understanding of what community life means in a Congregation such as ours. Reflection on that topic did not achieve the level that many desired to see. That continues, therefore, to be on the agenda for C.PP.S. formation.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The greater awareness of the *international and multicultural dimensions* of the C.PP.S. came through in the discussions and the reports time and time again. It should be noted that this corresponds to larger discussions now underway throughout the Congregation. Special regional meetings in 2003 and 2004 are leading up to a special general assembly in September 2004. In that assembly, greater collaboration among the regions of the C.PP.S., and the possible reconfiguration of provinces, vicariates, and missions will be discussed. Such collaboration between the regions is already happening, as members from one region now work with other C.PP.S. members in another. Brazil is perhaps the most striking example of that today, as members from Poland, the Teutonic and Iberian Provinces, and the Central American Mission have gone there to work. Tanzania is sending members to Guinea-Bissau and Chile, as well as Italy. Our formation programs must

prepare our future members for these emerging realities. Thus, the hopes voiced for greater collaboration among regional programs, as well as internationalization of aspects of formation programs, fits well with larger realities developing in the C.P.P.S. today.

Second, the *commitment to learn languages and appreciate cultures* can be seen as a part of a larger phenomenon as well. The Catholic Church is the largest transnational institution in the world. While talk about “transnational corporations” as exploitative of peoples and indifferent to human suffering is widespread, transnational institutions are also the hope of a greater unity in humankind and the hope of a world committed to justice and solidarity in the face of conflict, environmental degradation, and a widening gap between the rich and the poor. The C.P.P.S., as an international Congregation, has a role to play in this hope for humanity. Our commitment to a ministry of the Word, and our living a spirituality which builds relationships, walks with those who suffer, and offers healing and reconciliation are essential parts of what we have to offer. Our dreams have to be big enough to encompass that. Having our ears attuned to the cry of the blood in different parts of the world today, our hearts ample enough to welcome the breadth of humanity, and our actions committed to a just and more holy world have to be of a scope and range to meet the world as we find it.

Third, the explorations of our history, our present reality, and our spirituality have created a hunger for going even deeper into these matters. We will continue to need to produce resources, which can be used widely throughout the Congregation. All of this will enhance our C.P.P.S. identity and our capacity for solidarity among the different regions of the Congregation around the world.

At the audience he gave to the general assembly in 2001, the Holy Father challenged us to be true sons of St. Gaspar: to go where others cannot or will not go, to

put out into the deep of the world today, to bring the message of hope and reconciliation to all. We must share this dream and these challenges with the candidates who come to us. We have at times also the responsibility to remind our directors and our confreres of this charge given us by the Holy Father. Above all, we must deepen the bond of charity that holds us together, and the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, which gives us the strength to move forward. We have a great past. But we have even a greater future. May St. Gaspar guide us. May the love of Christ impel us. And may the promise of the Reign of God draw us all forward to that fullness of life, that reconciliation of all things, which God holds out for us in Jesus Christ.

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The Challenge of Living our Charism Today

Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S.

INTRODUCTION

The major superiors of the Congregation wanted this course for formators in order for them to study and reflect on the life of our founder, on our charism, our history and on our *Normative Texts*. Hopefully, the many reflections shared during our weeks together have helped to deepen our understanding of our C.P.P.S. patrimony leading to a clearer vision of *our own identity*, around which it is easier to build communion.

Even St. Gaspar seems to have been concerned with the theme of identity. For example, one of the early Missionaries recalled these words of Gaspar on the occasion of an annual retreat:

Each one then should live according to the spirit of the Institute. It is heard said: 'I like the spirit of the Cistercians, others, I like the spirit of the Jesuits, etc. They do it this way or that.' Nonsense! Then you should become Cistercians or Jesuits and not come into this Congregation! You did not become a Cistercian or a Jesuit; and you aren't really of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood either because you don't have her spirit. Who are you then?¹

The document *Fraternal Life in Community* reminds us that “an essential element of the unity of a religious community is ‘reference to the institute’s founder and to the charism lived by him or her and then communicated, kept and developed throughout the life of the institute’” (#45).

We are at a decisive crossroads in our history. We will continue as a vital force within our Church and in society, in the measure with which we are capable of recapturing the founding spirit of St. Gaspar and incarnate that spirit in the diversity of cultures and in the changing social realities in which we live. The deepening of our C.PP.S identity is calling us to new life and to new hope.

Centered in Christ

As has been affirmed on different occasions during this course, Christ is the center of religious life. He calls and gathers us into community. It is he who shares his mission with us. He becomes our model, our way and our goal. All that we are and do rests upon this vital relationship and a constant reference to Jesus, the one sent by God, the first missionary. Upon him we build our house. He is the spring from which our identity flows. Our lives need to be rooted in Christ, imbued with the Gospel values and on fire for the Reign of God.

When speaking on the importance of being rooted in Christ, the document *Vita Consecrata* states that, “In every charism there predominates a profound desire to be conformed to Christ and to give witness to some aspect of his mystery.” Our identity, then, is to be found in the particular aspect of the person and life of Jesus Christ that we put into relief, in a special way, in the Church. In other words, each Congregation approved by the Church is called upon to shed some light on the complex mystery of the person and mission of Jesus Christ. Understood within the universal mission of the Church, we make our specific contribution to that mission

through the living of our charism in faithful fidelity. There is no doubt that we, as Missionaries of the Precious Blood, are called to witness to the “price of our redemption.”

The Rule

This specific aspect is meant to take shape and develop according to the most authentic tradition of the Institute, as present in its rule, constitutions and statutes. Thus *Vita Consecrata* affirms that,

. . . there is a pressing need today for every institute to return to the rule, since the rule and constitutions provide a map for the whole journey of discipleship, in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church. A greater regard for the rule will not fail to offer consecrated persons a reliable criterion in their search for the appropriate forms of a witness which is capable of responding to the needs of the times without departing from an institute’s initial inspiration (*Vita Consecrata* #37).

Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., the former master general of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) observed when speaking on religious vocations to the assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men in Arlington, Virginia (August 8, 1996):

Our identity as religious lies in giving up the identities commonly understood in our society. In this human desert which is the global marketplace, we need to build a context in which religious can actually flourish and be vital invitations to walk in the way of the Lord. What a particular religious order or congregation does is to offer such a context. Each congregation offers a different ecological niche for a strange way of being a human being. A religious order is

like an environment. Building religious life is like making a nature reserve on an old building site.

He then asks an important question for us and one particularly apt for this group of formators: “What do our brothers and sisters need to flourish on that journey as they leave behind career, wealth, status and the assurance of a single partner? What do we need to make that hard pilgrimage from novitiate to grave?”

Our *Normative Texts* provide us with that map for journeying “along the road marked by blood.”

THE THREE PILLARS

When speaking of our identity today we commonly speak of the three pillars of our Congregation, namely, *mission*, *community*, and *spirituality*. During these weeks we have examined from different perspectives these three constituent characteristics of the C.PP.S. Our *Normative Texts*, given final approval in 1988, are organized primarily around these three pillars.

Title One of the *Normative Texts* deals with community life (articles C6–C20). The apostolate receives treatment in Title Two (articles C21–C27).

The third pillar, spirituality, while not mentioned under a separate title in our texts, is clearly the “red thread” which runs through their entirety and becomes the bond that holds it all together. For example, note the following citations from the *Normative Texts*:

C4 (Fundamental Principles) “Devotion to the Precious Blood—the mystery of Christ who gives his Blood for the salvation of all—holds a special place in the spiritual, community and apostolic life of the members.”

C6 (Community Life) “Whereas all the people of God are made one in the Blood of the new

covenant, our Society gives living testimony of this special unity through its community life according to the spirit of St. Gaspar.”

C21 (The Apostolate) “The Society takes part in the apostolic mission of the Church, proclaiming the mystery of Christ who has redeemed all human beings in his Blood to make them sharers in the Kingdom of God.”

C28 (Formation and Incorporation) “Called to be sharers of the mission of Christ in the world, the members of our Society, inspired by and living consciously within the mystery of the Precious Blood, exert themselves continually to attain that conformation to him—human, Christian, communitarian, apostolic—that best promotes the Kingdom of God.”

C45 (Government) “Our Society is a fellowship of men freed through the Blood of Christ and united in the bond of love. As brothers the members work together to create a community in which each of them can respond in full freedom to the call of Christ.”

The centrality of the spirituality of the Blood of Christ in our identity is highlighted in the introduction to the *Profile of the C.P.P.S. Missionary* which affirms in its opening paragraph: “Our mission and our community life are sustained and directed by the spirituality of the Precious Blood.”

These three pillars need also to be placed within the framework of being a *society of apostolic life* (SAL). Our *Normative Texts*, when outlining the fundamental principles of our *Constitutions*, begin by stating: “The Society of the Precious Blood is a society of the apostolic life of pontifical right with its own constitution and statutes” (C2). Fr. Mario Brotini (*C.P.P.S. Heritage I: Historical Studies*, pages 157–181) has outlined the history of our

Congregation from the juridical point of view, helping us to understand within the context of the development of Canon Law, how we have come to be defined as a SAL. These are reflections which add an important element to our reflection on C.PP.S identity. It has been until very recently a largely unexplored area in our Congregation.

The new Code of Canon Law has found a way of speaking about our type of Congregation (CIC 731,1). In our formation programs it becomes important that we use this category to define ourselves, avoiding the confusion of the past when we would hear confreres saying, "we are just diocesan priests living in community" or others who would go the other way, identifying us in practice with "religious." Some of this confusion we have experienced in the past reflects the confusion of the Church herself in trying to identify our type of Congregation. While perhaps not a perfect definition and one which is still in development, we can certainly see ourselves reflected in this category as described in the Code of 1983. One would be hard put to try to describe better what Gaspar envisioned our Community to be.

I would like to reflect briefly upon the three pillars which together configure the charism of our Institute of apostolic life: our mission, community life, and the spirituality of the Precious Blood. I will do so in the following way. First, I will sketch the historical expression in each category; then a word about our present-day reality; and thirdly, will try to indicate some of the challenges our present-day situation poses to us.

Apostolate

History

In the beginning our principal ministry was that of preaching *missions and retreats*. St. Gaspar saw these as the two means for renewal and reform which were most suited to the needs of the times in the Papal States after

the fall of Napoleon. The intended reform was for both the people of God in general as well for the clergy. St. Gaspar responded to a direct invitation of Pope Pius VII in 1815 to be an *apostolic* Missionary in the Papal States. In a letter to Pope Leo XII in 1825, St. Gaspar wrote: "The holy missions and retreats, as well as other pious works, which are currently being accomplished by the Society, are surely the principle basis for the reform." And in another letter to the same pope he writes:

. . . that in these foundations, already put into motion by the now deceased Supreme Pontiff Pope Pius VII, the clergy find a haven and the longed for reform of the clergy itself is promoted so that they can become a beacon of holiness for the people.

St. Gaspar was very clear in stating that we were not to accept parishes, since they demand stability and a more permanent residence which would seem to contradict our missionary nature. As we have seen in several presentations, this was clearly indicated in the first expressions of our *Rule*.

Present Reality

Over the years as the Society grew and we expanded into areas outside of the Papal States, the Missionaries had to respond to different needs and challenges. Gradually, our apostolic activities were broadened. Today our 530 C.P.P.S priests, brothers, and definitively incorporated students minister in nineteen countries. Our apostolic activities today include parish ministry, the educational apostolate, hospital and military chaplaincies, the foreign missions, and the preaching of missions and retreats, even though the latter is no longer our principle apostolate. And, as we face the needs of society today, some of our members are seeking to be freed from our "traditional apostolates" in order to

respond to other pressing needs of today's world, and to the cries of the blood of persons living with AIDS and HIV, the incarcerated, with victims of violence, and in efforts to reconcile and build relationships in a fragmented society, to name a few examples.

Challenges

When we were founded, we had a focused apostolate in which our Missionaries, through the preaching of retreats and missions, sought to bring about the reform of the Church. Today, in the midst of wide diversity in our apostolic commitments, what is our specific contribution to the Church's mission? What gives us unity amidst all of our diversity? How can we respond in new and creative ways to "the call of the Blood" in the diverse cultural, social, and ecclesial situations in which we find ourselves?

Are we free to "let go" of certain commitments of the past, in order to embrace the challenges of the present times? How can we recover our sense of being missionary while exercising ministry in parishes, in the educational apostolate etc., with their demands of stability? As Missionaries dedicated to the preaching of the Word, how can we respond to the call to "new evangelization" as we face the demands of the third millennium? And how do we deal with the tensions which arise from attempting to respect the demands of our present commitments, while responding in new and creative ways to the signs of the times in which we live and with diminishing personnel? How do we respond to the needs and demands of ministry in new cultural contexts where the C.P.P.S is developing?

Community Life

History

Community life was an essential element in the dream of St. Gaspar. He wished to join the apostolic

Missionaries together in what he called *mission houses* where they could regroup in order to pray and reflect together, study and rest, in order to once again go out and to engage in the preaching of popular missions and retreats. These mission houses were not connected to any parish church but were nevertheless centers of pastoral activity. In them spiritual and theological conferences and spiritual retreats were offered for the clergy and the laity in a type of ongoing mission. The mission houses were much more than mere residences, but actually formed part of their apostolic service for the reform of the Church.

Moreover, the Missionaries were not joined by any vows, but only by the *bond of charity*. This is clearly expressed in article 3 of our first approved *Rule* (1841): “They [the Missionaries] are bound to the Society by the bonds of charity alone and not by any vow.”

Present Reality

Today as a result of the diversification of our apostolic activities, our Missionaries more often than not live in very small communities. In fact, in some countries many might live alone and far from another member of the Congregation. But in other areas of the Society, the tendency is once again to come together for more community life. The idea of the mission house is resurfacing and some interesting experiences are being lived today. Some of our provinces are beginning to “cluster” our members in geographical regions in order to facilitate more contact among them.

Challenges

What might a modern-day version of the mission house look like today? How can it be a viable model in which to live community in a particular house, with members having different apostolates and with different schedules? What form does community life take in such a situation? What happens to community prayer? What

does “community life” mean for us when we are a Community whose principle reason for coming together is mission? How can we live a truly enriching community life in such circumstances, without the mission house simply becoming a hotel and a place to sleep and to get a hot meal? And, how can we live the bond of charity which calls us to seek ways to connect and bond with each other? How can people who live alone or at distances from others be “connected” to other brothers in the bond of charity?

Another challenge we face today is that of living in increasingly multicultural and international communities. How do we build unity in diversity? In a world where all sorts of boundaries are becoming more and more elastic, and where new walls keep springing up both inside and outside the heart of people, testimony to the Blood of the covenant and of reconciliation is urgently needed. How can we forge communities with the ability to absorb the diversity which will increasingly characterize us, our Church, and society? What is the prophetic witness which we are called to give? How can we become a *living sign* of that “beautiful order of things established in the Blood of Christ,” as Maria De Mattias prayed in her “Canticle”?

As important as community is for us, it cannot constitute our principal aim. St. Gaspar and his successors wanted us to have as a primary focus the service of the mission. We do not exist in order to maintain structures and works, but rather to evangelize, to announce the Good News, to free and to heal, and to reveal God’s love and compassion. Mission is our goal.

When we center too much on ourselves, on our structures, on our search for security, on our own welfare and future, we can become cold or indifferent to the sufferings of those outside our walls. When we spend our energies arguing among ourselves and become obsessed with little things, we become asphyxiated and begin to lose the perspective of the larger picture.

Spirituality

History

The ministry of the Word which is at the heart of our Society found its motivation in the devotion to the Precious Blood, as an expression of God's redeeming love, which offered pardon to sinners and called forth a response in conversion and renewal. The Missionaries established "confraternities of the Precious Blood" in order to promote devotion to the price of our redemption among the laity. For St. Gaspar and his band of Missionaries, spreading this devotion was a natural part of their ministry. St. Gaspar wrote in a letter to Fr. Gaetano Bonanni in 1815:

The Evangelical Workers labor so that the Blood of Jesus will be applied to the salvation of souls, and this they must offer continually, asking for pardon for sinners; if other institutes assume the charge of propagating the one or the other devotion, this one of the missions must be intent on the propagation of that devotion which *incorporates all the others, that of the price of our redemption.*

Present Reality

Devotions, which are born in a concrete historical situation and which are a response to the needs of a given culture and ecclesial situation, gradually can become disengaged from history and lose their significance. Gradually, as the Society moved into new cultural and social situations and needed to respond to different challenges, the devotion became estranged from reality and often resulted in merely "pious practices" and "prayers to be recited." Often disconnected from our everyday lives we no longer found in them a motivation for our life and mission. Fortunately during the past twenty years our Congregation has been going through

a process of rediscovering the spirituality of the Precious Blood by re-examining its biblical roots and finding in the spirituality a way of life and a way of focusing our apostolate. This spirituality has become the source of deep renewal within our Society and we are re-examining our mission in its light. Once again it has sparked the fires and zeal for mission in our members.

Challenges

The greatest challenge for many of the older members has been to go from the concept of a *devotion* to the Precious Blood, to developing a *spirituality* of the Blood of Christ, which becomes the driving force for our life in community and which gives direction to our mission. How does the spirituality of the Precious Blood express itself in different cultures and in new areas? How does it inform our everyday life and apostolates? The question of how we respond to the “call of the Blood” in a given place and time, is becoming a dynamic way to focus our mission.

Spirituality by its nature must be communicated; it cannot remain silent and unexpressed. It is not made to be kept and protected as a sort of personal treasure. It is gift from on high which, like all gifts of God, is destined not for the single individual or the single institution, but for the Church, for the whole world. Thus a spirituality has to be communicable, expressed in simple words understandable by all. It must be translated into simple language that is spoken by simple people, by the poor.

We face the challenge of translation of our spiritual wealth into local languages and dialects. People today still need devotions. We need devotions, but they also must be reflected in today’s language and in our present cultural and historical context. A particular challenge for us is to create, from our lived experience of the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, new prayers and songs which speak to people’s present-day experiences and which respond to their needs.

Fr. Amedeo Cencini, an Italian theologian, once said when speaking of religious life:

If the gift stays in our hands it will wear out, will lose warmth and color, weaken and continue only to repeat itself. Then we will become the curators of the museum and the face of religious life will grow old and wrinkled. It will no longer have anything to say because it will have moved outside the relationship, and it is well known that words spring from relationships.

Devotional practices, hymns and prayers, have always played an important role in maintaining and promoting our spirituality, as we have seen from our origins. Francesco Albertini composed some of the prayers we still use today! We must not underestimate their enduring power to communicate our spirituality.

Another important development which we are experiencing in our Society is the interest which many lay people have expressed in the spirituality of the Precious Blood. As we have seen, sharing the spirituality with the laity has been an important part of our mission from the very beginning. Today a whole movement of lay participation and companionship is emerging and is giving new life to our incorporated members around the globe. As we share our spirituality with lay women and men, we are enriched by their perspectives and are being called to renewal ourselves. Along with this process, we are also asking questions about possible new forms of living community, in which lay women and men Companions/associates can share more closely with us our spirituality and ministry.

Here I would speak of a danger to the identity of religious congregations. We sometimes suffer in our communities, parishes, educational apostolates, and in other ministries from a *generic approach*, that is, one that lacks the specific mediation of our own charism. We simply adopt the guidelines of the particular church

without any effort to see how our charism can enrich or contribute to living out those guidelines. Sometimes, in an effort to promote the lay vocation in the church, we so dilute our own charism that we fail to offer our witness in religious life as a gift to others, thus weakening our own consecration.

In some cultures there might be an excessive accommodation to the demands of family, to the ideals of nations, race or tribe or of some social group, which risks distorting the charism to suit particular positions or interests. For individual religious who are involved in certain movements in the church, one runs the risk of the ambiguous phenomenon of “dual membership.” While movements are a reality in the life of the Church and seem to be gathering force, we are called to maintain and live our own basic identity as “Missionaries of the Precious Blood.” What happens if a Missionary becomes more identified with a movement than with the C.PP.S. charism? *Fraternal Life in Community* warns that this generic approach “reduces religious life to a colorless, lowest common denominator and leads to wiping out the beauty and fruitfulness of the many and various charisms inspired by the Holy Spirit” (#46).

What I have just done is an attempt to describe at least some of the more significant aspects of the context in which we find ourselves today as a Congregation. Formation is not done in a vacuum. The challenges I raise above affect you who are engaged in the ministry of formation in a special way. It is for this changing reality that you need to form our men for life and ministry in the C.PP.S. What particular challenges do all these pose for your ministry in formation? This is the kind of question we hope you will examine as we near the end of this course. There are no pat answers. Certainly the answer does not lie in simply “copying” the model of religious life, or in a return, in a sort of fundamentalist mentality, to reproducing the forms of the past.

IN CREATIVE FIDELITY

In these changing situations we are called to be faithful to our foundational charism and to our spiritual patrimony. But we are also called to cultivate a dynamic fidelity to our mission in response to new situations and the diverse needs of different places and cultures, in full docility to divine inspiration and to ecclesial discernment.

Attentive to the signs of the times we need to discover how to adapt our mission to the needs which new situations present to us. Our founder encountered in his time situations of inhumanity which demanded his special attention. He heard the cry of the people and he was moved to compassion. It was the same sorrow and pain that Jesus experienced and like him, he was moved by the Spirit to look for creative ways to satisfy those needs.

In this context of creative fidelity to our charism we are to understand the appeal that the Holy Father made to us in the audience held with him in Castelgandolfo on September 14, 2001. He made this bold invitation to the delegates of our XVII General Assembly:

Two centuries later, another Pope summons the sons of Saint Gaspar to be no less bold in their decisions and actions—to go where others cannot or will not go and to undertake missions which seem to hold little hope of success.

He then also summons us to continue building a civilization of life and to promote the dignity of every human person, especially of the weak and of those deprived of their rightful share of the earth's abundance. He urged us to pursue a mission of reconciliation.

The Holy Father invites us not to dwell on the past but to live a life in the Spirit that makes the following of Christ fruitful today and helps to prepare for tomorrow. Erich Fromm once wrote: "Being creative means understanding the whole process of life as a continual new

birth and never considering any one phase of life as final.” We hold in ourselves the *memory* of our foundation and try to capture the spiritual force and the creative energies of our founder so as to be able to interpret the signs of our times making possible the necessary new and creative beginnings, new directions and reading of the Gospels.

We are called to appropriate the heart of our founder and to hear God’s call in the present moment, to see through his eyes with love the world today and its urgent needs, and to commit ourselves to translate into a language for today Gaspar’s message. The preaching of missions and retreats was the most apt means for communicating the message in his times. How might we respond today to the mission of evangelization in our modern world?

We are called to take risks and to situate ourselves on the frontiers, to go “outside the gate” and to plant our cross with those who are suffering, rejected, marginalized. This is where our main concern should be. When we depart from this preferential option of Jesus then our lives and our mission will be less attractive to others. Again, Fr. Cencini says, “An institute that is not open to embrace the new poverties has no right to complain about the crisis of vocations.”

In all of this, the most important thing is to keep alive the fire of the charism which gave birth to our Congregation and, by Gospel choice, to be present in those situations of suffering and misery, prolonging there the love of God which knows neither frontiers nor limits.

Starting Afresh from Christ

This is the title of the most recent instruction of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, issued in May 2002. The document states that “the Spirit alone can keep alive the freshness and authenticity of the beginnings while at

the same time instilling the courage of interdependence and inventiveness needed to respond to the signs of the times" (#20). *Starting Afresh from Christ* means once again finding one's first love, the inspiring spark which first gave rise to following the Lord. The primacy of love is his.

Consecrated persons cannot be creative, capable of renewing the Institute and opening new pastoral paths if they do not feel loved with this love. It is this love which makes them strong and courageous which instills fire and enables them to dare all (#22).

Once again we are reminded that being rooted in Christ is the starting point for our following of Christ, for our life in community, and the source of our mission. As Missionaries of the Precious Blood we are called to continually steep ourselves in the Word of God, that Word centered in the Blood of Christ, from which our charism was born.

In continuity with founders and foundresses their disciples today are called to take up the Word of God [the Gospel of the Blood] and to cherish it in their hearts so that it may be a lamp for their feet and a light for their path (cf. Ps. 118: 105). The Holy Spirit will then be able to lead them to the fullness of truth (cf. Jn. 16: 13) (# 24).

It was precisely in prayer and meditation on the Word of God under the influence of the Spirit that gave rise to the spark of new life and new works, and the specific rereading of the Gospel found in our charism of the Precious Blood.

It is with renewed zeal that we gladly take up the task of evangelization as *servants of the Word*. In the words of *Novo Millennio Ineunte* "we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow

ourselves to be filled with the ardor of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost” (#40).

As we contemplate the mystery of our redemption we seek to be renewed in our commitment, to restore that splendor which was the Creator’s intention for humanity from the beginning. And, in the words of the Holy Father, “[to restore] that splendor must be the goal of every plan and project of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood” (audience at Castel Gandolfo, September 14, 2001).

The celebration of the Eucharist constitutes for us a special moment for deepening our covenant relationship with the Lord and with one another. In it we drink from the wellspring of our spirituality of the Blood of Christ. As we drink from the Communion cup the bond of charity is strengthened and we are filled with missionary zeal as we say “yes” to the mission entrusted to us to carry Christ’s message of love, reconciliation, covenant, and hope to the farthest corners of our world. Sent by Christ, we venture forth in mission two-by-two, in community, in order to break the bread of our life with our hungry and needy sisters and brothers. It is in the Eucharist where we find our deepest identity and the source of our charism, a charism to be shared for the good of the Church and of society.

As members of a society of apostolic life, the fulfillment of mission is essential in our pursuit of holiness. I close with the words our founder wrote to one of his Missionaries:

In short, we must become all things to all people in order to save all for Christ. Charity does not lie down inactively; it is a flame that never lies still. That is what constitutes sanctity and the perfection of the soul, that is to say, to be totally intent on serving God (*Letter 49*).

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The Spirituality of our Society According to the Charism of our Founder

Luigi Contegiacomo, C.PP.S.

By the spirituality of a community I mean the sum total of the fundamental values given by the founder as the special basis and feature of his foundation. I say fundamental values, not their practical applications and their consequences. In this study, therefore, we will speak exclusively of these values, abstracting from the applications and inferences made by St. Gaspar himself and by others after him. These latter will form the object of other studies and researches.

These values, precisely because they are fundamental, are *ahistorical*, that is, they are for all times and not subject to changes dictated by various historical circumstances (thus differing from their application), and *inalienable* because they pertain to the very nature of the Congregation and our profound identity as Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood. Without any difficulty these values are reducible to the following four, to which all the others can be reduced:

- The paramount value of the *Rule*;
- the centripetal force of the bond of charity;
- our sanctification for the apostolate and by means of the apostolate; and
- under the banner of the Blood of Christ.

St. Gaspar offers these four principles in the introduction to his *Rule* and in the first title, "The Purpose Proposed for the Society." These texts will be referred to only in their most general and fundamental expressions.

THE PARAMOUNT VALUE OF THE *RULE*

It might seem strange that a systematic exposition of the spirituality of the Congregation should begin by our speaking about the *Rule*, for its importance is often presented as being that of a simple external means, and does not give the impression of possessing those basic, ahistorical and inalienable qualities which should form our spirituality. Be that as it may, allow me to make some preliminary observations which will perhaps prepare the ground for what is presented in this the first part.

First of all, it should be pointed out that our founder introduces his *Rule* by indicating very clearly and positively its value; in his judgment it is to mold the very life and development of the Society even in the future, "for [the rules] take care of the present as well as the future situations and needs of the members."¹

In the second place, if we go looking for the charism of our founder where else will we find it if not in his *Rule*? It was in the *Rule* that he intended to enshrine his charism in its most authentic expression, in order to pass it on to all the generations of his spiritual sons. It is useless to look for it elsewhere, as, for example, in some isolated statement in his writings, in some practical experience or episode in his life, often dramatized by his biographers for literary reasons, or in some secondary activity in which he was engaged. From these instances we might discover some personal charisms of Gaspar del Bufalo, but not his charism as founder of our Congregation.

As founder, he poured himself completely into the *Rule*. This will become more evident from what will

follow. Therefore there is an interior attitude toward the *Rule* which is not to be confused with respect for its value as a means, but corresponds to its “charismatic” value. Such an interior attitude is certainly not a secondary or accidental mark of our spirituality, but a fundamental and inalienable one.

In the third place, our attitude toward the *Rule*, besides being fundamental, is also an outstanding, characteristic feature of the Society to the extent, as will be seen later, that it has its source not in extrinsic values or obligations, but solely in the *freedom* exercised in the bond of charity.

Finally, by treating the value of the *Rule* before the other three characteristics, it is not meant that this one is more important than the others. Furthermore, the order I have chosen to follow in this treatment does not at all mean to establish any kind of precedence or hierarchy of value, that is, of greater or less importance and efficacy of any one of the characteristics in respect to the others. All four are equally fundamental and, therefore, intimately connected with each other to form one single whole, one sole spirituality just like the surfaces of a quadrangular prism make up one geometric figure. With these preliminary observations out of the way we can go on with the discussion.

Rules were Established from the Outset

St. Gaspar’s plan was to gather secular clergy in mission houses “to renew in them a sense of dignity and responsibility, a spirit of study and holiness,”² and then to launch them into the apostolate of preaching missions and retreats. His purpose was to bring about the religious and moral renewal of the Italian people, who had been thrown into complete disorder by the Napoleonic storm. Pius VII heartily approved of the plan and granted the first houses to the new Society. The plan was truly an ingenious one for two reasons.

First, it offered a speedy solution to great evils which then plagued the church: the relaxing of discipline among the clergy and the religious decline of the people. Second, it proposed to accomplish this double objective solely by relying on priest volunteers and on the virtue of such a group. Actually, Gaspar intended to organize a congregation of priests, apostolic in character, and not a religious community based on the three traditional vows.

Precisely because of the absence of that element (the vows) which religious communities consider a firm foundation and a dependable cohesive force, it was doubly necessary to fortify the new apostolic brotherhood with rules adapted to the purpose for which it was organized. As a matter of fact, the founder saw very well from the very start that if a society conceived along such lines would be lacking the protection of rules which would be clear and in keeping with the plan he had worked out, it would fail the hopes of the Church and the expectations of good people, and would disintegrate before it even got a good start. Which is exactly what he says in the preface to his *Rule*: “*Sine legum praesidio quae institutioni nostrae optime respondeant, conceptam sui expectationem vix dum oborta praecideret Congregatio* ‘Without the protection of laws which correspond to the nature of our institute, let the newly born Congregation abandon its expectation.’”³

I said that he was occupied with that problem *from the very beginning*. In preparation for the opening of the house at Giano, our saint had already intended to draw up some rather clear-cut rules, and as soon as the Missionaries joined him there, he began their exact observance. In a letter which he wrote August 13, 1815, to Monsignor Cristaldi, to inform him of the arrival of Bonanni and the first confreres a day or so before, we read:

Our welcome to Giano was truly a solemn one.
A group of the clergy. . . and all the people gave

evidence of their special rejoicing. Immediately the *Te Deum* was intoned . . . On the following morning the exact observance of the rules went immediately into effect; what those rules are you already will know.⁴

Therefore, not even for a day was our Society without the protection of its rules; in fact, before it officially came into being on August 15, 1815, rules, by the will of the founder, were already in force like arms extended to welcome the new Society and assure its vitality and development in the bosom of the Church.

An Expression of God's Will

What kind of rules are we talking about? St. Gaspar required of his Missionaries only the mode of life *common to all secular priests* as set down in the universal legislation of the Church. This is a *basic fact* to be borne in mind when speaking of our *Constitutions*: "They will order their lives according to what is prescribed in the sacred Canons."⁵

Nevertheless, this general principle was complemented by a few special norms demanded by their special calling to a common and apostolic life. We have this information from Venerable Merlini, who describes the origin and the development of our rules. We follow his interesting bird's-eye account here.⁶ These norms were studied by our saint together with Monsignor Albertini and Monsignor Cristaldi, and until 1820 they formed the lifestyle of the Missionaries at Giano, the only house of the Society.

In the first months of the same year St. Gaspar dictated to Father Francesco Pierantoni some more fully developed "Regulations" (*Regolamenti*) which were derived from the very first nucleus. These he had printed on two large sheets entitled *Regulations for Establishing Mission Houses* and *Spiritual Guide for the Missionaries*. He then called the famous first congressus

‘meeting [of the house community]’ at Pievetorina, June 7, 1820. In this meeting he defined more accurately and expanded the regulations printed on the above-mentioned two sheets. In 1821 he commissioned Fathers Biagio Valentini and Giovanni Merlini to extract from these printed materials and manuscripts an orderly and organic body of rules. After having examined it, retouched and corrected it, he had it printed the following year under the title: *A Summary of all that Regards the Pious Society of the Mission and Retreat Houses under the Title of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Fabriano 1822).

This *Summary*, often known by its Italian name, *Transunto*, with its forty-five articles, was in force during the lifetime of our saint, even up to the approval of the definitive *Rule* in 1841. It offered substantially sound norms, but they were still somewhat vague and deficient. The founder continued to correct these defects, and to expatiate and perfect these norms by means of circular letters, little by little, as occasions presented themselves, as he used to say to his Missionaries:

Like a painting which is first sketched, then outlined, afterwards perfected, finally idealized, even so it is the case with our Society which now finds itself enjoying such success [this was 1826] and we will see it perfected and ennobled still more for the greater glory of God whom alone we serve.⁷

Let us now listen to the Venerable Merlini as he continues to describe the various steps in the formation of the rule. He thus testifies at the beatification process of St. Gaspar:

At the same time [Gaspar] continued to think about forming a rule, complete in every respect, and many times he talked about it. However, as a matter of fact, nothing was finalized and he

used to say that it was not the time as yet, because God had still not inspired it. In this way matters went on until 1835. Then one day we happened to be together in Albano (it was in the month of July).⁸

He called me in to say that before he died he wanted to dictate the *Rule* for canonical approbation. Immediately I sat down and began to write, and on other occasions I wrote at his dictation several pages. Then, he told me to arrange the material in an orderly manner, separating, as much as possible, the material that belonged to the *Rule* from that which belonged to the *Praxis*. When this was done I [read] it to him again and he then told me to have it put into good Latin by our confrere, Missionary Father Cristoforo Frioli.⁹

“Afterward, with much thought and prayer” he continued to elaborate on it and perfect it until his death. “When I was called to Rome on the day before he died,” continues Merlini, “I asked him about another point that seemed to remain somewhat unsettled, and he replied, ‘Abide by what has been decided.’”¹⁰

From this outline, hasty and sketchy though it be, we can have a good idea of what the *Rule* meant to Gaspar. It is not a superficial piece of work done on the spur of the moment by an incompetent individual, nor an abstract study worked out by a jurist at his desk, nor a painstaking mosaic put together by a diligent compiler, incorporating in an orderly fashion materials from various sources. Rather, it is the holy obsession that goaded him on his entire life. It is the mirror of all his ideals, the fruit of continuous prayer, of personal experience and the counsels of holy and wise men: “After having consulted men who are easily the most outstanding for holiness of life, wealth of learning and for their practicality.”¹¹

In one word it was the *expression of the will of God*, for, just as he was not ready to put the finishing touches to the *Rule* until in the fervor of his spirit he clearly saw “that God had inspired it” (as we are told by Merlini), so from the very beginning of the Congregation he had been guided by the hand of God in its step by step formulation. As a matter of fact, Merlini himself guarantees that the *Rule* in its final and definitive draft “except for some accidental modifications and additions, was substantially the same as the one we already had in practice.”¹²

That explains why St. Gaspar wrote as follows to Betti, who would not approve one of his directives concerning the dress of the lay brothers:

God and his glory is my sole motive; and I assure you that if I possibly could agree with your suggestions, I would not hesitate a moment, both because I am inclined that way by nature and for religious motives. But I tell you once and for all that I cannot.¹³

One can sense that courageous firmness of a man who is conscious of his charism as a founder, and of his duty to pass it on to the Society just as God wanted it.

Gaspar Was Resolute

At this point it is in place to recall how dear to St. Gaspar’s heart was the observance of the rules which he continued to offer to his Missionaries as these rules were being perfected step by step. Gaspar was a practical, realistic person, with both feet on the ground, and he understood very well that even the most beautiful and perfect rules would be useless unless they were put into constant and faithful practice. He was not interested in composing beautiful pieces of writing, in spiritual rhetoric, or in more or less brilliant reflections, which afterward always remain in the realm of the clouds and dreamland. What he wanted to offer most of all was a practical mode of life.

His letters and the testimonies of the beatification process are an inexhaustible source of sayings and deeds which clearly demonstrate his intentions. Father Domenico Silvestri says,

He showed his courage by his observance of the *Rule*, which he wanted the rest to do also. He saw to it, and had the respective superiors see to its observance . . . Here is what he wrote to me once about this matter: 'Be zealous there where you are for the most exact observance . . . Make sure that the community is what it is supposed to be; the devil will take care of creating disorder and confusion. Once we cease insisting on our own will, everything will be in order.' In another letter he expressed himself in a similar vein: 'You did very well to refuse both invitations of the official [the Pelegrini family in Sonnino] . . . Stand fast by the *Rule*; whether that causes resentment or not, does not matter. Be a German in firmness in keeping the rules.'¹⁴

Any abuse, change or novelty, even the slightest, which might be introduced in the houses or in giving missions, says Father Beniamino Romani, "did not escape correction and remedial action."¹⁵ Once he wrote peremptorily to Father Mattia Cardillo: "No one has the authority to change the *Rule*, no matter what position he occupies."¹⁶ To Father Giovanni Pedini he wrote: "I want our mission houses to be so many Carthusian establishments."¹⁷ He told someone to tell Father Beniamino Romani: "For us the rule is to abide by the *Rule*."¹⁸ Father Luigi Mosconi was informed: "Either keep the *Rule* or go home; no nonsense, no fancy excuses, no grumbling will be tolerated."¹⁹ The same alternatives are expressed in the conclusion of the *Rule*:

Let no one be ashamed to observe the *Rule*, because the sacrifice of one's own will redounds

to the glory of God, to the welfare of the Society and to one's own spiritual profit. Whoever feels otherwise about this matter, let him, in God's name, seek another way of life.²⁰

Evidently our founder was willing to lose any member, no matter how outstanding, rather than infringe on the *Rule*, in spite of the then small number of his Missionaries. "He is a good plant," he used to say, "but not for our kind of soil."²¹

Such firmness and intransigence is surprising in a person who otherwise was so flexible. The documents of the beatification process and his letters testify abundantly to that. They show him anxious to hear and follow the advice of his confreres, open in every circumstance to dialogue, averse to decide matters on his own,²² inclined as he was to follow the impulses of the heart. "Although I seem to be severe," he wrote to Father Betti, "I have a heart that melts like wax."²³ To the same Betti he wrote again: "The older I become, the better I am able to understand human weakness, and I see that charity has to be stretched as much as possible and as far as possible."²⁴

He was ever ready to give in, in order to comply with the wishes of others, even at the cost of acquiring the reputation of being fickle and irresolute. Thus, for example, in order to satisfy Father Betti, he completely abandoned a plan he had all worked out for the apostolate and for governing the Society, and he wrote to Father Betti: "It was all ready, but I am willing to receive letters accusing me of instability (!!!) rather than not to concur with your wishes."²⁵

All of which goes to reassure us that his resoluteness in regard to the *Rule* was no fanaticism or unreasonable hardheadedness, but the result of a profound conviction that the *Rule* was of God, and that its observance meant four things:

First, it was the *sine qua non* condition for the very existence of the Society, as he states in the conclusion to

the *Rule*: “Infractions of these rules would mean that the Congregation could not long hold together, but would completely fall apart.”²⁶ Second, it was a sure safeguard of the authentic spirit of his Society, as he says in the same conclusion to the *Rule*: “. . . or it certainly would deviate from its original design.”²⁷ Third, the exact observance of the *Rule* was the only efficacious pedagogical means for the ongoing formation of his Missionaries for “acquiring and increasing their spirit, zeal and skill in promoting, defending and maintaining the good to be done”²⁸ “the task of a Missionary is a noble one and therefore demands sanctity and learning. Our *Rule*, if well observed, furnishes the means to that end.”²⁹ Fourth, for the members of the Society it is “the guide to heaven” because “the exact observance of the rules leads us by the hand, so to speak, to acquire the wonderful spirit of God.”³⁰ The rules are conducive to living the Gospel in a perfect way because “they do nothing else but offer a spiritual guide, capable of recalling us to the practical execution of the obligations we assumed at the foot of the altar.”³¹

His last circular letter, written for the occasion of the annual retreat and sent out a few weeks before his death, can be considered *his spiritual last will and testament*. In it St. Gaspar makes an impassioned plea for the *Rule* in relation to the mystical vineyard of the Song of Songs (1: 6 and 2: 12), to which he compares our Society:

The vineyard, however, has its hedge, so that the foxes may not stealthily creep in to destroy the vineyard. Behold—by the way of comparison—the *Rule*, which prescribes retirement, silence, circumspection with outsiders, prudence in our dealings, and a virtuous industry at work. For the cultivation of a vineyard, moreover, there is need of skill, toil, vigilance, fruitful showers. For the cultivation of our

Community there is need of special graces to be sought in prayer, of real effort in doing good, of system, of vigilance in harvesting the desired fruit. And in admirable agreement with all this are our regulations and *Rule*, which cannot be too highly recommended. Finally, there is our activity in promoting whatever furthers the glory of the Lord, and in seeking the permanence of our endeavors by means of associations which the Community proposes, the means it points out, the practices it offers.³²

To achieve all this, concludes Gaspar, “He who lives by the *Rule*, lives for God.”

Abide by the *Rule*

I think that from all that has been said thus far a clear message comes through, and it constitutes the first fundamental characteristic of our spirituality, coming so directly from our founder, namely: “For us the rule is to abide by the *Rule*,” to use the very words of our founder.³³ By this “Gasparian” formula I mean to emphasize above all the fact that to remain faithful to the charism of our founder it is necessary to stay with the *Rule* and abide by the *Rule*; under no circumstances can one abstract from it, and it is for that reason that I have spoken of the “paramount value of the *Rule*.” To desire to choose one’s own private way for realizing or developing this charism, outside the framework of the *Rule*, or worse, contrary to it, is a dangerous and alienating illusion.

It was a good thing and our duty to bring the *Rule*, namely, the *Constitutions* and *Statutes*, up-to-date according to the needs of the times and the directions of the Second Vatican Council. It was good and a duty to modernize it, to eliminate the encrustations which today have become useless, to check on the traditions and to retain only the healthy and vital elements. However,

once this work is done, it is also a good thing and a duty for all of us, with good will and joy, with confidence in God, in our confreres and in the future of our Congregation, to set to the task of observing the *Normative Texts*. In them there still shines forth, suitably expressed, the spirituality of our founder in its basic and characteristic notes. This observance, too, is something good and a duty which cannot be ignored. Of what avail would be all that work if afterward we would let ourselves be led by an inferiority complex in regard to the observance of the *Normative Texts*, as if it were a disgrace in our day to observe and see to the observance of the *Rule*, and to perform, according to the *Rule*, the functions entrusted to each one for the service and support of the Community?

“*For us the rule is to abide by the Rule.*” This statement sounds like a self-evident truth, and yet it is so difficult to really understand it and put it into practice! During the lifetime of our founder, in a controversy about this principle with some who wished to remain in the Society but who were opposing the rules of our saint, the Venerable Merlini gives us the authentic interpretation of that formula:

Everyone must conform to the *Rule* and to the practice of virtuous obedience, and not adapt his obedience and the *Rule* to himself, like having a suit of clothes made to one’s own liking . . . ; and I conclude that he who wishes to live according to the *Rule* . . . should certainly remain in the Society and store up treasures for heaven, in conformity with his vocation. On the other hand, whoever does not wish to live according to the *Rule*, let him find another way of life more agreeable to him and not remain to disturb the others.³⁴

The virtuous observance of the *Rule* is of such importance for our founder and for his most faithful

interpreter as to be the condition for belonging to the Society, without it being possible to imagine a third way, especially since, as the same Venerable Merlini points out, “neither the vow nor obedience keep” the individual in the Society. With these words we are introduced to the second characteristic of our spirituality, which serves to explain and helps us to go more deeply into what we have already said.

THE CENTRIPETAL FORCE OF THE BOND OF CHARITY (*Rule*, art. 4)

For St. Gaspar, therefore, fidelity to the *Rule* and fidelity to the Society, adherence to the *Rule* and adherence to the Society are one and the same thing. However, from where does this fidelity, this clinging to the *Rule* and to the Society draw its life and vigor? In the religious orders and congregations these come from the religious profession and from the vows. In our Society, destined for the secular clergy, St. Gaspar wanted a pattern of common life without those bonds of cohesion which were so firm and had withstood the test of centuries. What else was there that could give vigor and life to the *Rule*, perseverance to the members and, in a word, stability to the new Society? Our founder appealed to a cohesive force more powerful than any juridical bond, and which is the heart and essence of any moral bond, namely, the force of charity, which St. Paul calls “the bond of perfection” (Col, 3: 14).

Biblically Based

It is worthwhile to pause a moment and reflect on its biblical text to which our founder clearly alludes. Paul is presenting to the Colossians a rich ensemble of virtues to practice: mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, mutual forbearance and forgiveness; but all these virtues are to be united in one cluster, all held and bound together by charity, which makes of it all one perfect whole.³⁵

The same holds true of the rich and varied complex of values offered by the *Rule* by our saint. Among them are values in the sphere of the common life and in the continuous advancement in the fields of the spiritual life, learning and missionary activity; values in the field of the itinerant apostolate as well as in that of the local apostolate with, all their magnificent and surprising ramifications; values in the sphere of a wise, benign and dialogue-type of government exercised in a wise and kind way after having talked things over with those concerned, be that on the local community level as well as on the general level of the Society.

All of this had to be held well together in one cluster, tightly fastened and secured by the bond of charity. This bond, then, is the fundamental value which gives consistency to all the other values of the *Rule* around which the followers of St. Gaspar are united. It is, therefore *the* powerful bond which unites all these men of good will with one another.

In this connection our founder uses another comparison which also comes from St. Paul. We are in the Society, he tells us, to form “a dam to stem the tide of impiety of the world.”³⁶ To construct a dike or dam against the furies of the floods, it is necessary that the stones be tightly joined to each other by cement, so as to form a solid block. Thus, for us this powerful cohesive agent is “the bond of charity,” namely:

. . . the dedicated and supernatural affection we should have towards our Community and our confreres . . . should be such that we too may have stamped on our hearts the saying of the great Xavier: ‘May my right hand be forgotten should I forget you, O Society of Jesus.’³⁷

This quote from St. Francis was very dear to St. Gaspar, and he never tired of repeating it toward the end of his life, substituting, of course, “Society of the Most Precious Blood” for “Society of Jesus.” From all

these expressions of his it can be seen that for him the primary object of such a “dedicated and supernatural affection,” which forms the bond of charity, is the Society itself with all that it implies, namely: the *Rule* which gives it its structure and physiognomy, the works of the apostolate which make it vital and dynamic, the spiritual vigor which maintains its zeal and identity, and then, the individuals who form the living stones of the structure.

Love for Christ

To appreciate the true meaning of this supernatural bond, it is well to point out that here charity is meant in its full meaning of love for God and for our neighbor, as taught by our Lord and always taken for granted by St. Paul. Above all, it means love for Christ. St. Gaspar says: “Are we men of the spirit? Do we possess that love of God which qualifies us to enter the sanctuary (namely, the Congregation) to be teachers of the people and sanctifiers of their souls?”³⁸ The love for Jesus Christ is at the same time the irresistible incentive which impels us to consecrate our life in the apostolic Society, such as ours, renouncing “the excessive attachment to our opinions, views and desires” which are such a hindrance in our apostolic career, and this (love for Jesus) should be the only bond by which the Missionary should feel himself bound. St. Gaspar continues:

The Apostle therefore said: ‘I . . . a prisoner for Christ’ which is equivalent to saying: I desire to be bound solely by love for Jesus; and if we reflect on the manner in which the Most High manifests his divine will (respect for the *Rule* and obedience), this heavenly love will force us to cry out: ‘Who will separate us from the love of Christ?’ Every other bond is now severed, and the will of the Lord alone triumphs!^a

In turn, this bond of love for our Lord becomes the bond of peace which gently and firmly unites in the heart of Christ himself the hearts of all those who are inspired by the same vocation and are received into our spiritual family. In another circular letter St. Gaspar writes: "Let us pray for one another, in order that in holy concord and unity of spirit, strongly united 'in the bond of peace' in the heart of Jesus crucified, we may be able to reach the blessed goal of paradise."³⁹

For St. Gaspar it is always the love for Christ which constitutes the fountain from which flows the love for the brethren, and creates the environment necessary for fraternal love to flourish and expand; and the divine heart is the most favorable place for the meeting of these two loves. This is a thought that surfaces in countless ways in his writings. An example of this is his fifth circular letter for the annual retreat, where he says that the heart of Christ is the mystical "wine cellar" of which the Song of Songs speaks:

Since the King of Glory has brought us here into this wine cellar, let us in time establish here our sweet abode, and let us reinforce the foundations of the holy city of God by the bonds of charity.⁴⁰

In another circular letter he writes:

May humility [the virtue which has a very special place in the apostolic spirituality of our saint] strengthen our charity and encourage the union of our hearts in the adorable heart of Jesus Christ.⁴¹

³⁹*Circular Letter III, 1829.* St. Gaspar contrasts the bond of love for Christ to any other bond that could be an obstacle to "our apostolic activity," as, for example, an undue attachment to one's own opinions, etc.

One could go on quoting at length from his letters and from the testimonies of the beatification process. However, the quotations already furnished are more than enough to make his thought clear for us. His idea was a comprehensive one which he wished to have chiseled into the spirit of each one of his members by means of the text of St. John, a text so full of light and mystery, and which he introduced into the ritual for the blessing of the food at mealtime: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (I Jn. 4: 16). Like the solemn tolling of a bell, these words incessantly reminded us each noon and evening of the beauty and joyfulness of our vocation.⁴²

Free Charity

The charity which constitutes the bond of our Society, is qualified in the text of the *Rule* by the word, *libera* 'free': "Not by the bonds of any vows, *but only by those of free charity.*"⁴³ What value is to be given to this adjective, *free*? Does it perhaps mean that the members are free from the obligation of persevering in the Society, so that they can come and go as they please? Most certainly not! Our saint warns us about the dangers of carelessness in this matter. One has only to read the letters to his Missionaries to appreciate the sacred and supernatural conception he had of a vocation to our Society; when that vocation is certain, one would be going against the will of God not to persevere in the path undertaken, even if it cost a person sacrifice.

Furthermore, when a person entered the period of probation (*probandato*) he was vested with a cincture (a practice that, no doubt, came from the founder himself). The old rite of this investiture required from the candidate a clear pledge of good will. And in the rite of the imposition of the missionary crucifix, a rite also going back to St. Gaspar, there was clearly expressed the consecration of one's life to God and to the Society:

Remember that God chose you by a special calling of his that you might live no longer for yourself, but for him who chose you and for the Society to which you have given your name. . . Therefore be faithful unto death.⁴⁴

To emphasize strongly this pledge of loyalty and religious fidelity, he set it down as a rule that if anyone left the Society, whether because he was dismissed, or whether he “deserted camp,” he could never hope to be readmitted: “*Reditu in perpetuum prohibetur*” “Return is forbidden in perpetuity.”⁴⁵

Could the “free charity” possibly mean a certain permissiveness with regard to the norms of life which the Congregation offered? That must be unequivocally excluded. We have seen that our founder was firm and uncompromising in requiring from everyone, “no matter what position he may occupy,” the most scrupulous observance. The observance of the *Rule* was a condition for persevering in one's vocation. This idea he emphasizes on every possible occasion, as if he were afraid that he was not well enough understood. He understood well enough our natural tendency to compromise. “Let no one flatter himself,” he says in the article just cited, let no one labor under the illusion that “even though he observes the rules poorly . . . he can still remain in the Society.” In the *Praxis* he expressly advises those who do not love the observance of the *Rule*, who lead a careless life, who would like to introduce novelties or something contrary to our rules, or who is a bother to the local community or to the Society, to leave on his own accord without waiting for the decree of expulsion: “The Society should not tolerate those who are a drawback to it.”⁴⁶

This “free charity,” could it perhaps be interpreted in the sense that, since we do not have the religious vows, we remain free from the obligation of following the evangelical counsels which are the object of those vows? This type of freedom is also totally contrary to the

thought of our founder. He never tires exhorting his Missionaries to the highest perfection and to the exercise of the virtues which correspond to the religious vows.

For instance, in regard to striving for a very great purity of life: "Everyone should live as an angel in the flesh, and be an example of good works to the rest."⁴⁷ In regard to the spirit of poverty, he warns: "Let them not set their heart on riches, and let them shun the horrible strong desire for hoarding."⁴⁸ As far as obedience is concerned: "It is the keystone and foundation of all order."⁴⁹ A characteristic saying of his was: "The Missionary should be a Carthusian in the mission house, and an apostle out in the vineyard of the Lord."⁵⁰ Well known is also the proverb handed down by him to the early members: "The others take the vows, but we should observe them for virtue's sake." This maxim our saint included in the text of the *Rule* when he speaks of the formation of those in special formation (*probandi*):

They are to give convincing proof that in the future they will voluntarily (namely, without the pressure of the juridical vows) do whatever the Society would have a right to require of them if there were the vows.⁵¹

It is refreshing, in this connection, to read in the beatification process of the saint a precious testimony which assures us how these words did not remain a dead letter. The witness is Monsignor Giuseppe Angelini, who spoke these words twenty-six years after the death of our founder:

I was edified by my stay with them (namely, with our Missionaries) during the holy Retreat at Albano. I found them superior in perfection to many other religious; I saw in them reflected the virtues of which St. Gregory speaks: unselfishness, zeal, low opinion of themselves,

respect for bishops, apostolic life, moderate and frugal in their eating, and the poverty of their rooms and furnishings was such that one found only what was absolutely necessary.^b

A Free Choice Made Daily

Why, then, did St. Gaspar add the adjective, “free?” Simply to remind us that that is the nature of charity. For love by its very nature is free and voluntary. True genuine love excludes all selfishness and ulterior interests. If it is a love that proceeds from God and is inspired in the heart by the Holy Spirit, it cannot but be free in the deepest and widest sense of the word, for, as St. Paul says: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3: 17). In Romans 6: 1, 15, 22, the same apostle says more about freedom for the service of God and for the service of the brethren.

By this expression, therefore, our founder wished to say:

- Nothing constrains us to remain in the Society and to persevere in our vocation except our free, personal, spontaneous, voluntary choice; a choice dictated by the love of God and of our brethren, and renewed day by day (one might even say moment by moment) with acts of joyful and sacrificial love.
- It is only this free, personal spontaneity which, day by day, brings it about that we really embrace the Society, the sum total of the ideals and values which give it life, as well as the prescriptions and structures which join it firmly together; thus the observance of the *Rule*, loved and freely offered, assures us ever more of perseverance in our vocation.

^b*Processo Apostolico Romano*, Vol. II p. 952; Sessione 122, del 12-11-1863. *Editor's note*: This is a reference to the proceedings of the process for the beatification carried out in Rome.

- It is only this free and personal resolve which caused us to choose a life of priestly perfection and the following of Christ along the way of the evangelical counsels, within the framework, however, of our rules and not in a manner extraneous to the charism of our Society. How precious is this freedom which, in its daily exercise, witnesses to our love for God and the brethren! How deep and vital must this love be within us, so that we may never need any other help or support outside of our own freedom, to be the unbreakable bond in our personal life, in our life in the Society, and in our apostolic activity! For that reason St. Gaspar used to ask these disturbing questions: “Do we possess that love of God which qualifies us to enter the sanctuary?”⁵² “Why are we in our Society?”⁵³
- I think that it is urgent for the survival of our Congregation to rediscover the true Gasparian meaning of the “bond of free charity.” In that discovery we will find the solution to all the tormenting problems which are afflicting our renewal efforts. I mention three in particular:
 - o *The seeming conflict between personal freedom and law.* The bond of charity leads us to love everything that the *Normative Texts* offer us, not merely to tolerate it with resignation, just to avoid trouble, or out of sluggish apathy. No, we are led to really love it, in such a way as to make it a part of ourselves, so that we can truly say: these norms of life are not being imposed on me from without; they are not a hostile attack upon my personality. No, it is I myself who am choosing them and imposing them on myself, and I consider it my joy and my boast to be thus bound, for it is my heart which, day by day, tightens this bond ever tighter. If my bond in regard to the laws is really my own freedom, where is there any longer any conflict between

them? It is a situation in which one can exclaim in the words of Psalm 84: 11: "Justice and peace shall kiss."

- o Another problem which is discussed so much today, is that of *spontaneity*. The free and joyful giving of oneself to the Society and to the brethren gives the genuine character of spontaneity to everything that in charity the *Rule* and the authorities ask of us, and in charity finds justification. It is a spontaneity worthy of a human being and of a Christian, especially of a person called to a special perfection of Christian life. Spontaneity has nothing in common with impulsiveness, caprice, sentimentality, and emotionalism. Rather, it is a free, conscious and responsible choice. It is fidelity and consistency in regard to a choice made, and a sense of duty to defend that choice precisely against the assaults of impulsiveness, caprice, sentimentality and emotionalism. St. Gaspar pointed out to those who even in his day were agitating this problem, although a little more timidly than today: "It is not the walls of the combination of companions that make us better, but the victory over self-love."⁵⁴ "The root of our ills is within ourselves, my dearly beloved, and not in the walls, or in the climes in which we happen to be."⁵⁵
- o The third problem which disturbs us so much today is the *relaxation of our lifestyle* that has crept in especially in these last years. We all have a share in the responsibility, and I do not exempt myself. With the praiseworthy intention of counteracting a certain external and mechanical, stereotyped and formalistic observance, fetishism to a certain extent, which could easily creep into the observance in the past, we have gone too far in the opposite direction. Come! Let

us admit it in a brotherly spirit! If we stir up in ourselves that genuine bond of charity as intended by St. Gaspar, we will certainly regain the right balance.

We have seen that, for our founder, charity is not vain romanticism, nor a Trojan horse, which in its spacious belly brings in all sorts of abuses. Neither is it a merry, convivial camaraderie of a broadly permissive type, but it is something extremely serious, carrying with it obligations, and much more sacred than any bond of the vows, because it is the bond of perfection. It follows from all this that every manner of living or being deliberately contrary or systematically alien to the style of life handed on to us by the founder and presented to us by our *Normative Texts* is a violation of the bond of charity. This cannot be considered a personal affair, but is an attack upon the fraternal love which binds us together and it is infidelity to the love of Christ who has called us to live together.

To summarize this second characteristic of our spirituality, which completes the first one and removes all ambiguity from it, we will say: "For us the rule is to abide by the *Rule*, because we are joined to the Society and to one another by the bond of free charity."

Such a bond, however, in the mind of our founder, does not have a mere static and constitutive function, in so far as it unites us, but it also, and above all, has a dynamic action. In his treatise, "A General Idea of the Society," which our saint presented to Leo XII, the bond which unites the members of the Society is called "the bond of unity for the ministry," by means of which "we activate ourselves for the apostolate which is so necessary for the glory of God."⁵⁶ He calls it that because we are united by the bond of charity, in so far as we all together, by means of the apostolate, "must build a dam against the torrent of vice, and be a wall of defense for the house of the Lord."⁵⁷

SANCTIFYING ONESELF FOR THE APOSTOLATE AND BY MEANS OF THE APOSTOLATE
(Rule, art. 1, 2)

Our founder desired a spirituality that was distinctly apostolic for his Congregation. Perhaps, at this point, an in-depth discussion of the meaning and implications of this word would be in place. However, I do not think that it is in place here to expatiate on the discussions which, especially since the Second Vatican Council, have developed concerning this subject, in regard to the clergy and to the religious and the Catholic laity. The only thing we must bear in mind is that the apostolate of which St. Gaspar speaks is that which flows, as an unavoidable duty, from the ministerial priesthood, and not from any other source, because the members of the Society “belong to the secular clergy” and their general rule of life and activity “is that which is common to every faithful minister of the Lord.”⁵⁸

We must also bear in mind that the apostolate (or “ministry,” the synonym used by our founder) is the apostolate of the Word, especially in the form of popular missions and retreats, because in his *Rule* he states: “Their principal duty is to occupy themselves in preaching missions and giving retreats.”^{59c}

It is very important to point out that our founder included in the scope of the apostolate of the Word not only the extraordinary and itinerant ministry, but also

^c*Translator's note:* It should be pointed out that in Italy, the people were never so parish-conscious as people in the United States, for example. The mission houses of which St. Gaspar speaks always had a church attached; not strictly a parish church, but a church open to the public, and which performed many functions of the parish church as we know them, except strictly parochial functions like Baptisms, marriages, funerals and the like.

the ordinary and local ministry with its various ramifications, which included such functions as the evening oratory, directing various sodalities and other pious associations which included all classes of peoples. It included the ministry in prisons, hospitals, and monasteries, regular preaching and the administration of the sacraments, and any other pastoral activity proper to a mission house.

For St. Gaspar every mission house was “a continuous urban mission because of the continual instruction given the people by the various members of the house; this ministry is of such importance,” insists our saint, “that it is a special grace of the Lord to be called to it.”⁶⁰ This shows that, in his opinion, the ordinary and local ministry was the apostolate of the Word no less than the extraordinary missions. The ordinary and local ministry was also a true “mission” and in a certain sense was even more demanding than the extraordinary missions, because it was “continuously taking place.” This broad and full sense of the expression, “apostolate of the Word,” is becoming more and more accepted in our days, because it has become accepted that every kind of pastoral activity of the church, from the administration of Baptism to the offering of the Eucharist, from the sacramental life to that of the social life of Christians, must be understood above all as evangelization, namely: the announcement of the Good News of Christ, and this is the same as “a mission continuously going on,” as St. Gaspar used to call it.⁶¹

Personal Sanctification Overflows into the Apostolate

With the foregoing explanations as a background, we cannot help emphasizing the fact that our founder places “at the very beginning” of his *Rule*, like an inscription on the facade of a temple, the ideal of the apostolate of the Word coupled with that of one’s own sanctification: “They shall devote themselves not only to

the acquiring of their own perfection, but shall also have at heart the salvation of others.”⁶² Upon this “twofold spirit . . . for the renewal of ourselves and that of others,”⁶³ our saint insisted continuously. Could this, perhaps, be a case of two distinct ideals which could be taken separately, and on occasion set up one against the other with efforts to show that the first is superior to the second, or that this one has precedence over the other?

In a purely monastic and religious spirituality, such a dialectic could take place, but it is absolutely excluded from the apostolic spirituality of a priestly character such as wished by St. Gaspar. For him to sanctify oneself and to save souls were two things so closely united as to form one sole ideal. One can say that, according to his thought on the matter, there was between these two concepts a continuous interchange of values, a happy circle of reciprocal enrichment: personal sanctification is for the apostolate, and the apostolate, in turn, furthers the personal sanctification. The two are inseparable and indispensable for the spirituality of our Society. These statements can be backed by our founder’s own words.

In the first place, *personal sanctification is directed to the apostolate*. In the writings of St. Gaspar there always stands out the necessity of the interior, contemplative life and one of intimate union with God. However, he never speaks of this as a goal in itself, but always in relation to the apostolate.

Our holy Society provides us with those means through which we are to cultivate an ever more and more vigorous virtue. Days of recollection, meditation, silence, examination of conscience and all those other practices we have in our *Praxis*. Oh! How they help to strengthen the spirit and to make progress in ecclesiastical perfection! . . . Upon this internal cultivation of the spirit depends the external life of the ministry.⁶⁴

In a circular letter for the annual retreat, he writes:

Each one of us should examine himself well about the purpose for his being in the Society. A virtuous detachment from all things and people, self conquest, and the eradication of inordinate inclinations are, without any doubt, the prerequisites for performing the ministry entrusted to us by God, and performing it well . . . How blessed are we, if a prompt fulfillment of the Divine Will serves as the mystical food to nourish and strengthen our souls!⁶⁵

In a special way he recommends a

. . . continuous inner converse with God . . . a deep study of humility . . . a flaming desire for the inner and hidden life in the adorable wounds of the Crucified, whence we will derive strength to wage war against the powers of hell and gain the most glorious victories over them . . . And to what pains does not the demon go in order to harm those who work for the glory of God? . . . However, one glance at the Divine Blood, and we are aroused to toil with untiring zeal, to work in the true spirit of God.⁶⁶

To Father Domenico Silvestri he wrote:

Oh, how sweet, my dearest Father, is the voice of God in our heart during the periods of silence and seclusion! It is then that we are kindled with the most tender love; then filled with such great love for our Lord, our words will be so many darts directed at the hearts of our listeners.⁶⁷

We have just seen that our saint recommended, in his exhortation to foster the interior life, “a deep study of humility.” It is worth the trouble to pause here a moment and dwell upon this virtue which has a very

special place in the spirituality which he wished to communicate to his Society. So true is this, that he assigned a special saying or maxim on this virtue in rhyme, for each day of the month, to be read after the meditation in common. He made it the object of the daily examen of conscience. He also had placards posted in all the rooms with these aphorisms printed on them, as well as another placard with the “Salutary Admonitions,” because he wanted these two to be, as it were, the “Magna Carta” of the spirituality of the Missionaries.⁶⁸

Why did our saint insist continually upon this virtue of humility? Because of the special influence this virtue has on the apostolate. Here are his words:

Since the Lord makes use of humble souls for the great works of his glory, thus in order to come into special communion with God, let us resolve upon an even more perfect acquisition of the virtue of holy humility . . . Did not the Savior once say to the Apostles, ‘I send you as lambs among wolves?’ And did he not humble himself for the love of men unto the death of the Cross? . . . This practice of humility will bring it about that as the humble shepherd, Moses, by means of his miraculous rod made himself dreaded in Egypt, so will the docility, in obedience, and, above all, assiduous prayer directed to the throne of mercy, to obtain ever greater graces, courage and strength for the ministry.⁶⁹

In order to make the influence of humility upon the apostolate even better understood, our saint used to make use of the biblical comparison of the field of stubble invaded by a fire (Wisdom 3: 7). To be penetrated by the heavenly fire of the love for God which launches us into the apostolate, it is necessary to be as the stubble: “The stubble is especially susceptible to the action of fire because since it is hollow it is easily enveloped by the flames. Now, are we emptied of ourselves?”⁷⁰ It is

precisely the virtue of humility which makes us such, and prepares us to be engulfed by the flames of apostolic charity.

The Apostolate as a Means to Personal Sanctification

We have seen that according to the spirit of St. Gaspar, our sanctification, our interior life, and the virtues that go to make it up, are all for the sake of the apostolate. Now let us examine its companion piece, or call it the reverse side of the same coin, or something like the reversed picture of oneself in the mirror: the apostolate itself is a wonderful way to personal sanctification.

Saint Gaspar writes: "Can anyone fail to realize that since the ministry is branching out into so many fields of operation, it is directing us to lead irreproachable lives?"⁷¹ We are being led in that direction, in the first place, because it is a continuous stimulus, a spur continually dug into the priestly soul, rousing its sense of responsibility and impelling it to honor the great name of "missionary" with a holy life, "because people consider Missionaries holy men, and that is also the expectation of the Church!"⁷²

The apostolic life is based upon the interior life of the spirit. Now, are we men of the spirit . . . fit to be teachers of the people and the sanctifiers of their souls? . . . Even if we sacrifice our health in the ministry, woe to us if we are not entirely animated with charity . . . But blessed are we if at the foot of the Cross we will acquire that life of the spirit which indeed is the soul of every holy undertaking.⁷³

Could it be possible that we, custodians of the heavenly treasures and dispensers of the same to others, should be lacking all those good things?⁷⁴

In these and in a hundred other ways our saint made his Missionaries realize the incentives for their own sanctification which arose from the ideal of the apostolate.

However, according to St. Gaspar this ideal leads us “to an irreproachable life,” not only because it spurs us on to it, but also, and above all, because the apostolate itself is an exercise of the most precious virtues.

The sweet yoke of the ministry, what a gold mine it is for gaining treasures for heaven!⁷⁵

Deepest humility, most ardent and impartial charity, and patience which is indomitable amidst suffering and wonderfully productive of virtuous acts: these are the riches that should adorn us for our own salvation and that of others.⁷⁶

“These are the triumphs of the holiness”⁷⁷ which flow from the exercise of the apostolate. And in other places he says:

Let the thought that we belong to a Society which offers such a broad opportunity for laying up treasures in heaven . . . spur us on to run the course of apostolic life with bold and swift strides, for it will render our days full of merit and of virtue.⁷⁸

Let us be resolved, therefore, not only to walk but to run along the ways of the apostolic life for which God has called us.⁷⁹

In his third circular letter for retreats, our founder discusses a difficulty which is common enough in those who dedicate themselves to the apostolate. In our weakness we get so immersed in the activities of the ministry that often we neglect ourselves, and “we dispense the divine treasures to souls, while we remain poor perhaps and needy through our own fault,” and then we are assailed by a sense of fear and we ask ourselves whether

“it would not be better to abandon what we have undertaken, namely, the apostolate among the people.” But he quickly squashes this difficulty by having recourse to the sanctifying power of the apostolate itself, and by recalling the exhortation of St. Paul to his disciple, Timothy:

‘Fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you [2 Tm. 1, 6].’ From these considerations it does not follow that we should abandon what we have undertaken, namely, the apostolate among the people; for as St. Paul continues to say, ‘In this way you will save both yourself and those who listen to you’ [1 Tm. 4, 16].⁵

That is to say, it is precisely by keeping alive in yourself and by exercising the charism of the apostolate which was communicated to you in your priestly ordination, that you will save yourself and those who listen to you.

The devil will tempt:

. . . by suggesting something very attractive to you under the guise of some outstanding virtue, but in which you would not be able to persevere; from this disillusionment would follow sluggishness, sloth, despondency, and even the temptation to be disgusted with anything good.

To triumph completely over the infernal enemy who would desire to have us abandon the apostolate by giving in to such faintheartedness, our holy founder invites us “to give one glance at the Divine Blood, and by that we are aroused to toil with untiring zeal, to work in the true spirit of God.”

As a result, what a rich and joyful panorama of sanctity the exercise of the ministry will offer us!

We shall work, indeed, but we shall be equipped with such strength that in our labors no voice of

flesh or blood nor of any other human desire will be heard . . . We shall work with such cheerfulness and holy delight in God, that as we encourage one another to keep on toiling, we will carry the cross of Jesus with joy and jubilation, achieving the salvation of our neighbor as well. And because this cross is the golden ladder to heaven, we shall never cease to repeat: 'I am filled with consolation, and despite my many afflictions my joy knows no bounds.'⁸⁰

Consequently, the apostolic labors, [concludes our saint] the perseverance in the ministry, and the suffering in defense of the various activities for saving souls, instead of depressing us, should encourage us to imitate our divine Master and Exemplar: thus 'we shall have undertaken a wonderful journey.'

That is to say, we have taken the marvelous road to sanctity.

Oh, what a sweet consolation to be able thus to spend our life as a worthy holocaust for the greater honor of God and for the welfare of souls! What an interesting, what a glorious career the Most High offers us, and what laurels, what crowns in reward for it.⁸¹

Personal Holiness and Apostolate are Necessary for Spirituality

We now come to the third statement, in which our founder draws the conclusion from the two preceding ones, namely, that personal sanctification overflows into the apostolate, and the apostolate offers us a marvelous way to personal sanctification. *Both are inseparably necessary for our spirituality.* He states this with systematic clearness, choosing his words with care:

Let the Missionary be a contemplative in his cell, and a hard worker in the field. Let him join

the interior life to the active, maintaining a holy balance with God's help. The interior life is the basis for the active life, and the active builds on that foundation. If the interior life is lacking, the edifice lacks a foundation; if the active life (the edifice) caves in, it is not being built according to God's plan for us.⁸²

The characteristic way to that sanctity proper to our vocation requires, therefore, the one and the other element: the interior life, the life of intimate union with God is necessary. At the same time and for the same reason, the active life of the apostolate of the Word is also necessary. We sanctify ourselves in order to sanctify others, and we sanctify others in order to sanctify ourselves at the same time. A fascinating program of life! Let us pray, says our holy founder, that we may be able to appreciate its beauty and to put it into practice: "It is prayer that directs the erection of this [spiritual] edifice, lends stateliness to its design, zest in its execution, and directs good taste in its adornment."⁸³

This ideal is offered and put into execution by our *Rule*, because everything in it is directed:

. . . toward strengthening the spirit, and making progress in ecclesiastical perfection . . . and toward all our activity in furthering the goals which tend towards the glory of the Lord.⁸⁴

It is animated, supported and furthered by and in the bond of charity, for:

. . . it is a holy and delightful thing to have people live in the unity of charity: 'Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!' [Psalm 133]—good for our sanctification, pleasant for the glories of the ministry.

We must, therefore, conclude this section also by going back to the formula of our founder:

For us the rule is to abide by the *Rule*, in order that, being joined to the Society and to one another by the bond of free charity, we may be able to sanctify ourselves, for the purpose of sanctifying others and by sanctifying others, through the apostolate of the Word.

UNDER THE BANNER OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Our spirituality would lack its most characteristic, its most outstanding and beautiful note (if one may be permitted to express it thus) if we would not add that it is illuminated, penetrated, and vitalized by the devotion to the Blood of Christ from which the Congregation gets its name. The emphasis upon the mystery of the Blood is so strong in the writings of our founder that in the *Constitutions* of 1946 and those of 1964 it was stated that the principal purpose of the Society was the propagation of the cult and devotion to the Blood of Christ.

Mind you, there was no question of a distortion of the mind of Gaspar, as it might seem to some. In fact, it would be very easy to show that in the writings of St. Gaspar, as well as in those of the first Missionaries, the purpose of the Society is found to be expressed in just such terms. All we have to do is read, for example, the memorandum sent to Pius VIII,⁸⁵ the famous defense of the title “of the Most Precious Blood” to Leo XII,⁸⁶ some letters to Monsignor Cristaldi^d and to some other prelates.^e Finally, article 5 of the *Rule*, which speaks of

^d*Letter 1200* notes that Pius VI erected the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood, and that the said Archconfraternity “was to have Missionaries capable of propagating such an important devotion . . . is incontrovertible from its *Constitutions*.”

^eCf. *Letter 509* to Cardinal Della Somaglia of Velletri: he

the devotion to the Most Precious Blood, belongs with the other four to the first title, “The Proposed End of the Society.”⁸⁷

St. Gaspar does not distinguish and specify exactly the special end of the Congregation—the apostolate or the spreading of the devotion to the Precious Blood. This is technical and philosophical language, foreign to his mentality. Neither can one say that the expression used in article 2, “their main occupation” will be to dedicate themselves to missions and retreats, is any more forceful and cogent than the expression used in article 5, “let nothing take precedence over preaching devotion to it [the Blood of Christ] and spreading it far and wide.” Therefore, it is very understandable how in a different time and in an ecclesial context different from today’s one could state correctly that the special end or purpose of the Society would be the spread of the cult and devotion to the Precious Blood, the intention being to emphasize that which was the springboard of all the founder’s activity^f and to set a unifying center for all the various types of missions which our Missionaries have taken on due to the demands of times, places, and social

invites him to rejoice in the establishment “of the Mission and Retreat House, which is dedicated in a special way to spreading Devotion to the Most Precious Blood.”

^fThe Missionary Fr. Vincenzo Fontana, one of the first followers of St. Gaspar and a confidant of his, has left us the following testimony which Fr. Merlini in turn relays to us word for word. “In 1824 we were traveling together from Pievevitorina to Giano. (For a part of the way) up to Ponte della Trave, Fr. Camillo Rossi was our companion. While he was with us, the conversation turned to the subject of our Society. (During the discussion someone, I cannot remember who it was, expressed the fear that the Society might be suppressed. I know for certain that [Gaspar] did not broach that subject, but he said that in the event that the Society

conditions—a unification which today, in the light of the clear statements of Vatican II and post-conciliar studies, can and even must be happily realized in the full and pregnant sense of the term, apostolate of the Word, or evangelization.

However, the old formula which specified the devotion to the Divine Blood as the end of the Society, had another justification or, if you will, another vindication, which is worthy of special consideration.

Spreading Devotion to the Blood of Christ

Granted that this manner of expression is not adapted to the modern ecclesial mentality because, on the one hand, it seems childish (how could a

would be suppressed, he would have a remedy at hand. His plan would be to call to Rome all those who would want to be his companions; they would then go together to the Propaganda Fide and would offer themselves to that Sacred Congregation. If that Congregation would not want to accept them, then he would rent an apartment in some building in Rome; there he would have them live, and distributed throughout the city of Rome working like porters (i.e., doing work nobody else would like to do) in the city by doing what good they could do in the prisons, in the hospitals and elsewhere; he concluded his discourse by saying: ‘and we would always remain Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood’ (by which I am certain that he meant that in the exercise of our apostolic ministry we would be able to have a means by which to honor and propagate the devotion of the Most Precious Blood).” (Cf. C.P.P.S. general archives, “Notizie del Fond. II,” p. 835 (935)—Processo Ordinario di Albano, Vol. IV, pp. 2090 to 2091, and Vol. III, p. 1167). From the above words of St. Gaspar it can be deduced that his most profound thought in founding the Society, his uppermost inspiration which remains even in the event of the suppression of the Community as a Society for giving missions and retreats, would be the love for the Most Precious Blood: “And we would always remain Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood.”

congregation identify itself with the spreading of a devotion?), and on the other, it might seem a particularistic pietism, while today the Church's whole attention is directed to the person of Christ and the Paschal Mystery.

However, the idea of devotion will appear less strange if one comes to understand what devotion to the Precious Blood meant for Gaspar. It is not a question of a devotion in a particularistic or pietistic sense, but in the wide and Thomistic sense of the word. Rather than a devotion, it is a theology which embraces not one solitary mystery, but *all* the mysteries of our religion. St. Gaspar saw them all centered in the mystery of the Blood, which coincides with the Paschal Mystery of salvation.

Here are some of his more striking statements.

In this devotion the whole Faith is condensed in a nutshell; all the mysteries converge in the infinite Price of Redemption, like the lines of a circle meet in a common center. Other devotions are all meant to help Catholic piety, but this one is its basis, its support, its essence.

—It includes in itself all the other devotions.

—In this devotion we have the treasures of wisdom and of holiness, in it is our comfort, our peace, our salvation.

—Therefore this devotion is the one which renews our religion in its basic principles, in its practices, in its glories.⁸⁸

He not only made statements, but backed them up with solid proofs from the Scriptures, the fathers, the liturgy, Church history, unfolding before our eyes the whole immense panorama of the truths of faith, the mystery of Christ, the history of salvation from the beginnings of time until the final glory of the Church. In all this he points out that everything takes on light and meaning from the central mystery of the Blood, namely:

from the person of Christ taken in its truest and deepest identity: the Word Incarnate who out of love shed his Blood in the sacrifice of salvation.⁸⁹ This is a veritable theology which St. Gaspar offers, and not just a simple devotion.

Here permit me to disagree with some other interpretations of our devotion, which reduce it to just one of so many different ways of looking at Jesus, being attracted to him, imitating him, and making him the illuminating source of our own spirituality. Some say that just as, for example, there are those who are especially attracted by the mystery of his infancy, or by his youth at Nazareth, or by his hidden life or his life of manual labor, or by his public life as a preacher, or as a poor man among the poor, or the good Samaritan among the sick, etc., etc., so we concentrate on Jesus in the sheddings of his Blood, and to this mystery we owe our particular spirituality. Now this is certainly a valid and respectable way of presenting our devotion; but in this way it remains on a particularistic level and markedly devotional, although taken in the best sense of that word.

The picture Gaspar presents is entirely different. For him the mystery of the Blood embraces all the other mysteries of the life of Christ, from the incarnation to Calvary, from Calvary to the glorification, from his mediation before the Father until the glorious, triumphant finale. In every one of them the Precious Blood stands out as the *raison d'être*, because to all of them it gives their salvific value and coordinates them all to the glory of the Father and for the salvation of humankind by means of the passage from death to life. The Blood of Christ is offered continually in the Eucharistic mystery; it is applied to souls in all the sacraments; it vivifies spiritually the whole Church; produces holiness, and brings about that intimate alliance of God with his people, which was foretold and prefigured in the blood of the ancient sacrifices.

This view, so wide as to include everything, St. Gaspar clearly outlines in his writings where he speaks of the devotion to the Blood, and especially in the various defenses of the Society and its title, which he directed to the popes. It stands out in the booklet, *The Month of the Most Precious Blood*, composed by Strambi, but certainly inspired by our Saint Gaspar, a booklet to which he always referred when treating this subject.⁹⁰

It is studied and treated more thoroughly in the writings of the first Missionaries, witnesses of the spirituality handed down by the founder, and especially in the learned work of Enrico Rizzoli,⁹¹ which is a tapestry of scriptural and patristic quotations. Let us be convinced, therefore, that the devotion to the Blood is not thought of as a particular devotion to one of the mysteries of the life of Christ, but as a universal theology, or, if you prefer, as “*the devotion*” of the whole Church because, as we again repeat with St. Gaspar, “in it is summarized the faith itself; it includes all the other devotions; it puts new life into religion in its principles, in its practices, in its glories.”

If that is the case, then to spread this devotion can only mean in the first place the preaching of the truths of the faith by means of missions and retreats and other forms of the apostolate, recalling souls to the love of Jesus crucified, and applying to all people in the largest measure possible the riches of graces which have their source in the Blood of Christ. St. Gaspar wrote: “The world is stained with sin and therefore it needs to have workers who will apply the redemption since it was precisely: *redemisti in Sanguine and fecisti nos Deo nostro regnum et sacerdotes* ‘you have redeemed us in your Blood and have made us a kingdom and priests for our God.’”⁹²

Devotion to the Blood Remains Central to Our Identity

It was said above that this idea appears less strange in the older formulation of the specific purpose of the

Congregation, expressed as the spreading of the devotion to the Divine Blood. However, it should be pointed out that the same idea is still most valid and basic even today to let us penetrate our identity as Missionaries of the Precious Blood. For even though devotion to the Blood is no longer stated to be the purpose of the Society, it still ever remains the most characteristic note of our spirituality. The first thing to say, therefore, about such a spirituality is this: it is a spirituality eminently catholic, that is universal, ecclesial and therefore polyvalent, even “omnivalent” in the sense expounded by St. Gaspar, which is that of Scripture and tradition ever alive in the Church.

In no way does it foster the spirit of particularity or of the ghetto. We, a Congregation of secular priests dedicated to the apostolate of the Word, have drawn our communitarian and apostolic style of life not from some particular source, but from our being priests of the Church and for the Church.[§] We do not seek refuge in any particular or restricted source of our spiritual life and vigor. Rather, we immerse ourselves in the limitless spirituality of the Church herself, where the center of light and attraction is the person of Christ, who by means of the Paschal Sacrifice of his death and resurrection redeems and saves the human race in his Blood: “The sacrifice which is renewed mystically and really in the Mass, and gives meaning and direction to the life of a Christian,” as Pope John XXIII said.⁹³

[§]*Editor's note:* One must recall that this article was written more than thirty years ago and reflects not only the early history of the Congregation but also the experience of the Italian Province of his day which had few brother members. The situation is surely different today in light of later developments in understanding the spirituality of the Blood of Christ and the nature of the Congregation.

This is the spirituality which is breathed in deeply, especially in the liturgy of the Church—in that prior to Vatican II and much more so in the postconciliar liturgy. It is a fact that in the liturgy of the Mass, as well as in the Liturgy of the Hours, every mystery which is celebrated is presented, explicitly or implicitly, in relation to the Blood of salvation. In fact, in the ferial liturgy of each week day there appear in the form of canticles and in the form of meditations the wonderful texts from the letters of St. Paul and from the Book of Revelation, which St. Gaspar used to cite as the basis of his whole teaching on the redeeming Blood. How this would have pleased St. Gaspar! With the same sentiments we, too, should enjoy this and imbibe this grand ecclesial and catholic spirituality.

Devotion to the Blood Is a Dynamic Force

Viewed in this way, devotion to the Most Precious Blood is offered us by our founder as the dynamic or motivating idea (*idea-forza*) for implementing our common vocation in the bond of charity and to quicken our apostolic zeal for our own sanctification and that of others. Using, as has already been pointed out, the biblical image of the wine cellar, he says:

The need for our spiritual advancement in virtue, the twofold spirit which we must acquire for the renewal of ourselves and that of others, the particular and general needs of the Church

. . .

impel us to accept the invitation of Jesus, who wishes to take us into his heart, “the center of peace, the furnace of love, the ark of safety, the mystical wine cellar.”⁹⁴

Here let us in time establish our sweet abode, and here let us reinforce the foundations of the holy city of God by the bond of charity. [Here let us yearn for] the sublime degrees of holiness

. . . and for the love for Jesus, who out of love has redeemed us, who with love has shed all his Blood, and through which we have our mystical dwelling in his heart.⁹⁵

And again:

We must acquire fervor and spiritual thirst for souls. But who will acquire it, if not he who stands at the mystical fountain of the wounds of Jesus Christ? Meditating then on the Mysteries of the Divine Blood, one feels a great zeal for the salvation of men . . . and let us pray for one another in order that in holy concordance and unity of spirit [we may be] united in the bond of peace in the heart of Jesus Christ Crucified.⁹⁶

We are thus united in the bond of charity, by Jesus Christ “who has redeemed us by his Blood,” as Gaspar said so often in his writings.

Here is another meaningful text:

As the Lord does not fail to supply every creature with the means conducive to the attainment of its end, so to us in particular he offers the Red Sea, a symbol and type of the mysteries of his Precious Blood, by which, while providing for our welfare [our personal sanctification], at the same time the mystical soil of souls, arid because of the sins of humanity, is cultivated and watered [the apostolate] . . . What a glorious career the Most High is offering us! For this end let us pray, and confirming ourselves in sentiments of fraternal charity . . . let us inspire each other with the ideals of fervor, learning, and zeal, in the exercise of the ministry.⁹⁷

In short, our holy founder continually groups the various elements of our spirituality in a cluster around the dominant idea of the Blood of Christ, which he points

out to us as the unifying center of our spirituality and the mark belonging characteristically to our Society. "Let them hold nothing more important than to serve under the banner and the title of the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁹⁸

Here one might object: If the devotion to the Precious Blood is universal and ecclesial in the widest sense of the word, how can it be said to be proper to and characteristic of our Society? The term, "proper to," must not be taken in a "restrictive" sense, as if meaning an unavailable area, a sort of spiritual monopoly. Nor should it be understood in the sense that it contains elements which may not be common to all Christians, because, as Blessed John XXIII pointed out (and this is also St. Gaspar's position), although the title of the Most Precious Blood distinguishes us in the Church, "nevertheless every Christian is our brother by the very fact of belonging to the inheritance of Christ, since he redeemed all people in his Blood" (Rv. 5, 9).⁹⁹ Therefore every true Christian cannot help being devoted to the Most Precious Blood.

The term, "proper to," must be taken in its "intensive" sense, in as much as we Missionaries of the Precious Blood are called to live this spirituality with greater intensity, with a more living faith, with a clearer and deeper consciousness, and greater fervor in our prayers and works.

In other words, we must, like St. Gaspar, acquire the conviction that every truth of our faith, every principle of morality, every sacrament, Christian life as a whole, the practice of virtue, the struggle against sin, in a word, anything connected with religion and Christianity is based upon, is centered and rooted in, is illuminated, motivated and animated by the glorious mystery of the Blood which is being continually renewed on the altars, forming the heart of the Church of Christ. This consciousness we must foster in ourselves by the study of the Scriptures, the fathers, the documents of

the magisterium, and the works of Christian writers (here I mention only the letters of St. Catherine of Siena, a doctor of the Church, and a writer closer to our times, Father Frederick William Faber).¹⁰⁰

We must deepen this consciousness in our hearts by meditation and prayer; we must enrich it with our experience, personal and communitarian. Nor should we be afraid of going beyond bounds in exaggeration, because no matter what we do or say we will never reach the magnificence and grandeur of vision that St. Paul offers in his letters and St. John in the Revelation.

That being the case, perhaps someone might say that our spirituality should consist in being able to give a “tint of red” to everything, whether relevant or irrelevant! Without meaning to resort to irony, I would say that this red tint does not have to be given by us (that would be absurd and ridiculous), but is already there in our whole religion. It is the Lord, who wanted religion—namely, our relations with him—to be marked, tinted red, because he established it in the bloody sacrifice of the cross of his Son. In both the Old and New Testaments God wanted to communicate with humanity, and have human beings communicate with him, by means of the sacrament of Blood. The whole history of salvation is a marvelous fresco painted by the Supreme Artist in the bright red of the Blood of his Son. What remains for us to do is to become aware of it, to discover its beauties and make them stand out, to nourish our hearts on it.

If we diligently foster this conviction and let ourselves be enchanted by it, then we will understand why our founder gave it to us as the dynamic or motivating idea (*idea-forza*) for our common life based on the bond of charity, and especially for our sanctification and for the apostolate for which it is a most effective stimulus, source of courage and generosity and a sure pledge of victory over evil: “They overcame the dragon by the Blood of the Lamb” (Rv. 12, 11).

The Object of Our Apostolate

Does St. Gaspar stop with this? No, he does not. In article 5 of his *Rule* he gives the “devotion to the Most Precious Blood” also as the “object” of our apostolate. “They will consider nothing more important than to practice devotion to [the Precious Blood] and to spread it far and wide.” In fact, in the famous letter of March 15, 1815, in a large part so programmatic, he writes thus to Father Gaetano Bonanni, but gives credit for the idea to Cristaldi:

The ‘Preachers of the Gospel’^h labor that the Blood of Jesus may be applied to the salvation of souls; this Blood they should offer continuously to beg pardon for sinners. If other Societies take upon themselves to spread this or that devotion, this Mission Society should be committed to the spread of the devotion which includes all the others, that is, the Price of our Redemption. By Blood have we been saved.

Therefore, concludes our saint, “our Society is now entrusted to the merits of the Blood of Jesus.”¹⁰¹

We are, therefore, Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, not only because, nourished by this spirituality, we live together in the bond of charity and we sanctify ourselves for the ministry and by the exercise of the ministry, but also in order to communicate this devotion to others as widely as possible. We cannot possibly excuse ourselves from this duty without betraying the charism of our founder. Even today, just as in the days of our saint, there is a great need for spreading it among Christians.

^h*Translator's note:* A group of zealous priests organized by Bonanni and including Gaspar, who eventually assumed its leadership; the group in time evolved into the Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

It would seem that, precisely because it is a devotion which is universal and catholic by its nature and part of the Church itself, there should be no need to advertise it, because people should be anxious to drink it in eagerly, so to speak. Sad to say, however, this is not the case. St. Gaspar lamented the fact in his times, and we experience the same thing today. The topic of the Blood, although it occupies such a central position in the Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testaments, is neglected in preaching. There exists a preconceived idea that it is a difficult topic, and so other topics, more pleasant, more in style, less jarring, are preferred. We content ourselves with proclaiming the various truths of our holy faith without taking the trouble to show how they are related to their center of unity, to the ultimate reason behind them all, that is, the sacrifice of love, of the Blood of Jesus, God incarnate. This trend existed in the past and still exists. That is why Gaspar saw the need for spreading “far and wide” the knowledge of and the love for this great mystery.

Bearing in mind the directives our founder left us in his writings, we must spread the devotion to the Precious Blood of Christ in two ways.

First, in a general way, we spread the devotion by getting down to the basic facts. The words of Gaspar, though written more than one hundred fifty years ago, still ring true:

In our miserable times the crisis among the people is a general one, and the perversion of faith and morals is indescribable—to stem the torrent of iniquity—we should recall to the minds of the people the glories of the Cross and Christ Crucified. There should be—therefore—those who preach to the people the glories of the Divine Blood, pointing out that in that Devotion our whole Faith is summed up—as a result, in it rests salvation, the treasures of wisdom and

of holiness. Now is the time to tell the people at what a great Price their souls were bought. We should let them know in what ways the Blood of Jesus cleanses souls and sanctifies them, especially by means of the Sacraments. To shake off today's indifference we should keep reminding the people that this Blood is being offered daily upon our altars, and to counteract blasphemies and profanations we should adore It and glorify It.¹⁰²

Have we noted well the significance of these words? "Recall to the minds of the people—preach—point out—tell the people—let them know—remind them" (apostolic action). About what? The Blood of Christ and its efficacy (the object of the apostolate). In what context? In the whole sphere of religion. Have we noticed how St. Gaspar speaks of faith, morals, the sacraments, the Eucharistic sacrifice, the Christian way of life, worship (the whole range of the apostolate)? In other words, he wants to tell us that it is our duty to spread the devotion to the Blood of Christ as a catholic, ecclesial and omnivalent spirituality which is inherent in all the manifestations of Christianity.

But does that mean that we must always be preaching on the Precious Blood? Not at all! St. Gaspar, although on fire with love for this mystery, did not do that. Rather, it means that if we shall have become habitually conscious of this mystery and have enriched this consciousness by the study and internal experience of which we have spoken, it cannot help surfacing and coming spontaneously to our lips from the fullness of our heart just at the opportune moment, no matter what topic we may be treating in our ministry. Perhaps it could be a mere allusion, a biblical or patristic reference, a simple well-turned phrase, an application that suits a particular occasion. But it will be enough to direct the souls to the heart of all religion; it will be a ray of light

presented without any posing or artificiality, just the right touch to give effect to our words.

Contrary to what some stated foolishly in St. Gaspar's time, and some continue to argue even today, the testimony of the Blood has the power to move, to convince, and finds a ready response in all hearts. It will mean joining our apostolic action to the sacrifice of Christ "which gives meaning and direction to the life of a Christian." This basic procedure, so simple, spontaneous and modest, is very important and has the modest but irresistible power of the drop falling upon a rock—"drop by drop the stone is worn away."

Spreading the Devotion to the Blood of Christ

On the other hand, St. Gaspar would not have been the practical, solid individual, with his feet planted firmly on the ground, which he showed himself to be under all circumstances, if he would have been satisfied with only that. In that case he would have left in a very uncertain, foggy and whimsical state that which was dearest to him. He realized that man needs strong foundations upon which to base his convictions, and practical means to foster them and make them effective. Therefore, he prescribed not only a general form, but also some specific forms of the apostolate for spreading the knowledge and love of the mystery of the Blood of Christ.

That is the reason for his establishing wherever he could the well-known *associations* or *circles*, which organized all the various classes of the faithful in one grand movement of spirituality, and which he united with the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood in Rome. These he fostered even from afar with great care, and wished that his Missionaries should continue to establish and encourage them. It was their duty, in particular, to promote courses of sermons on the Precious Blood (tridua, novenas, months). Thus, upon the members of his Society and upon the faithful, we see him

inculcating means adapted to the mentality of those times, for the practice of and promotion of the devotion to the Blood of Christ.

Among other things we should recall the “Mass of the Chaplet of the Precious Blood.” During its recitation, while there was being renewed upon the altar in a sacramentally real manner the shedding of the redeeming Blood, the faithful were taking part in it in an intimate manner by meditating upon the mysteries of redemption, praying that the Eucharistic sacrifice become effective in their daily lives, and offering it up together with the minister at the altar. We must admit that for the liturgy of that period and the level of education of the masses, it was one of the best means that could be suggested for “praying the Mass” and penetrating its meaning.

There were also the “Seven Offerings” to which our saint attributed a “special efficacy.”¹⁰³ Here it is apropos to mention that especially to the Missionaries he constantly urged the practice of offering up the Blood of Jesus. His letters are full of expressions such as these: “Let us never cease offering the Price of our Redemption for the Church and the eternal salvation of souls.”¹⁰⁴—“for that much desired reconciliation [of enemies]”¹⁰⁵—“for the world, which is in a bad way”¹⁰⁶—“for the desired reform”¹⁰⁷—“in order to confirm, by means of such a noble offering, that holy practice of reparation which is so badly needed in order to placate, the Lord, who is justly angered by the sins of man,”¹⁰⁸ and so on.

There was the “Hour of Adoration and Perpetual Adoration,”ⁱ “because of the pressing need to give continual recompense to the Divine Redeemer for the

ⁱ*Translator's note:* A practice by individuals or families, who would pledge to make such a holy hour in such a way that in that particular parish or town a holy hour would be continually going on, be that in a church or at home.

ingratitude of men.”¹⁰⁹ There was especially the “Month of the Most Precious Blood,” which he called “the great month,”¹¹⁰ and which he spread everywhere with irresistible tenacity, because during this month the preaching was to be on the devotion to the Blood of Christ, bringing out its comprehensiveness and efficacy.

These and similar practices, adapted to the ecclesial and liturgical context of those days, were not the devotion, but only *the means for practicing and spreading the devotion* to the Blood of Christ. Not all of them are suitable to the mentality of today. Are we to conclude, then, that we should be done with external practices? Or worse, confusing the means with the end, and making one bundle of it all, should we say: enough of this insisting on the devotion to the Precious Blood? If we really consider ourselves Missionaries of St. Gaspar, “serving under the banner and name of the Precious Blood,” we cannot accept either conclusion. We must consider it our duty to bring up-to-date, with all the love and skill that we have, the external means, but preserving intact the spirit of the devotion.‡

CONCLUSION

The main artery of our spirituality is the love for Christ, who brings about the salvation of humanity by means of the mystery of his Precious Blood. Into it converge and meet all the other marks of our vocation: our love of the Society and of its *Rule*, which draws its motivation and strength from it; the bond of charity, which is animated and rendered inviolable by it; our own

‡In this connection it would help to avail oneself of the new liturgical calendar, which offers the following solemnities as especially suitable for recalling the mystery of the Blood of Christ: the Passion of our Lord, the Body and Blood of Christ, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the Triumph of the Cross.

particular way of sanctifying ourselves for the apostolate and by means of the apostolate, which finds in it constant stimulus, encouragement, and an inexhaustible source of inspiration and preaching.

So there remains for us only to return once again to the formula of our founder:

For us the rule is to abide by the *Rule* so that united to the Society and to one another by the bond of free charity, we can sanctify ourselves for the purpose of sanctifying others and by sanctifying others, by means of the apostolate of the word, animated by the love for the mystery of the Blood of Christ, which illumines all of our religion and gives meaning and direction to the life of the Christian.

Fr. Luigi Contegiacomo was the postulator general for the cause of St. Gaspar's canonization during the years immediately preceding that event (1954). He was intimately familiar with our founder's writings and transcribed and organized many of his letters and other documents.

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Expressions of the Devotion to the Blood of Christ in the Ministry of St. Gaspar

Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S.

The title of this presentation, “The Expressions of the Devotion to the Blood of Christ in the Ministry of St. Gaspar,” could also be expressed in another way: “Cultic practices (*pratiche di culto*) promoted by St. Gaspar in honor of the Blood of Christ in his ministry.” By “cultic practices,” I mean both those activities that are properly liturgical as well as pious exercises and other devotional expressions.

St. Gaspar was “the true and greatest Apostle of the Blood of Christ,” not only because he centered his missionary ministry on preaching the “Gospel of the Blood of Christ,” but also because he stimulated a great movement of adoration of the price of our redemption, a movement not recorded before him. D. Ferdinando Angelici confirms this observation on the practice of the devotion to the Blood of Christ in the Marches before and after Gaspar’s apostolate there:

. . . I know that [the] infinite price of our redemption came to be venerated and invoked in our area in a generic way . . . but . . . after the preaching of [St. Gaspar] it began to be venerated and invoked *in a very special way*.¹

In this article I do not want to treat St. Gaspar so much as an adorer and Apostle of the Blood of Christ, which I have written about elsewhere,² but rather I want to present the cultic expressions (*le espressioni di culto*) that he promoted for practicing devotion to the Precious Blood.

No devotion can continue to exist without its worship or devotional practices. These both manifest the devotion as well as nourish it. Thus, St. Gaspar, who wanted to spread a lively devotion to the Blood of Christ among the faithful, also recommended its expression in worship and he spread appropriate practices of Precious Blood piety.

Gaspar wrote to Leo XII:

Sinners are abusing the Divine Blood horribly and the Lord, in the transports of his love, is saying: '*Quae utilitas in Sanguine meo?*' 'Of what use is my Blood?' (Psalm 29: 10) So, is there not anyone who will, through this *sacred, solemn cult, procure adoration in compensation* . . .³

To Cardinal Cristaldi, he wrote on June 29, 1827: "It is a just thing to render a cult of special compensation, especially in our times, to Jesus who continues to repeat: *quae utilitas in Sanguine meo?*"⁴

Elsewhere Gaspar, exhorting the faithful to observe special practices during the month of June, which at that time had been dedicated to the Precious Blood, he says:

It was appropriate, therefore, O faithful ones, that to compensate for the ingratitude of humankind that we consecrate this month to adoration of the Divine Blood, and through it our hearts will be moved.⁵

Similar exhortations to have a special cult of the Divine Blood are frequent in the writings of St. Gaspar.⁶

The aims that he chose in the practices of this cult were the same that he had proposed to achieve in the spread of the devotion: compensation to the Redeemer, reconciliation with God, and the sanctification of souls. In these three general ends were included particular aims.⁷

St. Gaspar wanted the worship of the Blood, which could be either private or public,⁸ to be perpetual.⁹ He wanted to see “a huge army of souls who, with solemn worship, [would seek] to make compensation for the many wrongs that Jesus receives.”¹⁰

The expressions of worship recommended by the saint were many and diverse. For convenience, we will organize them under the following titles: the Eucharistic mystery and the sacraments, the liturgical feast of the Precious Blood, contemplation of the mystery of the Divine Blood, devotions, particular functions, and various initiatives.

The Eucharistic Mystery and the Sacraments

Among the cultic expressions of the devotion to the Blood of Christ, the Eucharistic mystery and the sacraments occupy the central place. In fact, when St. Gaspar speaks of the Eucharistic sacrifice and of the sacraments in relation to the devotion to the Precious Blood, he seems to emphasize a particular bond:

From this devotion . . . comes the renewal of that good which the Divine Blood has effected in us in the regeneration of Holy Baptism; from this special relationship to the other sacraments, and especially the sacrament of Penance . . . which, if we direct the gaze of faith to the table of love, to the sacrifice of the altar, oh, how religion recalls the most tender mysteries of redemption!¹¹

For St. Gaspar, the mysteries of redemption were synonymous with the Blood of Christ.¹²

The sacraments are “an ongoing application of the merits of the Blood of Jesus Christ”;¹³ in them “are applied the mysteries of the sheddings of the Blood of Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ The Precious Blood “is that which cleanses us in the sacraments,”¹⁵ “*est medicina in omnibus sacramentis*” is the medicine in all the sacraments,¹⁶ “*est thesaurus infinitus in sacramentis*” is the infinite treasure in the sacraments.¹⁷ From these short phrases one can easily argue that the sacramental life was considered as the soul of the cult of the Precious Blood for St. Gaspar.

The Eucharistic mystery, then, perennial and central source for the application of the benefits acquired by the Redeemer by the shedding of his Blood,¹⁸ occupies a special place in the devotion to the Precious Blood. As this devotion is the compendium of the entire faith,¹⁹ thus the Eucharist is the compendium of all of that is good,²⁰ of the entire faith with its glories.²¹ Accordingly, there is established between devotion to the Precious Blood and the Eucharist a nearly equal relationship.

St. Gaspar considers the Eucharistic mystery in relation to the Blood of Christ in terms common to the Catholic theology of the time: as sacrifice, meal, and sacrament.

In the sacrifice of the altar, the offering of the Blood of Christ to the Eternal Father is renewed²² for the same ends for which Jesus offered his bloody sacrifice on Golgotha: for adoration,²³ for thanksgiving,²⁴ for expiation,²⁵ and for entreaty.²⁶ This offering continues for the same sacrificial ends by the Eucharistic Jesus, the permanent sacrament in the tabernacle.²⁷

Communion is a table of love,²⁸ in which Christ, together with his body as food, gives us his Blood as drink.²⁹

The Eucharistic mystery, therefore, is not only the soil in which the devotion to the Precious Blood is nourished and develops, but is also the soul of its cult. This is the reason for St. Gaspar's frequent invitations for those

devoted to the Blood of Christ, because they express their adoration in the sphere of such an august mystery.³⁰

The Liturgical Feast of the Precious Blood

The liturgical feast of the Precious Blood with its proper Mass and Office had already been instituted in the Church for some dioceses and religious congregations, who celebrated the feast on different dates.³¹

On March 26, 1822, St. Gaspar obtained the privilege of celebrating the Office and the solemn Mass of the Divine Blood on the first Sunday of July for the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. This privilege was extended, on May 27, 1826, to those churches in which the Pious Union had been established.³² He wanted the feast to be extended to the whole Church: "Oh how much I want to get the Office and the Mass of the Divine Blood for the first Sunday in July extended throughout the entire Catholic world!"³³ He had made a request for this to the competent authorities many times,³⁴ and he would have considered himself "very happy if before I would die" that he would have "such consolation."³⁵ He was not able to have this consolation during his earthly life, because the feast was extended to the universal Church by Pius IX only on August 10, 1849, with the decree *Redempti Sumus*. Gaspar, nevertheless, undertook to have granted to others the same privilege that he had obtained for himself.³⁶

In the Office and Mass of the Divine Blood he found such spiritual nourishment for "moving . . . the heart."³⁷

The day of the feast was a solemn glorification of Jesus the Redeemer. In the morning, during the Mass, general Communion was distributed to the faithful and the Blessed Sacrament was exposed for adoration during the course of the day. In the afternoon they would hold the service of the Seven Bloodsheddings, with short sermons (*fervorini*) and hymns. In a letter to his niece, Luigia del Bufalo, St. Gaspar reveals those sentiments

that he certainly nourished in his heart in this recurring celebration:

Here we are at the Feast of the Divine Blood. . . . What a great feast of love for Jesus is this feast of ours! Yes, let us love Jesus incessantly, irrevocably, so that we can love him eternally in paradise. To look at Jesus as he pours out his Blood is an act of religion which helps us do great work for our own eternal salvation as well as that of our neighbors, praying in a special way for the success of the Missions and for the apostolic work that is being promoted throughout the Catholic world. For us, the Crucifix is a mystical tree of salvation; blessed is the soul that stands in the shadow of this plant, gathering in its fruits of holiness and paradise. It is, at one and the same time, the book in which we read of the love of a redeeming God. Finally, it is a weapon against the devil, while also being the ladder to heaven. These are the sentiments that we should nourish with the recurrence of this very holy solemnity.³⁸

Contemplation of the Mystery of the Blood of Christ

Under this title we include those forms of the cult of the Blood of Christ which had as their primary aim the instruction of the faithful, namely: the month of June, the triduum (or spiritual exercises), the octave or seven-day devotion, the preaching on the Divine Blood in the mission, meditation, and hymns.

The Month of June

The observance of the month of June in honor of the Precious Blood was introduced by St. Gaspar himself.³⁹ It would begin thirty days before the feast of the Precious Blood⁴⁰ and was a preparation for the feast. "In

the month of June,” writes Gaspar, “the people are roused to meditate on the mysteries of the love of Jesus who has redeemed us with the inestimable price of his Divine Blood.”⁴¹ St. Vincent Pallotti also testifies to the purpose of the month of June:

[The people] already moved by simple preaching and by coming together for an hour of adoration for a month. . . , would be more satisfactorily enlightened in mind and understanding in heart to know the pleasant attractions of the ineffable mystery of the Most Precious Blood of the Redeemer; they would be more perfectly converted from evil and confirmed in good in the love of Jesus Christ.⁴²

The month, therefore, ordinarily involved preaching, but one could also read some relevant book. Particularly recommended by St. Gaspar was *Il Mese di Giugno* of Strambi.⁴³

The Triduum of the Divine Blood

In the places in which it was not possible to observe the month of June, St. Gaspar recommended at least a triduum before the feast. He was happy when many would cooperate effectively to carry out his wishes. Thus he writes to Sig. Camillo Possenti of Fabriano during the first days of July of 1831:

Excellent, holy, and hardly ever sufficiently to be praised, is the donation of 60 *bajocchi* for the triduum of the Divine Blood, a devotion which I always recommend more and more to your well acknowledged zealous spirit. ‘*Ipsi vicerunt draconem propter Sanguinem Agni*’ ‘They conquered the dragon through the Blood of the Lamb.’⁴⁴

The Seven-Day Devotion to the Divine Blood

This seven- (or eight-) day devotion to the Divine Blood (*Settenario o Ottavario del Divin Sangue*), which St. Gaspar called “glorious” and which gave him consolation,⁴⁵ was another exercise of piety in honor of the Divine Blood. Canon Albertini established that, in the octave after the month of June, the Chaplet and the Seven Offerings be solemnly recited, with “preaching matter . . . in the form of a short colloquium”⁴⁶ in thanksgiving; therefore it was called also the “seven-day devotion of thanksgiving.”⁴⁷ St. Gaspar wanted to preserve and disseminate this practice where the devotion of the month of June was held, lamenting if it was neglected. On this point, he writes to Mons. Gregorio Muccioli, president of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood:

We know that the works of God are brought forth in thorns. Yet, I cannot express to you the spiritual consolations that we experience through this good work. Let us give thanks to the Almighty a *quo omne bonum* ‘from who [comes] all good.’ One thing still pains me and that is the removal, from the members of the Archconfraternity, of the octave and the seven-day devotion of the Divine Blood after the month [of June]. This was obtained by Albertini, and I would like to see it kept intact. I feel confident that, with your industrious efforts, you will find a way of having this segment of good work revived. Also, I humbly pray to Jesus, our Beloved, that the cult to the Divine Blood will not be diminished in the least degree.⁴⁸

Preaching on the Divine Blood in the Mission

St. Gaspar prescribed, in his *Method of the Missions*, “never to neglect . . . the preaching of the passion and of the Precious Blood.”⁴⁹ At the end of this preaching,

priests dressed in red vestments would solemnly bring into the church the coffin of the dead Christ, while others went before it and accompanied it. The coffin was covered with red damask and beautifully adorned with flowers. In the meantime, the preacher said to the faithful: "See how far the love of Jesus goes . . ." "With such a beautiful exercise . . . the people were roused to kiss in spirit those holy wounds, sources and springs of eternal life."⁵⁰

Meditation and Hymns

Among the diverse forms of contemplation of the mystery of the Blood of Christ we must recall, finally, the invitation to *meditate on the Precious Blood* ("*meditatio circa mysteria effusionum Sanguinis D.N.J.C. est praeferenda*"⁵¹) and to praise it with "hymns of devotion" (*canti devoti*), especially in the month of and on the feast of the Precious Blood.⁵²

Devotions

Under this title we include the prayers and practices of piety most frequently recommended by St. Gaspar to those devoted to the Precious Blood. These are: *The Chaplet of the Precious Blood*, the *Seven Offerings*, the recitation of the *Gloria Patri*, ejaculations, and hours of adoration.

The Chaplet of the Precious Blood

The *Chaplet*, the work of Albertini, is composed of brief meditations on the seven sheddings of the Blood of Christ (the circumcision, Gethsemane, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the way to Calvary, the crucifixion, the piercing of the side), with the recitation of the Our Father and the verse "*Te Ergo Quaesumus*" *'We ask you, therefore'* in between. It concludes with a prayer to the Most Precious Blood. St. Gaspar spread its public recitation everywhere. In the houses of the Institute and in the time of mission he would ordinarily "have it

recited during the first Mass, just as the Dominican Fathers recite the rosary,"⁵³ "animating the people in such manner to hope for all that is good from the Eternal Father, the mercy of the inestimable price of our redemption, which is offered on the altar in bloodless sacrifice."⁵⁴

The Seven Offerings

In the *Seven Offerings*, a practice of "a special efficacy,"⁵⁵ which also flowed from the heart of Albertini,⁵⁶ the Blood of Jesus is offered to the Eternal Father, while praying for the needs of the Church, of the society, and for the poor souls. Between the invocations of the various offerings is praise to Christ, Redeemer in his Blood, with the invocation: "Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus, who with his Blood has saved us." ("*Sia sempre benedetto e ringraziato Gesù, che col suo Sangue ci ha salvato.*")

The Seven Gloria Patri

St. Gaspar recommended, for acquiring indulgences, to those who joined the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood, to say every day seven *Gloria Patri* in memory of the principal sheddings of the Precious Blood.⁵⁷

Ejaculatory Prayers

Gaspar also recommended the use of ejaculatory prayers in honor of the Precious Blood,⁵⁸ especially the "Eternal Father, I offer. . . ," promoted by the Passionists. St. Gaspar

. . . used to recommend it to all with zeal in his sermons, in confessions, and whenever the occasion presented itself, say that he hoped for all the graces and the means necessary for attaining eternal salvation by the merits of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. He wished that the Missionaries at the end or at the beginning

of their sermons would always offer to the Divine Father the Most Precious Blood of his Son with the ejaculatory prayer of the 'Eternal Father.'⁵⁹

Hours of Adoration of the Divine Blood

The hours of adoration of the Divine Blood were set for "all the Fridays of the year."⁶⁰ St. Gaspar spread this pious practice wherever possible, and it could not be lacking in those places in which he was opening the houses of his Institute. In a house meeting at Sermoneta on October 5, 1822, with St. Gaspar present, we read:

One should seek out persons who can adore the mysteries of the Most Precious Blood on Fridays, at an hour to be decided. They should pray for the ongoing fruitfulness of the holy missions and spiritual exercises and in particular for the good progress of our Work.⁶¹

On February 20, 1835, St. Gaspar, writing to Canon Giuseppe Ottaviani of Ancona, suggests to him: "two ways to strengthen devotion to the Divine Blood," and one was the following: ". . . on Fridays, select seven devout persons who will divide seven hours prayer, one hour each, adoring and offering the Divine Blood, the price of our salvation."⁶² We will speak of another means suggested by St. Gaspar in the next section.

The Perpetual Worship of the Divine Blood

We have said that St. Gaspar wanted the worship of the Divine Blood to be perpetual. He promoted the *Hour of the Divine Blood* and the *Month of the Divine Blood* as forms of this worship.

The *Hour of the Divine Blood* consisted in an ongoing adoration of the price of redemption for the entire year. The faithful would choose an hour for adoration by signing up on a special sheet,⁶³ thereby "filling all the hours of the year and of the feast days of the year with

so many men and women adorers of the mysteries of the Blood of Jesus Christ.”⁶⁴ Through this, one would realize “a special perpetual adoration of the inestimable price of our eternal salvation.”⁶⁵ This work of adoration could be done:

. . . at home or in church, on one’s knees or sitting down, . . . either before the Blessed Sacrament or else before some holy image of the crucifix, always praying for the Supreme Pontiff, for the needs of the Church, for the foreign missions in the East and for all the Missionaries.⁶⁶

For the perpetual worship of the Divine Blood by means of the *Month of the Precious Blood*, St. Gaspar advised that this would be practiced in private, by twelve persons consecutively for the entire year or, in public, by twelve churches, each of which would choose its own month of the year. In the letter to D. Giuseppe Ottaviani already cited, St. Gaspar suggests the second method for a greater strengthening of the devotion to the Divine Blood:

. . . select from the communities, or wherever possible, for example, 12 persons who will each take one month to practice the devotion; this can also be arranged with 12 different churches as has been done for some time now in Rome. As for the churches, one could, for the sake of economy, recite, for example, the Chaplet during one of the Masses; or whatever you find to be most feasible.⁶⁷

The Procession of the Dead Christ

A particular feature of the cult of the Divine Blood was the procession of the dead Christ, which occurred in the missions on the evening of the day in which the preaching on the Precious Blood took place.⁶⁸ The aims

of this practice were the following: “to compensate for the crimes and public scandals by which Jesus, who has redeemed us with his Blood, is profaned in public ways,”⁶⁹ to rouse in sinners the desire for virtue and the joy of the Christian life, and to “promote all the more a tender devotion to the Blood of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁰

A festive solemnity permeated the whole procession, such that it was also called the “triumphal procession.” The bier of the dead Christ was covered with red damask and nicely decorated with flowers. The clergy were garbed with solemn vestments and red stoles and all of the confraternities participated. The streets of the town were illuminated by lights carried by the faithful or placed in the windows of the houses; the bells rang festively to call back

. . . the people to bless the Blood of Jesus. Various choirs sang hymns of praise to the Precious Blood and short sermons were given along the way. The procession would conclude with the singing of the *‘Te Ergo Quaesumus.’* All of this constituted a solemn glorification of Christ, Redeemer in his Blood.⁷¹

The procession of the dead Christ held on Good Friday was of a similar character. St. Gaspar instituted this procession wherever he would establish houses of the Institute, defining it as “a very touching ceremony entirely in keeping with one who is promoting the great devotion to the Divine Blood.”⁷²

The Way of the Cross and the Three Hours of Agony

Always seeking to exalt the mystery of redemption, St. Gaspar spread the practice of the Way of the Cross and of the three hours, “in order to animate to a tender love for our most lovable Redeemer.”⁷³ St. Gaspar also introduced the practice of the “Holy Carnival” to the cult of the Precious Blood by means of the recitation of the rosary of the Precious Blood.⁷⁴

Miscellaneous Initiatives

There were other initiatives for the practice of the cult of the Precious Blood that St. Gaspar suggested to keep alive in the faithful the memory of the Blood of Christ and to inspire in their souls feelings of gratitude and of trust in the redeeming Blood.

Among these initiatives, the first place would go to the spread of the image of the Madonna of the Most Precious Blood. [*Editor's note:* Fr. Conti has written an article on the Madonna of the Precious Blood that appears in the first volume of *C.PP.S Heritage*.]

Gaspar recommended that a special *votive habit* in honor of the Precious Blood be worn by someone who sought to obtain some grace. The habit consisted of a black dress or habit (*veste*) with red ribbons or cords hanging from the waist.⁷⁵

There were also *inscriptions* related to the Divine Blood, which Gaspar had placed above the doors of the house or on the walls. In fact, in the missions, “in imitation of St. Bernardine of Siena, he carried with him a carved block of wood (*traforo*) in which were inscribed the names of Jesus and Mary along with the motto ‘*Viva il Sangue di Gesù Cristo.*’” With this block and a brush he would print the names and the mottos above the doors or in other places of the houses,⁷⁶ to implore the protection of the Lord, “as the Hebrew people were ordered to mark their doors with the blood of the lamb.”⁷⁷

In the houses of the Congregation, the entrance to every room had to be marked with the words: “*Viva il Sangue di Gesù Cristo!*” Other phrases of invocation or of praise to the Blood of Jesus were written in areas that were used more frequently. For example, in the house of San Felice, the first house of the Congregation, one reads (in addition to some biblical expressions) the following invocations: “O my dear Jesus, whom do I love if not you, who have given your Blood and your life for me?” “I desire, O my Jesus, that all creatures adore you

and praise you through the Blood you have poured out for us.”⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

At the end of this description of the various expressions of the worship of the Divine Blood recommended by St. Gaspar we can synthesize their goals and say that they aimed at bringing the whole person—mind, heart, and life—to enjoy the benefits of redemption and to witness and glorify, as individuals and as a community, the freely given and saving love of God, manifested in the gift of his beloved Son in the shedding of his Blood (cf. Rm 5, 8–9).

Fr. Beniamino Conti is the author of a number of works on St. Gaspar and the early history of the Congregation and is well known for having edited a critical edition of the writings of St. Gaspar. He is a member of the Italian Province.

The translation is by Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S.

The Development of the Devotion to the Precious Blood in the Spirituality of Saint Gaspar

Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S.

In the solemn allocution given in St. Peter's Basilica on January 31, 1960, at the close of the Roman synod, Blessed John XXIII recommended the cult of the Precious Blood in a special way to the priests and laity of the Diocese of Rome. He described St. Gaspar quite properly as "the true and greatest apostle of the devotion to the Precious Blood in the world."¹ It is clear that this is certainly true of our saint in his mature years. But what was the spiritual path that Gaspar had to follow to reach this primacy as "Apostle of the Blood of Christ in the world?"

This is what I propose to explore in this article, in which, after a brief excursus on the youthful spirituality of Gaspar in relation to the Blood of Christ, I will treat more broadly the explicit formation of Gaspar in the spirituality of the Blood of Christ.

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST IN THE YOUTHFUL SPIRITUALITY OF GASPAR

There is a temptation to believe that St. Gaspar was born with this devotion or, at least that he practiced it since he was a small child, above all in the school of his

holy mother Annunziata Quartieroni (1761–1811). Reading the testimonies of the canonical processes for Gaspar's beatification and canonization would disappoint those who are of this bias.

In these testimonies, there is repeated affirmation that St. Gaspar, from the time he was a boy, was greatly in love with Jesus and his passion. He was very devoted to the Eucharist, to the Blessed Virgin, and in a special way to St. Francis Xavier and St. Aloysius Gonzaga. There is never a mention of a genuine devotion to the Precious Blood.

In truth, we can speak of Gaspar's first explicit contact with the devotion to the Precious Blood only in 1808. On December 8 of that year he was asked by the canons of the Basilica of San Nicola in Carcere to give some short and inspiring sermons on the occasion of the institution of the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood. Before this date *one cannot properly speak of devotion to the Divine Blood* in St. Gaspar. We find full confirmation of this claim of ours if we examine the testimonies regarding the heroic virtue of Gaspar and the spiritual writings from his youth that are still extant.

In the canonical process, as far as we know, only one companion from early childhood, Maria Tamini, offers testimony for the presence of the "Precious Blood" in the spirituality of Gaspar the youth. At one point she states that he "made [the Precious Blood] an object of meditation since he was a boy,"² especially meditating on the agony of Gethsemane, and when he used to console his mother, worried about domestic problems, he would say: "Mama . . . , hope in God and trust in the merits of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ."³ I have sought in vain for other explicit references to the Blood of Christ in the childhood of Gaspar.

We arrive at the same conclusion with regard to his youthful writings. As I have already said, we find some discourses on St. Francis Xavier, St. Aloysius, both of whom were special objects of devotion, but on the

Precious Blood we find only a few hints in the transcriptions of the sermons heard by Mons. Giovanni Baccolo.⁴

Thus, before 1808, that is, Gaspar's first contact with the Confraternity of the Precious Blood in San Nicola in Carcere in Rome, which I will treat later, the theme of the Blood of Christ is practically absent from the writings of St. Gaspar, while after that date it will come evermore to the fore.⁵

We must conclude, therefore, that Gaspar from his earliest years did not nourish a genuine and specific devotion to the Precious Blood, but we cannot deny that in the youthful spirituality one does notice some characteristic aspects: the devotion to the Eucharistic mystery, the diligent meditation on the passion of Jesus, and the practice of reparatory Penance. These constitute a solid foundation upon which a flourishing spirituality of the Blood of Christ will develop in St. Gaspar.⁶

ST. GASPAR'S EXPLICIT FORMATION IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

From the documents available to us, the spirituality of the young Gaspar was not characterized by devotion to the Blood of Christ. In this part of the article I want to retrace the journey that led St. Gaspar to maturity in his spirituality of the Blood of Christ.

In this journey we can determine five principal stages: the years 1808, 1810, 1811–1814, 1814, and 1817. These constitute a marvelous crescendo in the symphony to the Blood of Christ, modulated in the heart of Gaspar by the Holy Spirit.

First Stage: 1808

Foundation of the Confraternity of the Precious Blood in the Basilica of San Nicola in Carcere

Gaspar's first explicit encounter with the devotion to the Precious Blood, as we have noted earlier, took place on December 8, 1808, when he was invited by the

canons of the chapter of the Basilica of San Nicola in Carcere to give some short inspirational sermons on the Eucharist (*fervorini eucaristici*) and the official address for the inauguration of the “Pious Association of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, of the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Holy Souls in Purgatory” in the same basilica.

A relic of the Precious Blood, a gift of Prince Giulio Savelli, mounted and sealed in a silver box, had been preserved in this very ancient basilica since 1708. It was engraved with the words, “*De aqua et Sanguine D.N.J.C. quae effluerunt ex ejus sacratissimo latere dum pende-
bat in Cruce*” ‘From the water and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ which flowed from his most sacred side while he hung on the Cross.’⁷ According to the tradition of the noble Roman family of the Savellis, a legionary of this family, present in Jerusalem at the death of the Savior, had possession of the garment sprinkled with a few drops of the Blood of Jesus. When he became a Christian, the former legionary attached the part of the garment that was still red to his own garment and, upon returning to Rome, placed it in a precious reliquary, which was preserved and handed on with devotion for many centuries in the Savelli family.^a

The chapter of the basilica, by way of a special concession, used to celebrate the feast of the Precious Blood on the first Sunday of July with a proper Office and Mass, and used to expose and carry the relic in procession already in 1808.⁸

In the same church was venerated a crucifix, which, according to tradition, spoke to St. Brigida.⁹ The crucifix

^aAt present this relic is preserved in the church of S. Giuseppe a Capo le Case in Rome, where it was transferred by the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood in 1936. Cf. A.M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo nella liturgia e nella pietà popolare*, II, Roma, 1989, p. 481.

and the relic were placed together on the same altar of the chapel, called the Chapel of the Crucifix.

But more than these sacred objects—little venerated by the rest, if the good canons were concerned about the religious apathy of the neighboring quarters of the city¹⁰—there was also in the chapter of that basilica the learned and holy canon D. Francesco Albertini, a highly appreciated spiritual director. He directed the servant of God Sister Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato, of the monastery of the Paolotte in Rome who,

. . . after communion, used to have certain rapturous experiences, during which she spoke of sublime matters. One morning, having received Communion . . . one of her usual ecstasies occurred. The nuns alerted the Canon [Albertini] of this, and he was attentive to hear what she was saying. He understood that she was speaking of the devotion of the Precious Blood, how this devotion would be spread, and similar matters regarding the devotion.¹¹

From that moment, Albertini began to devote himself enthusiastically to spreading this devotion. It was hardly difficult for him to do so in his church, because the canons wanted to revive the Christian faith among the faithful of the area, and because they venerated the relic of the Precious Blood and the crucifix there—both of which were indispensable means for encouraging the devotion, especially among the simple people. In addition, the feast of the Precious Blood was already being celebrated with a proper Mass and Divine Office in the basilica.

Albertini knew how to plead this holy cause so well that the chapter of the Basilica of San Nicola in Carcere charged the canons Mons. Francesco Maria Pittori, D. Gregorio Muccioli, and Albertini himself, to work for the establishment of the “Pious Association of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, of the Rosary of the

Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Holy Souls in Purgatory.” The official inauguration took place on December 8, 1808.

According to a memoir written by Albertini,¹² the young and newly ordained Gaspar was called to preach for the event. (Gaspar was ordained on July 31, 1808, with a dispensation from lack of canonical age.)

This pious association with its *Constitutions*¹³ was approved and canonically erected on February 27, 1809, with a decree of the vicar of Rome, Cardinal Antonio Despuig y Dameto.

After the approval Albertini, named president of the *Pia Adunanza* ‘Pious Association,’ composed the Chaplet (or Rosary) of the Precious Blood,¹⁴ which was approved by the Sacred Congregation of Rites on March 31, 1809,¹⁵ and then printed.

Albertini called on Gaspar to preach to the *Pia Adunanza* in 1809 and 1810 as well, as we find recorded in the above mentioned memoir.¹⁶ This is the bare recounting of the facts that brought our saint to his first explicit contact with devotion to the Divine Blood.

Our main interest is to know for what motive the three canons who were in charge of the chapter at San Nicola in Carcere called the twenty-three year old Don Gaspar, a priest for only a few months, to take on such important preaching as that of December 8, 1808. We also want to know more about the request to found a confraternity, and what were the repercussions of this first encounter in the soul of the young priest.

It does not appear that the three canons called him because they noticed in Gaspar a particular zeal for the devotion to the Divine Blood. Nor does it seem that they asked this of the preacher, for at that moment the *Pia Adunanza* was also concerned with the holy rosary and the souls in purgatory. Besides, in the light of what I said in the first part of the presentation, the devotion to the Precious Blood had not yet begun to grow in the youthful spirituality of Gaspar. Even though on that

December 8, 1808, Gaspar “concluded the discourse with a fervent prayer to the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ and to the Blessed Virgin Mary,” as we read in the already cited memoir, this does not mean that devotion to the Precious Blood was particularly prominent in his life, as it would come to be later. The prayer dealing with the topic of the sermon was a customary way of concluding the preaching, as one can observe in other preaching of the same year.¹⁷

The reason for Gaspar being invited to undertake such important preaching was of a more general nature: it was the same reason why he was called to preach an official discourse on divine providence in the Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican for the exposition of the funeral pall (*coltre*) of the holy martyrs,¹⁸ namely his fame as a great preacher and zealous apostle. The intense pastoral ministry of this young priest, which took place before their very eyes as he moved back and forth between the Santa Galla Hospice and the evening oratory of Santa Maria in Vincis, inaugurated on October 23, 1808¹⁹ could hardly escape their notice. They would have heard the opinions that were running through the entire populace of the area of the Campo Vaccino^b on account of young Gaspar, canon of the neighboring Basilica of St. Mark in the Piazza Venezia: a truly zealous priest who could make one fall in love with God simply by being around him.

This twofold fame as a holy priest and an exceptional orator, therefore, was the reason for the invitation offered by the three canons to preach on December 8, 1808, in San Nicola in Carcere.

^b*Editor's note:* The Campo Vaccino, literally “cow pasture,” was a popular name for the Roman forum. At the time of Gaspar it had not been excavated and preserved as it is today and lay under several meters of debris. Prints from the era show cows and other animals grazing among the ruins that poked through the pasture.

What kind of influence did Gaspar's first encounter with the devotion to the Precious Blood and with Albertini have on him?

For St. Gaspar this was not an encounter with the devotion to the Precious Blood of great importance, because he had not yet become well aware of its theological implications. On first contact with the devotion it would be difficult to distinguish it from devotion to the Jesus crucified, to the passion, or to the Eucharist. Gaspar, in fact, later, when he becomes aware of his vocation to propagate the devotion to the Precious Blood, will apply himself to studying it, as St. Vincenzo Pallotti affirms in his deposition.²⁰ D. Giovanni Merlini also notes:

To succeed even better in this regard [Gaspar] would apply himself diligently, just as one day he said to me, to the study of Scripture and the Church Fathers in order to amass as much as he could for his sermons on the Divine Blood
 . . . ²¹

The meeting with Albertini was not important for Gaspar, except for those few contacts that took place—directly with Albertini or with other persons in his name—to coordinate the commitments of ministry which he carried out at San Nicola in Carcere, especially when Albertini was named president of the *Pia Adunanza* of the Precious Blood by the chapter of San Nicola in Carcere. Besides, St. Gaspar was always involved in various pastoral ministries which fully absorbed his time. In addition, Gaspar already had his spiritual director in Rome, the learned Mons. Giovanni Marchetti, rector of the church of the Gesù, for which reason one must dismiss as without any foundation the notion that Albertini had begun the spiritual direction of St. Gaspar already before the deportation.²² As a matter of fact, D. Giovanni Merlini, a well-informed witness, states in his deposition in the *Processo Ordinario di Albano*:

It is well to note that the Servant of God, as he himself told me, even though he already knew the celebrated Albertini in Rome by sight, had only greeted him and, if memory serves, had talked with him a few times. During his deportation, Gaspar, knowing his reputation as an excellent director of souls, placed himself under his direction, and I know that he never distanced himself from him.^c

Second Stage: September: 1810
The Prophecy that Gaspar Is to Be
Herald of the Divine Blood

Rome, with its endless apostolic demands that absorbed all of Gaspar's activity given the generous resonance they found in his zealous heart, would not have been the place suited for realizing the divine plan, according to which he was to be the Apostle of the Divine Blood. Just then God took him from his own surroundings, from his cherished and demanding apostolic works, from his family. He called Gaspar to a land of martyrdom, where he began revealing to him his vocation in the Church.

Gaspar's pilgrimage began with a summons by the French police, which reached the del Bufalo home in the Palazzo Altieri on June 12, 1810. The following day Gaspar had to present himself at the Palazzo Borromeo, next to the church of St. Ignatius, to take the oath of loyalty to Napoleon Bonaparte.

The latter had already occupied Rome with his troops on May 17, 1809, with the intention of bending

^cG. Merlini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo. Un santo*, op. cit., 24. These affirmations of Merlini are not entirely tarnished by the deposition of Sister Maria Giusepppa Pitorri, niece of Albertini. (Cf. *Letter 1385*. This "letter" actually is the testimony of Sr. Pitorri, an Ursuline, that contains 24 fragments of the letters of St. Gaspar.)

Pope Pius VII to his aims of dominating Europe and abolishing the temporal power of the pope, after having annexed the last two regions of the Papal States, Lazio and Umbria, to the French empire. On June 10, 1809, Pius VII issued a bull of excommunication for all responsible for the suppression of the patrimony of St. Peter. During the night of June 5–6, 1809, the aged and weak Pius VII was arrested at the Quirinal by French police and was taken into exile, first to Grenoble, then to Savona, and finally to Fontainebleau.

News of this crime petrified the population of Rome. To this abuse was added the imposition of the oath of loyalty to the established authority, that is to the emperor, with the consequent approval of the deeds already done. Cardinals, bishops, prelates, and ecclesiastics who enjoyed benefices, such as pastors and canons, were obliged to take the oath. It was either loyalty to the emperor or deportation.

Pius VII, with two instructions of May 22 and August 30 of 1808, declared such an oath illicit, notwithstanding the opposing opinions of theologians and canon lawyers, duly manipulated, who considered it legal. Gaspar made accurate copies, in his own hand, of the two papal instructions, and those copies are preserved among his writings.²³

On that June 12, 1810, therefore, the order to take the oath arrived at the home of Gaspar, canon of St. Mark's. The following day, accompanied by his father Antonio, Don Gaspar went to the Palazzo Borromeo before the commissioner prefect. Before the prefect he announced, instead of the prescribed formula for the oath, his decision: "I cannot, I must not, I will not," just as Pius VII had declared before General Radet, when, on the night of June 5–6, 1809, the latter had invited him to renounce his temporal sovereignty.²⁴ Deportation to Piacenza followed immediately.²⁵

During the first days of July he was on his way to Piacenza together with Albertini and two other canons

of the Basilica of St. Mark: Francesco Gambini^d and Bernardino Filippo Marchetti.^e

The threads of the divine fabric began to come together. Out of sheer necessity Gapsar must rub shoulders with the pioneer of the devotion to the Precious Blood and will begin without resistance to submit himself to his influence.

Passing through Florence, Albertini used the opportunity to promote his dear devotion, arousing Abbot Consalvo Petrai to sufficient enthusiasm to have reprinted and distributed the Chaplet of the Precious Blood.²⁶ Monsignor Emidio Gentilucci, in his short biography of our saint, assures us that Gaspar also helped him in this work.²⁷

In Piacenza, Gaspar also undertook to spread the devotion to the Precious Blood and the recitation of the Chaplet with Albertini,²⁸ and he had it translated into five languages.²⁹

However, the moment of revelation of the will of God had not yet struck for Gaspar; this arose unexpectedly while he was in bed with a very serious illness in September 1810. The unhealthy air of Piacenza or “Dispiacenza,”^f as he jokingly refers to it in one letter,³⁰ had brought him near death. Even the physicians did not hide the seriousness of his case, and so Albertini administered the anointing of the sick to him. (In that

^dGambini would die in exile in Bologna on the night of January 29–30, 1811. Cf. *Letter 15*.

^eMarchetti, unfortunately, took the oath while in Bologna on September 11, 1812, following the Napoleonic decree of May 4, 1812, while he was in Bologna, and returned to Rome. (cf. L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, III-1, Roma 1982, 112; 143–149.)

^f*Translator’s note:* This is a play on words in Italian. *Piacere* means “to please” and *dispiacere* “to displease.”

period the sacrament was customarily administered only at the point of death.) While he was attending him, Albertini, with heart swollen with sorrow, gazed on the features of this young priest, transformed with wrinkles of a premature old age.

On August 28 Gaspar had written to Don Gaetano Bonanni[§] asking him for prayers to St. Francis Xavier for his health;³¹ even at that point—the first days of September of 1810—on his straw mattress where he lay near the point of death, Gaspar is invoking the help of his dear saint, to whom he was so devoted from his boyhood.

Albertini did not let so much as a breath from the apparently dying Gaspar escape his notice; he observed everything. At one point, not so much to console him, inasmuch as he was sustained by an interior force, Albertini assured him that his cure was certain. Why this sudden change? Albertini had always fixed in his mind some prophetic words referring to Gaspar by the already noted servant of God Sister Maria Agnese of the Incarnate Word:

[§]Gaetano Bonanni was born in Rome on June 16, 1766, and was ordained priest on December 18, 1790. From 1800 Bonanni, with a few other companions, began to dedicate themselves to the ministry of the missions in various parts of the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples. On October 23, 1808, he and Gaspar opened the evening oratory at Santa Maria in Vincis. In 1815 Bonanni followed Gaspar in the founding of the first house of San Felice di Giano, where he was the first superior. Appointed bishop of Norcia (Umbria) by Pius VII on February 5, 1821, he was consecrated on July 8 of the same year in the Basilica of San Nicola in Carcere. He died in Norcia on August 17, 1848, leaving behind the reputation of being the “holy bishop.” Cf. A. Pollack, “The Closest Collaborators of St. Gaspar in Founding the Society,” in A. Pollack, *Historical Sketches of the C.PP.S.*, Revised edition, edited by R. Schreiter, C.PP.S., (Carthagenia, Ohio: Messenger Press, 2002), pp. 2–16.

You will recognize in the difficult times of the Church a young priest, zealous for the glory of God, and with him, in the face of oppression of enemies and in pain, you will form a spiritual friendship and he will be your Director. The distinctive characteristic of this priest will be the devotion to St. Francis Xavier. He will be destined to be an apostolic missionary and he will found a new congregation of missionary priests under the title of the Divine Blood, dedicated to reforming morals and for the salvation of souls, to the dignity of the secular clergy, to rouse the people for their indifference, from their unbelief, and calling all back to the love of Jesus crucified.

He will be the founder of an institute of sisters, but he will not direct them. Finally, he will be the trumpet of the Divine Blood, in order to shake up sinners and sectarians in the difficult times of Christianity.³²

All these communications, kept jealously in his heart, Albertini now entrusted to Gaspar, to explain his categorical assertion that he would be cured, which really did follow.

The prophecy, which Sr. Maria Agnese had received from God, in all probability during one of her habitual ecstasies after communion,³³ and which she had communicated to Albertini, was explicit. It foretold that a young priest would be the apostolic missionary and trumpet of the Divine Blood, the founder of two congregations with the Divine Blood in their titles, to call back "all to the love of the Crucified."

What weight did this prediction have for the soul of Albertini and that of Gaspar?

Albertini had to be intimately convinced of the truth of this prediction, first of all on account of the holiness of the person he knew. This holy religious, born on June 24, 1757,

. . . in the humble condition of a lay sister which she voluntarily chose, shone with the light of solid virtues. She was favored by God with great gifts of miracles, of prophecy, of counsel, of the knowledge of hearts . . . High ranking people, both clerical and lay, came to her for advice.

She enjoyed the esteem and veneration of St. Vincent Strambi, Passionist bishop, Giuseppe Maria Pignatelli, Jesuit, and of Venerable Clotilde di Savoia.³⁴ After a very long illness, she died on the day she predicted, March 15, 1810,³⁵ some months before Gaspar and his companions departed for exile.

The effect of this holy religious on the soul of Albertini was of no small importance if, as we already know, she persuaded him to propagate the devotion to the Precious Blood precisely because he heard the servant of God speak of this in an ecstasy.

Albertini, after fasting and prayer, was inspired to write the Chaplet of the Precious Blood and, after finishing it,

. . . thinks about taking it to Sister Maria Agnese . . . , with the intention of making some finishing touches later. Scarcely did the pious lay sister see her confessor did she speak to him about what he had written, although he had not shown it to her. She was happy as if having received an ineffable gift, and said to him: 'You have the Chaplet of the Precious Blood! Do not change a thing. Leave it as the Lord has inspired it.'³⁶

Albertini followed her counsel to the letter.

For these and other reasons, known only to the holy canon through his particular relationship to Sister Maria Agnese, one must conclude that the prediction, even before its fulfillment, was held by Albertini as a genuine divine message. We say this because, already

during the period of imprisonment, we see his work with Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi (1765–1826) for establishing the Institute of the “Daughters of the Precious Blood.”^h We say this because Gaspar, when he returned to Rome after his imprisonment, wanted to enter the newly reestablished Society of Jesus, and Albertini did not try to stop him and assured Gaspar that he would not be successful, which, in fact, was the case.³⁷

What kind of influence did that prediction have on Gaspar in September 1810?

The prophecy contained a beautiful message, but was too difficult to be heard enthusiastically by Gaspar. This was also part of the character of our saint: to be fearful in the face of the great responsibilities he was about to embrace until some sign manifested the will of God to him. This was the case at his priestly ordination: he needed the counsel of St. Vincent Strambi. It would also be the case in his choice of vocation: he would need the call of Pius VII.

That prediction, therefore, certainly did not find an enthusiastic welcome in Gaspar. In fact, if it is true that the confidential letter is the mirror of the soul of the one who writes, we find no exhortation to nourish the devotion to the Blood of Jesus in the letters that Gaspar wrote to his friends in this period, nor any explicit reference to the Blood of Jesus.³⁸

Third Stage: 1811–1814 Years of Luxuriant Growth

Gaspar was transferred to Bologna on December 12, 1810, and lived next to Albertini in the house of the

^hThis is the first name of the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, as found in the Rule written by Countess Bentivoglio Orsi in 1812 (cf. Conti, B., editor, *Scritti di Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi. II - Regolamenti*, Roma, 2001, pp. 19–91.)

Oratorians, attached to the church of Santa Maria di Galliera, and then, in February 1811, in the quarters of the countesses Marianna Spada Bentivoglio and Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi, her daughter. It was Albertini who sought lodging for himself and St. Gaspar with Caterina after he had been chosen to be her spiritual director. Since there was no place available in their house, where several exiled priests had already found lodging, they had him stay in the house of their servant Giuseppe Sartin, at Via Cartoleria Nuova, 618, present-day Via Domenico Guerazzi.³⁹

The year Gaspar spent with Albertini in Bologna—the latter was transferred to Corsica on December 28, 1811—was a time of great spiritual influence on the soul of St. Gaspar, especially through the intense apostolate for the devotion to the Precious Blood which Albertini was able to arouse in that city.

During these months in which Gaspar lived with Albertini, his zeal for the devotion to the Precious Blood had not waned. In 1811, however, the zealous activity of Albertini was impressed more deeply in the life of our saint. Albertini's activity coincided with the enthusiasm in the region of Bologna, especially that of Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi, whose fervor for this devotion was roused by her spiritual director, Albertini. So great was her devotion that, as she herself writes in an autobiographical letter, in September 1811 Albertini

. . . erected [in Bologna] a union of seven individuals, who honor the seven sheddings of the Blood of our divine Redeemer, and he commissioned me to be their leader. This union was established on the day of the birth of our Lady and met on the last Sunday of the month.⁴⁰

This was the basis of the future Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood in the church of San Domenico, eventually merged with the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of San Nicola in Carcere in Rome on

June 9, 1816. Just as Albertini had singled out Gaspar as the future Apostle of the Blood of Christ in Piacenza in September 1810, so in Bologna in 1811 he singled out the Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi to be the foundress of the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood. From that time on Albertini began to prepare her, along with some companions, for the founding of this institute which, according to the first plan that had developed there, was to have been dedicated to caring for the sick in hospitals and in the home.ⁱ

What influence, then, did Albertini exercise on the soul of Gaspar during the time when he lived with him in Bologna prior to his deportation to Corsica on December 28, 1811?

In the first letters that St. Gaspar wrote during his exile, no explicit witness to the presence of a devotion to the Precious Blood in his soul is apparent. He begins by adding a heading with a reference to the devotion to the Precious Blood, which from that time forward will become more consistent in his letters. We notice this first witness in a letter written on June 18, 1811, to Countess Virginia Malaspina Caracciolo of Piacenza. Among other news, he speaks to her of the approaching feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus:

Oh, how happy I would be if I had always loved
Jesus as I ought! At least you, please, love him

ⁱA. Santelli, *op. cit.*, 56–57. Until recently it was commonly believed that St. Gaspar and Albertini, together with Bentivoglio, wrote the *Articoli Fondamentali* ‘Fundamental Articles’ according to which the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood were to be dedicated to education “civil, Christian, and devout” (art. 2) of women. Nevertheless, documents recently found in archives in Tarquinia show that this was not the original aim of the institute, but rather service to the sick in hospitals and in the home. This also appears in the Rule that Bentivoglio began to write in November 1812.

for me and let us make every effort to be entirely his in this life so as to be with him for all eternity. What beautiful thoughts come to me as I meditate now on our Redeemer, whose feast of the Most Sacred Heart we are about to celebrate very soon. That most Sacred Heart teaches us two truths in particular, that is, humility, as he says *discite* 'learn [from me, for I am meek and humble of heart],' etc. and holy love, symbolized in those flames surrounding the Sacred Divine Heart. *Ignem veni mittere* 'I have come to cast fire [on the earth]' etc. So, let us then place ourselves before him and ask him to sanctify our hearts and supply us with all that we need.

Be mindful of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus and say often the '*Te Ergo Quaesumus*'; and I also ask you, at your convenience, to offer a novena to St. Xavier for me.⁴¹

In another letter to the same Countess Caracciolo, Gaspar, in one section praising her for the zeal that she was showing for spreading the devotion to the Precious Blood in her city, also describes to her the rapid spread of the devotion to the Blood of Christ in Bologna and in all of Romagna by means of the Chaplet (or Rosary) of the Precious Blood. He asks her to have thousands of copies reprinted. Thus he writes her on September 19, 1811:

I am thoroughly edified by your work, especially for the zeal and Christian charity that you demonstrate by propagating anything that will redound to the greater glory of God. In particular, I am referring to the now well-known Chaplet which you, in your goodness, have begun to distribute to the nuns and other pious individuals. May you be blessed and may God shower his favors on all of your efforts and bring fulfillment to our hopes.

Here in Bologna, some women, on their own, and other people have become so interested in this devotion that at present it has spread throughout Romagna, throughout the diocese of Bologna etc. In many churches of Campagna, they are already using this devotion in public services. The same thing is occurring, at the present time, in only one of the churches in this city [the Basilica of San Domenico in Bologna], but becoming more and more widespread in other places. I mention all of this for your consolation.

One devoted person [Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi], had thousands and thousands of the booklets published which were then distributed into the hands of the seculars as well as private individuals, and little by little introduced into the churches. Thus, if devout people in Piacenza can be found who could join together to handle the publishing of some thousands of these booklets and passing them around privately, you will see that our good Jesus will take care of the rest.⁴²

The news of the spread of the devotion to the Precious Blood in Bologna and in the dioceses, in Romagna and in the countryside, is not an exaggeration, since Albertini and St. Gaspar had a strong friendship with the priests of the *Opera del B. Bartolomeo Dal Monte*,^j who dedicated themselves to preaching popular

^jBartolomeo Dal Monte (1726-1778), a priest of Bologna, preached popular missions in the area around his diocese. With a little group of priests, well trained, as was he, in the ministry of missions, he founded *L'Opera delle Missioni* 'The Work of the Missions,' which soon extended its activity beyond the boundaries of Bologna. He died after a tireless apostolate,

missions and who were committed to spreading devotion to the Precious Blood by means of the recitation of the Chaplet of the Precious Blood.⁴³ It is significant that Gaspar will propose to write to just these missionaries for a copy of their Rule in order to have “*lumī*” ‘enlightenment,’ when he is about to go to Giano in July 1815 to found the Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood.⁴⁴

The year 1811 was a year of great spiritual ferment for the Blood of Christ. The rest of Gaspar’s time in prison, which ended in February of 1814, was an apprenticeship of intense pastoral and spiritual formation for the Apostle of the Blood of Christ. Even when he was forced to be separated from his beloved Albertini on December 28, 1811, when the latter was deported to Corsica and when Gaspar was transferred to the prisons of Imola (January 14, 1813) and of Lugo (May 15–December 7, 1813). From Lugo he was sent to Florence (December 20, 1813) to await his transfer to Livorno, whence he also was supposed to embark for Corsica. This transfer, fortunately, did not take place because of the decree of freedom granted by Gioacchino Murat on January 26, 1814, to priests who had not sworn the oath. In this period St. Gaspar, although he was alone, committed himself to imitate Albertini in propagating devotion to the Precious Blood.

Having formed a friendship with the family of the noble Ginnasi family in Imola,⁴⁵ (specifically with the

enriched by more than 300 missions, not counting other preaching. During his life he had printed some little works which then were gathered together with the title, *Gesù al cuore del sacerdote secolare e regolare* ‘Jesus at the heart of the secular and religious priest’ (Rome and Bologna, 1775). He also published *Metodo e Laudi delle Missioni* ‘Methods and Praises of the Missions.’ He is buried in the Basilica of St. Petronio in Bologna and was beatified by John Paul II in 1997.

Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi) and with the priest Don Francesco Pollini,⁴⁶ spiritual director of those imprisoned, St. Gaspar took it upon himself to obtain for them the booklets of the *Chaplet of the Precious Blood* from Countess Caterina Bentivoglio. Thus he writes on February 11, 1813, to Monsignor Annibale Ginnasi:

I have thought also of writing a couple of lines to the Countess [Bentivoglio] to ask her help in a small matter that will have to be settled at Bologna (according to a letter from Rome which commissions me to it); on that occasion I will mention to her also the Booklets, etc.⁴⁷

In the letter of February 22, 1813, to Lucrezia Ginnasi, sister-in-law of Mons. Annibale, Gaspar assures them that the booklets requested had arrived from Bologna and that he was disposed to ask for more, so that he could introduce the public recitation of the Chaplet in Faenza and in other places.

If the Chaplet of the Blood of Christ could be publicly introduced also in Faenza or in some other place, I will see to it that other booklets are sent from Bologna and, as far as I am concerned, both now and always, I will never lose interest in the salvation of souls.⁴⁸

In fact, some letters of St. Gaspar from this period give us evidence of his interest in the devotion to the Precious Blood, as he obtains the booklets of the Chaplet for his friends.⁴⁹ Of particular significance is the letter to Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi of May 10, 1813, telling her of the arrival of a good quantity of booklets of the Chaplet. He writes her:

At the end of this month, we will have the booklets for the Chaplet, and today I wrote to Countess Bentivoglio who will send 500 of them: 300 for Fr. Pollini, who asked me to get

them; 100 for you and 100 for me. I hope that the Lord will bless our pious intentions and, in the meantime, let us not cease offering the price of our redemption for Holy Church and for the eternal salvation of our souls.⁵⁰

When St. Gaspar stopped in Florence at the end of December 1813 and in January 1814, awaiting transfer to Corsica to join Albertini, who had suffered for two years in the horrible “tombs” of Bastia, he undertook to spread the devotion to the Precious Blood in the monastery of the Montalve Sisters.⁵¹

Why did St. Gaspar, while lacking the support and guidance of Albertini, engage in spreading the devotion to the Precious Blood? Above all, it was because in these years of special participation in the cross of Christ out of love for the Church, with the guidance and splendid witness of Albertini, he devoted himself to his own interior maturity in the spirituality of the Blood of Christ.

He did this in the first place by means of prayer. Don Pietro Del Frate, who was for about eight months in prison with St. Gaspar, tells us that he “had all of the hours assigned, some for prayer, some for the reading of Scripture and for the recitation of the Chaplet of the Precious Blood. . .”⁵² On February 22, 1813, Gaspar wrote to Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi, suggesting to her a prayer of St. Francis Xavier, which had certainly also become his prayer.

The prayer that St. Francis Xavier was accustomed to recite in honor of the five wounds of Jesus Christ is the following:

Domine Jesu Christe, per quinque illa vulnera, quae tibi nostri amor in Cruce inflixit, tuis famulis subveni, quos pretioso Sanguine redemisti.

‘Lord Jesus Christ, I beg you, through the five wounds you suffered on the Cross out of

love for us, help your servants whom you have redeemed at the price of your Precious Blood.’⁵³

This loving contact with the Divine Blood, in intimate prayer, was strengthened and illuminated by his daily study of this great mystery. As noted above, Del Frate mentions that Gaspar applied himself to “Scripture readings.” St. Vincent Pallotti, who was later a friend and confidant of St. Gaspar, assures us that this study was precisely of the Precious Blood. During the canonical process for beatification he testified:

The Servant of God, himself, realized this divine vocation to which he was being called in the Church because of the vibrant faith which animated him. He occupied himself seriously in gaining knowledge through a study of the sacred words found in the holy books which pronounce the ineffable values of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, so that he might, with evermore growing love, be prepared to preach them more clearly and effectively to the people.⁵⁴

In addition to prayer and the study of the mystery of the Blood of Jesus, his joyful sharing in the cross of Christ out of love for the Church and of souls made the youthful soul of Gaspar grow progressively in the mystery of the Precious Blood. We have clear testimony to this maturation in the letters that he wrote to his friends while he was in prison. Here are some excerpts.

Let us read more reflectively the great book of the Crucifix which is opened for all and, therein, let us learn lessons leading to eternal life, while repeating often each day as a short prayer, *Te ergo quaesumus tuis famulis subveni*, etc. ‘We, therefore, beseech you help your servants, etc.’ Oh how happy we would be if all people were to avail themselves of the price of our

redemption! What a comfort this would be to the sweetest Heart of Jesus.⁵⁵

In his meditation on the mystery of the Blood of Christ he could omit thinking of the salvation of souls, for whom Jesus had poured out his Blood. Thus, St. Gaspar writes in various letters to Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi in 1813 in order to support her and “to animate her for the work. . . so advantageous for the souls redeemed with the Precious Blood of Jesus”:

Oh, you souls who are still faithful to me, at least you should be interested in procuring glory for me, defending my honor, satisfying my desires. With resolve remove from the jaws of the demon the person who has been redeemed at the price of living blood; and, since you are aware of the malice of sin and the hurt it causes me, arm yourselves with holy zeal to prevent it and to remove it insofar as it is possible. I am saddened to see so many fall into ruin, for I would want them to share in my mercy and I am continuously at work, drawing them away from evil. For a single soul alone I would have done all that I did for everyone; and from everything that I suffered, you can see the value of a single soul!⁵⁶

They immerse themselves in the most tender meditation of everything that Jesus has done and suffered, reflecting on the fact that he, inasmuch as he was God, determined from all eternity his love for mankind. They fix their glance on the blessed eternity that awaits them and, submerged, shall we say, in that sea of consoling thoughts, they become marvelously ecstatic and allow themselves to be consumed by the divine fire of love.

St. Francis of Paola, viewing the Crucifix, would cry out: Oh love! Oh love! St. Francis de

Sales used to say: "With what love should we not be inflamed when we look upon the flames that burned in the breast of our Redeemer! And oh what a fortunate thing it would be for us to be able to burn with that same fire that burns in our God! What joy it would be to be united to God by the chains of love! Oh how many loving arrows issue from those wounds that strike even the hardest of hearts! Oh what flames come out from the burning heart of Jesus Christ flames that warm the coldest of souls! Oh how many darts fly out from that pierced side which strike the most obstinate of sinners! Oh what an abyss of mystery lies in that very intense love which, like a flaming furnace, consumes the very life of the Savior! What a great act of kindness it was for us to be redeemed from servitude to the devil, to return to the possession of grace, to a claim to glory, to be children of God! However, Jesus could have achieved that without undergoing so much suffering. I mean, without the total outpouring of his Blood. Jesus wanted to be the model for confessors and martyrs, for apostles and virgins, for hermits and contemplatives. Jesus wanted to be the universal master. Jesus wanted to nourish us with his very self; he wanted to die for us! Oh love! Oh love! Oh love! My dear Redeemer, grant that I may live only to love you. Amen"⁵⁷

These and many other expressions one encounters in his prison letters reveal a soul already grasped by Jesus, contemplated in the mystery of his Blood.

In February of 1814, Gaspar returned to Rome. Four years of prison spent far from his homeland! He departed Florence with a heart full of sorrow because of the apostolic works he was leaving behind and because he was going home but would no longer find his beloved mother there since she had died while he was in exile.

He returns, however, bearing in his heart an immense treasure, acquired by means of the humble witness of his new spiritual director, Don Francesco Albertini, and through his generous participation in the mystery of the cross, faithfully following Christ, who was now showing him his face in the characteristic sign of his Precious Blood, shed with immense love and sorrow for the salvation of all.

Fourth Stage: 1814 Apostolic Missionary!

One would be tempted to think that the already heralded “Trumpet of the Divine Blood,” now so spiritually charged, free of the shackles of imprisonment and reunited with the father of his soul, Don Francesco Albertini, would begin to sound, gathering the faithful under the standard of the Blood of Christ.

This did not happen, however, because even though the fulfillment of the prophecy of Sister Maria Agnese was at hand, clouds of doubt were gathering in Gaspar’s heart. So great were these that his old desire to leave the world and abandon himself “in a haven of faith and hide myself in the Company of Jesus.”⁵⁸ He felt himself to be “bound by a thousand ties” that were preventing him from making “an effective decision.” He submitted himself to the will of God: “Enough; just let us pray and if it pleases the Lord, all will work out and we will adore the divine dispositions, since doing his will is what will make us saints.”⁵⁹ Thus he writes to the Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi on July 2, 1814.

In the matter of vocational discernment Albertini was of great help. Valentini, whom Gaspar chose as his spiritual director in 1820, writes of the resolution of the matter:

When the Servant of God returned from exile, he continued to consult with his spiritual director Monsignor Albertini who, likewise, had just

returned from his period of exile. With clarity of conscience, he opened himself up wholeheartedly to him making known his own inclination to join the Company of Jesus.

That great spiritual master did not oppose his expressed desire but, reminding him of the things that had been spoken by that great Servant of God, Sister Maria Agnese of the Incarnate Word, he advised him not to pay too much attention to those words since such extraordinary things should not be the basis of governing one's life, neither of belief nor of action. Rather, basing one's life on the rules of faith and in adhering to the basic principles of action, one must move forward always in accordance with good counsel and prayer. In that way, one will discover the pure will of God and not make a mistake in regard to one's vocation upon which depends every step of our lives, our predestination, our salvation. Completely satisfied with those fundamental principles, although still others were advanced for his well-being, the Servant of God did not cease tending toward joining the Company of Jesus. He even sought to be admitted there along with Fr. Carlo Odescalchi. However, the Lord, who had other things planned for him, as did Albertini also, though I am not able to say whether it was through the concern of Monsignor Cristaldi or through some other supernatural intervention that made the situation known, he was assured that even though he and Odescalchi had submitted their names to the aforementioned Company, they would not enter. And, as a matter of fact, around the following day, they received news by means of a short note that they had been summoned by the Supreme Pontiff Pius VII to an audience when he would

assign them to mission work. The Servant of God bowed his head to this wish of the supreme authority and knew decisively from that moment on that it was the most holy will of God that he should accept the apostolic career of conducting missions.⁶⁰

Writing to the same Countess Ginnasi at the end of November 1814, Gaspar confides in her regarding his vocation:

In regard to the question of my joining the Jesuits, I have sought the advice of the most expert spiritual directors and the advice commonly given was that I should continue to do good work as a secular priest. But even so, let us continue to pray so that I will know how to recognize the will of God.⁶¹

The papal commission to be an apostolic missionary engaged Gaspar to carry out this task in the most efficient way possible together with his companions of the Holy League, founded by Don Gaetano Bonanni on the feast of Corpus Christi in 1813. The League consisted of secular priests, called the "Gospel Workers," who dedicated themselves to the popular missions while remaining in their own residences. While still in prison, Gaspar was also invited to participate in their work and he joined the group with enthusiasm, by means of a letter written from Florence on January 14, 1814, to the secretary of the Gospel Workers, Don Antonio Santelli.⁶²

The priests of the Holy League were preaching missions, but as it was conceived, the League could not assure the stability of this ministry. Thus, Gaspar devoted himself not only to finding a stable location for the work with his companions and, above all, with Bonanni, but also to establishing a true and proper institute of secular priests living a common life and dedicated solely and permanently to the ministry of popular missions. In

a letter of September 22, 1814, he writes to Bonnani “with holy liberty”:

So, let us follow once again the paths of that Providence which has already given and continues to give to our Works very manifest signs of approval. . . An Evangelical Worker for whom the way is opened to perpetuate such a praiseworthy institution, even after his death, must not abandon the undertaking to which he has committed himself, postponing it for some other goods whose stability is equally uncertain. . . . All I want is the will of the Lord.⁶³

Moreover, he did take the initiative. This is how Merlini describes the events:

He had the opportunity of going to Giano, in the diocese of Spoleto, with the illustrious Monsignor Bellisario Cristaldi who had the practice of taking with him each year an enthusiastic priest for preaching a short Mission in preparation for the feast of the most holy Madonna delle Grazie, celebrated in Giano on All Saints Day. In past years, Fr. Gaetano Bonanni had also taken part. There, together with Lawyer Paolucci, one of the principal landowners in Giano, they seriously discussed the new organization and it was mentioned that for such a purpose, most serviceable would be the church and monastery of San Felice, bishop and martyr, which had recently been surrendered and formally renounced by the Passionist Fathers.⁶⁴

When he returned to Rome, he spoke of this with Bonanni and his companions. Cristaldi pressed him to present the request for the convent and church of San Felice di Giano in the most reasonable way possible and on November 30, 1814, the rescript of Pius VII granting the request was ready.⁶⁵

In addition to concerning himself with bringing the foundation of the work to completion, along with Albertini and Cristaldi he saw to it that the foundation would have the name of the Divine Blood.⁶⁶

In December 1814, the Apostle of the Divine Blood made an auspicious beginning for this ministry of his with a mission at San Nicola in Carcere, the birthplace of the devotion destined to be spread throughout the world.⁶⁷

The prediction of Sister Maria Agnese of the Incarnate Word was gradually coming to realization. Gaspar was also coming to a greater awareness of the truth of the prophecy, with the result that he no longer had doubts about the plan. Thus, in 1825 he would write to Leo XII that his Institute was

. . . conceived during the time of exile, wonderfully developed immediately after the exile with great advantage to souls, and, at the same time, to the anger of the devil who has never ceased nor does he now cease from waging a special war against this very expression: 'Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.'⁶⁸

Moreover, the testimonies given in the processes prior to Gaspar's beatification pass on to us this firm conviction.⁶⁹

After St. Gaspar founded the Congregation at San Felice di Giano on August 15, 1815, he continued to work with Albertini to expand the Confraternity and to enrich it with spiritual favors. A brief obtained from Pius VII on September 22, 1815, gave the Confraternity various indulgences. With another brief of September 26, it was elevated to the title of Archconfraternity.⁷⁰

By now, the soul of Gaspar is wedded to the cause of the Blood of Jesus and he will live single-mindedly for it.

The Fifth Stage: 1817
First Promoter and Missionary of the
Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood

At the point at which we have now arrived, it seems impossible to be able to record, with specific dates, other movements of Gaspar's spirit toward the devotion to the Precious Blood. One should understand that until his death he would grow in perfection in this devotion. How might one follow the intimate and intense activity that the Holy Spirit was unfolding within him? It is impossible for us, who understand his soul only through deeds and testimonies. We find these in abundance, however, in the letters of St. Gaspar, in his writings, and in the depositions for the processes of beatification and canonization.

Now, however, we must complete a final step, which permits us to contemplate the figure of Gaspar rising like a lone giant in the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, accomplishing thus the third part of the prediction of Sister Maria Agnese: "He will be *the trumpet* of the Divine Blood," not *a trumpet*, for he will be *the Apostle* of the Precious Blood, and not just *an apostle*.

We now come to 1817, the fifth stage we have determined in the mystical spiritual journey of our Apostle of the Blood of Christ.

I single out this year mainly because it was then that those responsible for the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood recognized Gaspar as having a special excellence in his devotion to the Precious Blood. Here is how the events unfolded.

One should recall that Albertini founded the Pious Union of the Precious Blood as an association of the laity. Then, in his desire to assure the spread of the devotion of the Precious Blood, especially by means of the preaching of popular missions, he enlarged the project, instituting as an integral part of the lay association the group of Missionaries of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. Secular priests, as well as religious and

bishops, were able to join. The first to join this group in 1817, following the suggestion of the same Albertini, was St. Gaspar,⁷¹ and after him his missionary companions joined.⁷² These “were confirmed in the *Constitutions* of the named Archconfraternity and declared as the principal brothers and propagators of the devotion of the Precious Blood.”⁷³

Now that Gaspar had become a member, it was hardly a surprise that, at a meeting of the officers of the Archconfraternity held on December 27, 1814, he would be elected general director of the missions of the Archconfraternity as well as “first promoter and missionary of the Precious Blood.”

The following day the secretary of the Archconfraternity, Sig. Pietro Zucchetti, communicated the news with these words:

Since your most reverend lordship has been elected by a significant number of votes as the principal promoter and Missionary to encourage evermore the devotion to the most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, the primary title of our Archconfraternity erected at the altar of the most holy Crucifix in the basilica of San Nicola in Carcere, the undersigned secretary, in carrying out the directions of our Congregation, hereby informs you of the decision made last night and has the honor of kissing your hand.⁷⁴

The choice could not have fallen to a person more worthy or more prepared. In this event, we see the point of convergence of the divine plan with human collaboration. Gaspar, from this moment, is the Apostle of the Precious Blood, not just out of a personal impetus, but also by means of an obligation received and accepted. In order to carry out this commitment with greater merit, he makes a vow to spread the devotion to the Divine Blood to the point of sacrifice.⁷⁵

This vow marks the highest summit Gaspar reached in his journey of maturation as the Apostle of the Blood of Christ. His future life would be an ongoing implementation of the vow, not only in the practice and in the spreading of the devotion to the Precious Blood, but also in its defense later even in the face of attacks on the part of the supreme authority of the Church.⁷⁶

Fr. Beniamino Conti is the author of a number of works on St. Gaspar and the early history of the Congregation and is well known for having edited a critical edition of the writings of St. Gaspar. He is a member of the Italian Province.

This article is based on a presentation given at a workshop for C.PP.S. formators held in June and July 2003. Fr. Conti has written a book on this topic that recently appeared in a second edition: San Gaspare del Bufalo, Apostolo del Sangue di Cristo, Rome, 2002. The book includes the material in this article as well as much more on the role of the devotion to the Blood of Christ in Gaspar's life and ministry, especially in his preaching.

The translation from the Italian is by Jerome Stack, C.PP.S.

Precious Blood Devotion and Spirituality from Saint Gaspar to the Present Day

Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ has been central to the identity and self-understanding of our Congregation from the very beginning. It was under this title that St. Gaspar del Bufalo created our Institute in 1815, and it was this very title he defended before Pope Leo XII when the Institute came under attack in 1825 from his opponents. The diffusion of devotion to the Precious Blood was seen as central to the work of the Missionaries in their popular mission preaching, and was even enshrined for a time as the principal purpose of the Missionaries in the 1946 *Constitutions*.

This article is directed in a special way to those who are responsible for the formation of candidates for the C.P.P.S. As such, it does not attempt to give a full account of the various themes which make up our understanding of the Blood of Christ. Nor does it give a complete history of the various turns which this reality has taken for us in the course of nearly two centuries. Rather, it is an attempt to step back from the immediate details of our understanding of the Blood of Christ to raise questions which are important for the work of

formation in communicating the meaning of the Blood of Christ.

The first question has to do with the *concrete form* of our understanding of the meaning of the Blood of Christ in the history of redemption and what that means for our response to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We live, after all, not with a general, abstract or purely theological understanding of the Blood of Christ. We live out that meaning in very concrete forms of prayer and action. To that end, we will examine our experience of the meaning of the Blood of Christ for us under two separate, but deeply interrelated forms, namely, as *devotion* and as *spirituality*. These represent two distinctive approaches to the meaning of the Blood of Christ for us, approaches which exist alongside, and interrelated with, one another.

In order to do that, we will need to examine something of the *structure* of devotion as a response to the mystery of the Blood of Christ, and also the structure of spirituality. These two approaches—devotion and spirituality—have the same purpose or end: namely, a deeper union with the great mystery of God's interaction with our world, and the meaning and destiny of our very being. But their internal structure is somewhat different, as is also their mode of interacting with the larger world.

To that end, we will need to look at a second question as we scan the history of the Precious Blood from the time of our founder, St. Gaspar, to the present day: namely, how the *concrete situation* in which we have found ourselves has shaped our presentation of the heritage of this great mystery, as well as how we live it out in our ministries and in our daily lives.

Bringing these two questions together—namely, of our how we understand the mystery of the Blood of Christ in concrete form as devotion or spirituality, and of how that understanding shapes our response to the world in which we live—is essential for the work of

formation of candidates and lay associates in our Congregation. To live as Missionaries is to do more than just know certain things about the Blood of Christ, and then to present them directly in our ministries. We must know also how to engage the people with whom and among whom we minister.

There have been, for example, periods of time in some parts of our Congregation where our members have wondered whether we could continue to speak of the Precious Blood as central to our identity at all. That is not a major question today, but the concerns raised at those times provide us with important questions which can help us respond to the questions arising from our candidates today. Such questions I found when I worked in formation included: Why focus on the Blood of Christ? What does this mean for my ministry? How does it shape the Christian life and a Christian response to the world in which I work and live?

I will structure this presentation in two parts. The first part will focus on Precious Blood *devotion* as it has been understood from the time of St. Gaspar to the present day. The second part will look at Precious Blood *spirituality* as it has developed in certain parts of our Congregation in the last two decades or so. As I said at the beginning, both of these forms are alive and among us today. Both are concerned about the same things, but take distinctive perspectives on how to communicate the mystery of Christ in our world today.

In each of these parts, on devotion and on spirituality, I will talk about three things. First of all, the *distinctive structure* of devotional practices and the practice of spirituality. This is necessary in order to understand the second area we need to examine, namely, how the *major themes of the Blood of Christ* are taken up in each of these forms. Third and finally, I will look at the *contexts* which make devotional practices or the practice of spirituality the more appropriate response to a situation or part of the world where the C.P.P.S. finds itself today.

By looking at contexts, or reading the “signs of the times,” we can see more clearly how devotion and spirituality both provide appropriate forms of communicating what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

By approaching the meaning of the Blood of Christ for us, both in history and today, I hope to set the stage for examining more closely the role, responsibilities, and challenges of formation today and in the near future. In effect, then, I am giving you a reading—one person’s reading—of the place and history of the Precious Blood in our lives and ministries as the C.PP.S.

DEVOTION TO THE BLOOD OF CHRIST FROM ST. GASPAR TO OUR DAY

Through most of history of the C.PP.S., we have spoken of our manner of responding to and living out the meaning of the Precious Blood in terms of *devotion*. In order to understand why our founding figures used this term, and why it continues to be used, we must begin by examining what we mean by *devotion*.

Devotion as Personal Commitment and as Practices

The term *devotion* encompasses two distinctive meanings. Devotion is first of all a posture, an approach, or an attitude toward an aspect of the divine mystery. Michele Colagiovanni, in one his reflections on the meaning of devotion, aptly traces the meaning of devotion back to its etymology in the word “dedication.” To engage in devotion to someone or something is to have a special commitment to that reality, a commitment that is marked by a focusing or dedicating of one’s life to that reality.¹ To engage in devotion is, therefore, to “be devoted.” Everything encompassed in that field of focus and dedication constitutes “devotion.”

Devotion has also a second meaning. It refers to the set of spiritual practices one engages in to give

expression to that object of dedication. These practices are the concrete embodiment, if you will, of that devot- edness. Sometimes this second meaning of devotion is expressed in the use of the term devotion in the plural, as *devotions*.²

When we speak of devotion to the Blood of Christ, we generally include both of these meanings. In the first meaning, of devotion as an object of focus and dedica- tion, we can enumerate certain themes included in our understanding of the meaning of the Blood of Christ. I would enumerate four principal themes regarding the Blood of Christ which recur in our understanding of its meaning, from St. Gaspar down to the present time:

- The first is God's *great love for humankind*, mani- fest in God's sending of the Son into our world to become one of us, and his taking our sins upon him- self as a sign of that love. The Son's total dedication to us and to our humanity is expressed in his will- ingness to shed his Blood for us to the point of death. The Blood of Christ, therefore, is a sign of God's unbounded love for all of us.
- The second is our devotion to this great mystery in the *passion and death of Jesus Christ* for the sake of our sins. The meaning of God's great devotion to us is given in the story of Jesus' willingness to undergo suffering and death on our behalf. In this story of the suffering and death of Jesus, we give special attention to the bloodsheddings noted in the Gospel accounts (the agony in the garden, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the carrying of the cross, the crucifixion, and the piercing of Jesus' side after his death). These moments in the story when Blood is shed give us a special entry into the suffering of Jesus on our behalf. Moreover, the story of the suf- fering and death of Jesus opens up for us the larger narrative of God's intentions regarding human des- tiny: that we are deeply loved by God, and God

wishes reconciliation and a renewed communion with us, despite our sinfulness.

- These meanings of God's love, our sinfulness, and the suffering and death of Jesus for our sakes finds profound symbolic presentation for us in the Eucharist. Participation in the Eucharist recalls for us all the dimensions of this great story. In the Eucharist we are invited to enter into these holy mysteries and into deeper communion with God. In the Eucharist we offer once again to God the Blood of Jesus, source of infinite merit for the taking away of our sins, and the pledge of eternal communion with God.
- The fourth theme is that God's great love for us in the story of Jesus reminds us of our sinfulness and the need to respond to this great love by reparation for our sins. Reparation involves both acknowledgment of our having sinned through engaging in penitential practices to show the depth of our sorrow. Those practices of penitence both acknowledge our wrongdoing and represent an effort to participate in sufferings of Christ so as to enter more deeply into communion with him. The Blood of Jesus can also give meaning to our own suffering, as a means of participation in the suffering of Christ. A corollary dimension of this theme is the importance of martyrdom as the ultimate expression of our commitment to Christ.

If we look at the authors who have tried to articulate the focus of our dedication to the meaning of Christ for us, these are the four themes which are returned to again and again, from St. Gaspar's mentor, Francesco Albertini, through Gaspar himself and down to the present time.³ There are, to be sure, many additional themes derived from these four, but it is to these four—God's love, the suffering of Jesus in his passion and death, the Eucharist, and penitential reparation for sin—that they all, in one way or another, return.

Devotion, then, represents entering into the divine mystery with a special focus. Devotion also entails engaging in spiritual practices which give expression to these commitments. There are a number of such spiritual practices clearly identified with the devotion to the Blood of Christ. Let me mention some of them.

- Certainly participation in the *sacraments of Eucharist and Penance* (or as it is now called, *Reconciliation*) are principal practices marking a devotee of the Blood of Christ. As already noted, it is in the Eucharist that all the themes of the Blood of Christ converge. Frequent participation in and reception of the Eucharist show one's devotion to the Blood of Christ. For Missionaries of the Precious Blood, these practices of participating in Penance and Eucharist are enjoined upon us in the *Normative Texts* (C13, 14).
- A second practice flowing from the participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist is *Eucharistic adoration*. Although not enjoined upon us in the current *Normative Texts*, it has a long history in our Congregation, dating back to the founder himself. It is a practice which has gained renewed interest in certain parts of the C.P.P.S. in recent years.
- A third practice distinctive to the Precious Blood family is the *Chaplet of the Precious Blood (coroncina)*. Similar to the rosary, it is a means of meditating on the Seven Bloodsheddings of Christ. It originates from Francesco Albertini, and was propagated enthusiastically by St. Gaspar and his Missionaries. In recent years a variety of forms of praying the Chaplet have been suggested, but all of these go back in one way or another to Albertini's original form.⁴
- A fourth set of practices includes a variety of prayers and hymns. Among the former the best known are the *Seven Offerings of the Precious Blood*

and the short ejaculatory prayer “Eternal Father.” Also, the *Litany of the Precious Blood*, approved for use in the universal Church by Blessed John XXIII, and a variety of other prayers to be found in manuals of prayers issued by the different provinces of the C.P.P.S. Likewise, observance of special prayers during the month of July, the month devoted to the Precious Blood can be mentioned.⁵

- A fifth set of practices are more generalized forms of Catholic piety, such as Stations of the Cross, pilgrimage, participation in popular missions, retreats, days of recollection, and the like. These are widely shared with other Christians but often carry specific themes of the Blood of Christ.

Distinctive Features of Devotion

Devotion to the Blood of Christ has been, and continues to be, part of the identifying feature of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Having said something about the themes and practices of the devotion, can something also be noted of this approach to the Blood of Christ as devotion? I would like to suggest a number of features.

First of all, the practices of the devotion are intended to help us enter more deeply into the great themes of the Precious Blood. The practices do this by engaging our intellect, but also especially our emotions and bodies in reflecting on the Blood of Christ. They are intended not simply to provide knowledge, but to stir up our feelings, deepen our commitments, and strengthen our motivation to seek communion with God under these forms. An important element of devotional practice in general, therefore, and of Precious Blood devotion in particular, is to engage us more closely with the divine mysteries.

Second, devotional practices, to a large extent, can be either individual or communal. One can recite the *Chaplet of the Precious Blood* or the prayers alone or

communally. When done alone, they provide scope for linking one's own life and experience to the story of salvation. When done communally they can create profound bonds of solidarity among those who are participating. For members of the Congregation, praying these prayers alone can remind us of the links we have to those present who are praying with us, but also fellow members and devotees who do the same elsewhere.

Third, many of devotional practices do not require the presence of clergy. Reception of the sacraments requires clergy, but Eucharistic adoration, prayers, and penitential practices do not. Even though that has changed since the Second Vatican Council, the persistence of these devotional practices reminds us that so many of these practices are rooted deeply in the popular religiosity (*religiosidad popular*) of Christians. The value of popular religiosity is more appreciated today as an authentic form of faith, thanks especially to the efforts of theologians in Latin America. They are not just deracinated or incomplete forms of Christian piety which will pass away if there is greater liturgical participation.^a

Fourth, one cannot but notice the instrumental or motivational dimension of devotion. That is, devotion is not an end in itself. It is intended to lead to a deeper commitment in Christian faith and can be seen in at least some measure as an instrument for achieving that. To realize this we need but think back on why St. Gaspar was so keen on propagating this devotion. Colagiovanni collects and notes some of those motivations of St. Gaspar and his followers in a now-familiar

^aIt would be worth exploring at another time whether the capacity of the Missionaries to work so closely with and be identified with the people is not at least partly the product of the fact that their identification with the Precious Blood was marked by such practices of popular piety.

list: the reform of morals, the salvation of souls, the reform of the clergy, and the rescue of the faithful from lack of faith or indifference toward religion. Engaging in Precious Blood devotion was for the purpose of achieving these ends.⁶ The fact that elements of the story of redemption are just referred to, rather than explicated, assumes that people already know the story and only need to be reminded of that story so as to renew their ardor.

Devotion represents, therefore, a special way of configuring the themes and practices of Christian faith. They confer a certain identity on those who practice the devotion, and in so doing serve a way of entering into the mysteries of faith.

Contexts for Devotion to the Precious Blood

Devotion to the Blood of Christ has at times been presented as somewhat timeless and universal, that is, at home in every time and every place: we can engage in the devotions of St. Gaspar and his first followers, even though we are separated from them in time, place, and culture. There is a certain truth to this, and this gives us solidarity with the time and very origins of our Congregation. However, the fact that devotion to the Blood of Christ as it has been outlined here has flourished more in some times and places than others makes us raise questions about context: Are there certain conditions that make Precious Blood devotion more lively and fruitful for people? Why has Precious Blood devotion flourished more at some times than others?

The second half of the twentieth century brought a greater awareness of understanding context and culture, and how these influence our capacity to understand and appreciate certain things. Learning to read the “signs of the times” at the Second Vatican Council, the appearance of the language of “inculturation” in the 1970s, and the language of the “refounding” of religious communities in the 1980s and 1990s have heightened our

awareness of the importance of context. Indeed it would now be considered irresponsible to form candidates without some awareness of the specific features of the situation in which they find themselves, and how that affects what people are able to hear and to experience. Culture and the capacity to live and work with people of different cultures are clearly challenges before us today.

Can something be said about the contexts which make devotion to the Precious Blood flourish in a special way? I would like to respond to this by looking first at the place of the origins of the devotion, Italy in the nineteenth century, and then looking at our current situation in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Precious Blood Devotion in Nineteenth Century Italy

I begin by looking at the origins of devotion to the Precious Blood in nineteenth century Italy. I do this not only because that is where the origins of the C.P.P.S. can be found, but also because it is widely acknowledged that devotion to the Precious Blood as it has come to be practiced worldwide in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had its roots in Italy. Devotion in Italy can be traced as the source of all the some fifteen religious congregations in the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century which have "Precious Blood" in their title. The largest Confraternity of the Precious Blood in the world today is traced back to an Anglican convert to Catholicism, Fr. Frederick William Faber. He learned of this devotion when he studied in Rome shortly after his conversion. When he returned to England, he published in 1860 *The Precious Blood; or, the Price of Our Redemption*. This book has never gone out of print since. He set up a worldwide Confraternity of the Precious Blood much larger than the Archconfraternity set up by Albertini, or its subsequent Union of the Blood of Christ.

There is widespread agreement that the modern devotion to the Precious Blood began with Francesco

Albertini in 1808. Albertini founded the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood at the Church of S. Nicola in Carcere in Rome in 1808, developed the Chaplet of the Precious Blood as a principal devotional practice, and mentored Gaspar del Bufalo in the founding of a missionary institute under the title of this mystery. He is the single source for these developments, not only among the Missionaries and the Adorers of the Blood of Christ founded by St. Maria De Mattias in 1834, but also, at least indirectly, of all the other congregations dedicated to the Blood of Christ founded in Italy in the nineteenth century.^b

What was the context that made Italy such fertile ground for Precious Blood devotion, and how were those conditions replicated elsewhere to spread that devotion? In her research, Sister Nicla Spezzati, A.S.C., has identified the two most important features of nineteenth century Italy that made this possible: the Restoration and Romanticism.⁷

The Restoration

The foundation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in 1815 was a direct outcome of a project by Pope Pius VII to restore the spiritual and social life of the Papal States after the depredations of Napoleon's occupation. This program, inaugurated by Pius VII and continued up to the beginning of the reign of Pius IX in

^bFor a presentation on these congregations, see John M. Behen, *Religious of the Precious Blood* (Carthagenia: Messenger Press, 1957). For studies on the founding figures of some of these congregations, see the articles collected in volume II of Achille M. Triacca (ed.), *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo e l'esperienza cristiana* (Roma: Ed. Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, 1987). It should be noted that Fr. Faber's work was the principal resource for the naming of the Anglican Congregation "The Society of the Precious Blood," a contemplative congregation of nuns founded in 1905.

1846, is usually called by historians "the Restoration." The Restoration attempted to restore the faith and morals of Catholics in the Papal States, as well as bring about the reform of the clergy. There was an awareness on the part of Pius VII and others that reform was also needed in many aspects of the state and of Church life, but there was never clear agreement on how far the reforms should go. What was in any case clear was that the pope was to be the sole sovereign in the Papal States.

The winds of political reform, first apparent in the French revolution and fed by the ideology of the Enlightenment, continued to grow in strength throughout Europe after Napoleon, culminating in the 1848 revolution in France and parts of Germany. Nationalist forces began coming together in the Italian peninsula, leading to the rise of the *Risorgimento* in the 1840s, which temporarily unseated Pius IX in 1848, and eventually led to the dissolution of the Papal States altogether in 1870.

St. Gaspar died in 1837, before the *Risorgimento* began to gather force. He was clearly a person of Pius VII's Restoration, and his polemics against the evils of the time cannot be understood apart from the policies of the Restoration. "Restoration" did not mean for him so much political reform as the reform of personal morals. One finds this already in his confrontation with the Carbonari, the Freemasons, and other free-thinking sects in his missions north of Rome.⁸ It is evident also in how he approached the problem of the *banditi* south of Rome in the 1820s. His concern was personal moral reform, be that of the brigands, the Papal governors, or the police. He did not raise larger questions about the nature of government itself as we might today.

Devotion to the Precious Blood, as an "armament against the times," was intended to make strong the souls of those struggling within the shifting social and political currents of that era. By living an upright life, in union with the Church, one would be found righteous before God.

Romanticism

It would be wrong, however, to see Gaspar and his Missionaries from a point of view of a century and a half later as political reactionaries. The Restoration was a reactionary movement against the French Enlightenment and its attendant ideas, to be sure. But there was also a more positive image or vision which guided this critique of the Enlightenment. It can be found in the movement which began to move through Europe in those years, known as Romanticism.

Romanticism began in Germany in the eighteenth century as a reaction to the universalizing character of the Enlightenment as it had come to Germany from France.^c Romanticism, as it spread from Germany to England, France, and Italy, countered the universalizing political perspective of the Enlightenment and insisted upon the importance of the particular and the local. In Romanticism we find the roots of nationalism, that is, the belief that each people has a unique character and temperament, which needs to be expressed in a distinctive language and culture as an organic whole. Likewise, the individual is not simply an instance of universal principles, but a uniquely constituted person within a distinctive culture.

This sense of being part of an organic whole expressed itself *politically* in the revolutionary and nationalist movements of nineteenth century Europe, of which the Italian *Risorgimento* is a prime example. It

^cIt should be noted that the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries was not a uniform movement. The French version was particularly anti-clerical and against the preponderant power of the Church. The Scottish Enlightenment (with figures like David Hume and Adam Smith) represented a form of Enlightenment more favorably attuned to religion. It was this form of Enlightenment which had the greatest influence on the founding of the American Republic in the 1780s.

swept through Latin America at the same time, leading to the emancipation of the colonies from Spain and Portugal.

The Church in all of these places was decidedly ambivalent toward nationalism, since the place of the Church in post-nationalist settings would likely be less privileged than it had been in the monarchical states (this was especially clear for Pius IX and for the Papal States). But the Church had its own Romantic ideal. This was the Catholicism of the European Middle Ages, before the trauma of the 16th century Reformation.

The medieval Church was seen to be an organic and ideal society, where everyone knew their place. Undivided Christendom, under the tutelage of the papacy, was seen as the ideal form of society. Consequently, one sees in the nineteenth century a renewed interest in the Church and the culture of the Middle Ages. Neo-Gothic became the preferred architecture for church buildings. The medieval guilds represented the best form of commercial life. In England, for example, this developed into the Tractarian movement in the 1830s, which in turn in the 1840s led Anglicans such as John Henry Newman and Frederick William Faber away from the Church of England and back to the Church of Rome.

The revival and power of Precious Blood devotion in the nineteenth century cannot be understood without these medieval antecedents. St. Albert the Great and St. Bonaventure had been great advocates of devotion to the bloodsheddings of Jesus. Many of the great medieval mystics—one thinks of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Julian of Norwich, B. Angela da Foligno, and St. Catherine of Siena—spoke of being inebriated in the Blood of Christ, or seeking entry into his wounds. There was a lively devotion to the passion of Christ in those centuries, which received expression in the penitential fraternities founded in Spain, in the passion plays developed throughout the southern German-speaking territories, and in the development of the Stations of the Cross.

And one can also not discount the proliferation of shrines to the Precious Blood throughout Europe, especially between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. These shrines were basically of two types. Some claimed to have relics of the passion, such as earth or clothing stained by the Blood of Christ as he died on the cross. Major shrines of this type could be found in Mantua, in Bruges, and in Weingarten. More numerous were shrines to miracles of hosts which bled when priests doubted the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements, or to hosts which bled when profaned.^d In their research into these shrines, Frs. Charles Banet and William Volk noted that at least 221 such shrines have existed or continue to exist in Europe today.⁹ The shrine at Santa Maria in Vado in Ferrara, entrusted to the C.P.P.S. in 1930, is a site of a Eucharistic miracle dating from 1171.¹⁰

This medieval backdrop helps clarify the development of the devotion to the Precious Blood in Italy in the nineteenth century. Francesco Albertini's devotion to the Blood of Jesus was centered upon a relic of the Passion, which the Savelli family donated to San Nicola in Carcere in 1708. Albertini celebrated Mass regularly at the altar where the relic was enshrined, while the faithful recited the Chaplet of the Precious Blood.

The emphasis on miracle and other forms of divine intervention permeate the nineteenth century devotion. It was the prediction of the ecstatic Sister Maria Agnese of the Incarnate Word which convinced Albertini—and Gaspar—of the divine will that an Institute of Missionaries of the Precious Blood be founded. Pious biographies of St. Gaspar recount a number of miracles

^dThe bleeding hosts were common during the time of the Eucharistic controversies regarding the real presence. The profaned hosts were often connected to anti-Semitic accounts of Jews profaning the Eucharistic elements.

attributed to him.¹¹ This atmosphere of miracles is certainly reminiscent of medieval piety.

Finally, if one looks to the texts on devotion to the Precious Blood from this period, their sighs, exclamations and ejaculations recall those of the medieval mystics. All in all, it seems to me, one cannot understand the rise and the persistence of Precious Blood devotion in the nineteenth century without reference to the Romanticism which formed its context and gave it many of its forms. This was not simply a rejection of the modern world which was developing, but has to be seen also as a desire for a more integrated, organic way of living in the midst of the political, social, and economic upheavals of the time.

Neo-Romanticism Today

Placing the rise of Precious Blood devotion at the intersection of the Restoration and Romanticism might lead some to think that this devotion has no relevance for the beginning of the twenty-first century, or that it can only find acceptance among those who live in utter reaction to the developments of modernity. To think in such terms would be shortsighted.

What has become evident since the interaction of the Enlightenment and Romanticism over the past two hundred years is that this was not a dialectic that played itself out only in the first part of the nineteenth century. It represents a larger interplay between the universal and the particular, the global and the local, which continues into our own time.

For example, the interest in inculturation of faith in the Church since the 1970s is unthinkable outside this dialectic. The Second Vatican Council, especially in documents such as *Gaudium et Spes*, attempted a broad new vision for the Church of the twentieth century. It left room for interpretation of cultural difference, but this challenge was only really taken up more than a decade after the Council. Insisting on the particularity of

culture as integral to the human being and to human development is part of the heritage of Romanticism very much alive with us today. Our language of multiculturalism and interculturality has romanticist roots.

The experience of what is now called *postmodernity*, the experience of the loss of an overarching worldview that would hold the Western world together, has been fruitful ground for the resurgence of Romantic sensibility. The quest for wholeness in the midst of what is perceived as fragmentation, unmanageable pluralism, and cultural relativism makes the organic view of life particularly attractive for many people today.

One form of Precious Blood devotion very much alive in parts of the C.PP.S. today that reflects this Romantic heritage, but in a postmodern way, is the interest in charismatic forms of piety. Such interest in charismatic forms of prayer represent a reappropriation of the Romantic heritage. They must also be read in terms of the wider Pentecostal/charismatic forms of Christianity widespread in the world today. By all accounts, Pentecostal and charismatic movements represent the fastest growing form of Christianity in the world today. An estimated 350 million of the 2 billion Christians in the world today profess a Pentecostal or charismatic form of faith. It is especially fast growing in West Africa, Latin America, Southern Asia, and the Philippines. One finds it in the C.PP.S. in Central Europe, but also to some extent in Chile and elsewhere.

Why the sudden upsurge of interest in Pentecostal faith in our time? Scholars are not of one mind on this.¹² The first stirrings of Pentecostalism occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States, Chile, and India. Since the 1970s, the numbers have increased exponentially, not only among Protestant Evangelicals, but also among mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, and even the Orthodox.

I see three reasons for the growth of Pentecostal forms of faith today. First of all, among the poor, it is a

way of gaining self-respect and dignity. The poor may be despised by the powerful, but their access to divine favor in Pentecostal faith (prophesying, healing, and speaking in tongues) shows that the Holy Spirit does not despise them. It gives them a sense of self-worth and autonomy which the rich cannot take away from them.

Second, among middle class people who embrace Pentecostal and charismatic forms of faith, it can be a reaction against the fragmentation and confusion of modern and postmodern life. Much as the Romantics protested against the abstract and universalizing character of life under the Enlightenment, so too middle-class charismatics today seek a more organic way of life amid the confusion and the pluralism they experience.

Third, although participation in Pentecostal and charismatic faith can be positive for the reasons just given, it also—as does any movement—have negative sides. Among the poor, it can turn energy away from improving their situation to finding a way to simply survive within it. For middle-class people, it can be an avoidance of engaging the difficult process of living in a pluralistic, multicultural context. For both groups, such forms of faith have also sometimes become tied to what is known as the “prosperity Gospel”: love Jesus and get rich.

Thus, phenomena as different as a commitment to intercultural and multicultural living, and the widespread Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity show part of the heritage of Romanticism. One sees how devotion to the Blood of Christ flourishes today especially in those contexts. These do not exhaust the reasons why Precious Blood devotion continues to be a vital form of faith for people. In Italy, for example, I would hazard the guess that sheer cultural continuity between the forces which shaped modern Italy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and what sustains modern and postmodern Italians today, accounts for the continued vigor of the devotion. In Poland, where

the Church was the sole guarantor of Polish national identity for more than two centuries of occupation and oppression, devotion is ideally suited to connecting present experience to that cultural and religious heritage denied under totalitarian and atheistic regimes. For others, devotional practices give an emotional and spiritual intensity to connect with the transcendent in a way that gives them genuine sustenance in their lives.

CONCLUSION TO PART ONE

In this first part, I have tried to show something about the structure and content of devotion to the Precious Blood as it developed from the time of St. Gaspar, and continues to show itself as lively and vigorous at the beginning of the twentieth century. I hope that this helps us to understand the origins of the devotion in the modern period, and also to some extent why it continues to be a lively option for so many people today. I would like to turn now to the second part of this presentation, the development of the *spirituality* of the Precious Blood.

SPIRITUALITY OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

Today we speak both of Precious Blood *devotion*, and of *spirituality* of the Blood of Christ. Why make this distinction? Where does it come from? And is it of any significance? In this second part, I wish to explore the emergence of the spirituality of the Blood of Christ. It is important to trace just where this development comes from, how it differs from Precious Blood devotion, and where it seems to be pointing for the future. As a final point, some attention will have to be given to how devotion and spirituality relate to one another in the larger world of the C.P.P.S. of the twenty-first century.

In this part, I will begin with emergence of the language of spirituality, and try to trace some of the reasons why it began to appear in the Catholic Church in the 1980s. Then, I will trace its emergence within the C.P.P.S. over the past two decades. In a third moment, I will trace what have become the principal themes in a spirituality of the Blood of Christ. Fourth and finally, I will explore how patterns of devotion and spirituality might relate in the C.P.P.S. in the immediate future of the first part of the twenty-first century.

The Rise of the Discourse of Spirituality in the Twentieth Century

In the lengthy article on “Blood” in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, published in the mid-1980s, the author, Réginald Grégoire, declared that today the devotion to the Precious Blood “is in a time of standstill.”¹³ Why did he make such a bold assertion?

That same feeling could be found in the C.P.P.S. in the period of the 1970s and early 1980s as well. Devotion to the Precious Blood, which seemed to be so alive only a decade or two earlier, appeared in some sectors to be in decline or even to have become hopelessly irrelevant. Part of the problem rose from the crisis which devotions in general found themselves after the Second Vatican Council. Within the C.P.P.S. and in other Congregations under this title, the question was raised about changing the title of their institutes altogether during this time. Devotion to the Precious Blood seemed for some to connote a different, now distant era, and a sensibility which no longer engaged the heart or the imagination.^e Blood-drenched images, so favored in the Middle Ages and

^eInterestingly, this happened not only among Catholics, but the Anglican Society of the Precious Blood went through the same crisis. (Personal communication from Mother Elizabeth Mary, S.P.B., September 10, 2002.)

again in the nineteenth century, now seemed almost alienating to many.¹⁴

Such shifts in sentiment usually say less about the practices of the past and more about questions of how contexts have shifted and certain ways of thinking, speaking, and acting no longer have the same resonance they once had. What had so dramatically changed as to make a devotion once so vigorous suddenly seem moribund? The change was, of course, not sudden. Three important developments which had begun earlier in the Church in the twentieth century contributed to this new situation: the biblical renewal, the liturgical renewal, and a new relation between the Church and the world.

The Biblical Renewal

The renewal of biblical studies which received official sanction in the Papal Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943 was an important development for changing how Catholics read the Bible. By introducing modern hermeneutical interpretation, contemporary readers of the Bible could experience both the cultural distance they had from the biblical text, but also its enduring message for them in their own time. The newer forms of interpretation emphasized looking at a biblical passage as a whole, rather than simply going to single verses of the Bible to legitimate a doctrinal position. It allowed for a more integral entering into the biblical world, alien as that might be for modern readers.

Many exegetes within the C.P.P.S. took up these new methods and started a wider exposition of texts which had been important for devotion to the Precious Blood. This opened up new ways of thinking about the biblical foundations of devotion to the Precious Blood.¹⁵

Such research created some dissonance with devotional uses of the biblical texts. Up to that time, biblical texts were often used as points of departure for meditations. However, closer scrutiny of the biblical text showed that the references to the bloodsheddings of

Jesus were indeed present, but scarcely developed in the New Testament. Moreover, attending to the integrity of the biblical documents prompted some shifts in emphasis in Precious Blood devotion. Thus, *blood* gets its principal significance in the Scriptures from the covenant, not from Christ's bloodsheddings on the cross. Indeed the latter is intelligible as salvific only within the larger context of the covenant. The significance of Christ's Blood at the Last Supper is less centered on the medieval disputes about the real presence, and more on a new covenant in memory and hope. References to Blood in the Letter to the Hebrews and in Revelation had less to do with the triumph and pomp of the liturgy than with the collective suffering of Christ and the saints. Even the reference to the "Precious" Blood of Christ is based on a single reference (I Peter 1: 19). So a renewed reading of the Bible would necessarily lead to a rereading of how the Blood of Christ was presented in Precious Blood devotion.

The Liturgical Renewal

The renewal of the liturgy in the twentieth century, culminating in the Sacred Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* at the Vatican Council in 1963, and in subsequent reforms after the Council, also created challenges for devotion to the Precious Blood. Let me note but three.

First of all, the reform of the liturgy, and the introduction of the use of local languages, led to a greater level of participation of the faithful, rather than it being a religious ritual performed by clergy while the faithful looked on. This new level of participation made such practices as saying the Chaplet of the Precious Blood during Mass unnecessary or even obtrusive.

Second, the restoration of the Eucharistic cup for all the faithful has had the potential—not yet entirely realized—for changing the relationship to the celebration of the Eucharist. Drinking from the cup places the

recipient of the Eucharist before greater challenges of sharing in Jesus' cup of suffering (cf. Matt 20: 22), as well as pondering what it means to drink of the cup unworthily (cf. I cor 11: 27).

A greater level of participation and the reintroduction of the Eucharistic cup had immediate effects on devotion to the Precious Blood. First of all, the new relationship to the Eucharist and to the Eucharistic cup narrowed the difference between what devotion to the Precious Blood meant for priests and what it meant for laity. Rather than two different spiritual worlds, it meant two perspectives in the same celebration of the Eucharist. Secondly, this shift in perspective meant that Eucharistic adoration, such a beloved and central devotional practice before the liturgical reform, now needed to be resituated and rethought. The Eucharist was no longer some distant divine reality to be adored or seen beyond the confines of the communion railing, but was now an event in which all believers, clerical and lay, participated.

Third, the renewed understanding of the Eucharist as an act of thanksgiving of the whole people of God meant that the Eucharist needed to find its connection with the wider world. The dismissal rite at the end of the Eucharist was not just an admonition that the Mass had ended (*"Ite, missa est"* 'Go, the Mass is over') but it was also now a challenge to carry the Eucharist into the world. ("Go, to love and to serve the Lord.") The Eucharist affects not only our interior lives, but how we see and move in the world.

A New Relation between the Church and the World

The thinking about what was called the "theology of worldly realities," and the rise of social action movements from the 1930s onward (think of Msgr. Cardijn's methodology of "see—judge—act") called for a new relationship between the Church and the world. The effects of social and political shifts in the nineteenth century

had led the Church to withdraw into itself, and see itself as a bastion of righteousness against a hostile modern world. Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* and the campaign against Modernism by Pius X were indicative of such a fortress mentality.

The renewal movements of the 1930s and 1940s created a new climate that found official acceptance and expression at the Second Vatican Council. In *Lumen Gentium* the Church was proclaimed to be a *sacramentum mundi*, a moment of grace within the world. The profound change of position represented by acceptance of religious freedom in *Dignitatis Humanae*, and a new relation to other religions proposed in *Nostra Aetate* extended this vision of a new relationship between the Church and the world. It culminated in the sweeping and ambitious vision of the relation between the Church and the modern world presented in *Gaudium et Spes*.

The result of all of this after the Council was a newly invigorated (we might say today perhaps overly optimistic) evaluation of engagement with the world. A devotion to the Precious Blood which only aimed at the human heart did not seem to take into account sufficiently the need to change social structures in the world. Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio* embodied much of that optimism.

All three of these developments—the renewal of biblical studies, the liturgical renewal, and the new social action—led to a collapse of the devotional piety which had sustained Catholics through the previous two centuries. This was by no means uniformly the case, but it was certainly strongly felt in Western Europe and in the Americas. In many ways, devotion to the Precious Blood was swept into this same eclipse along with other devotions. Although the Vatican Council had made no sanction against devotions, devotional practices went into steep decline.

What began to take the place of devotional piety was a language of *spirituality*. Spirituality was understood

as including many of the interests of devotional piety, but placing them in a broader scope. There was a greater concern for how a wider and more integral understanding of the Scriptures and the place of the Church in the modern world created a need to *interpret* the world in which Christians found themselves in biblical, theological, and even liturgical terms. Rather than seeking *responses* to the world in which we lived, spirituality was seen as an array of *resources* with which to interpret that world. Spirituality created a *horizon* out of which one tried to live out the message of Jesus. It was, in this sense, more interpretive of the world itself than had been devotion, which had seen itself as a set of commitments and a set of established practices.

The Response to the Crisis of Devotion in the C.PP.S.

Members of the C.PP.S. were not unaware of all these renewal developments in the middle of the twentieth century. One of the first concerted efforts to begin rethinking the meaning of the Blood of Christ in light of these emerging realities occurred in the American Province as early as 1957. In that year, and on two subsequent occasions in 1960 and 1968, a series of what were called “Precious Blood Study Weeks” were held at Saint Joseph’s College in Indiana to survey the changing landscape.¹⁶

It was the 1980s, however, which were to see the greatest amount of work which laid the foundations for a renewed spirituality of the Blood of Christ. Research and reflection took place in three different places of the Congregation that contributed to this.

Perhaps most significant was a monumental historical research project undertaken by the Italian Province through the 1980s and beyond. Under the auspices of the *Centro Studi Sanguis Christi*, led by Don Beniamino Conti, scholars within the C.PP.S. and other scholars from throughout Italy were invited to a series of

scholarly meetings at the Collegio Preziosissimo Sangue in Rome, where papers were read on different aspects of the Precious Blood in the Scriptures, the Church Fathers, and the history of theology. The proceedings of those meetings, held between 1980 and 1991, were published in a series of twenty-two volumes under the title *Sangue e Antropologia—Sangue e Vita 'Blood and Anthropology—Blood and Life.'* Alongside these volumes, publication of proceedings of scholarly meetings on the Precious Blood in the liturgy, in the history of religious congregations, and on a wide variety of other topics appeared in a series entitled *Collana Sangue e Vita, 'The Blood and Life Series'* which began in 1986. Volumes of this series continue to be published and, as of 2003, 16 volumes had appeared.¹⁷ The historical and theological work collected here will be an enduring resource for spirituality of the Blood of Christ for years to come.

In Latin America, a new commitment to the Church of the poor which had begun among the bishops at Medellín in 1968, led to the emergence of a new way of doing theology, known as the theology of liberation. In that same period, there was a dramatic increase in military dictatorships in countries across Latin America. This led to considerable ferment within the Latin American Church.

In response to this dramatic situation, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in Chile, working with the C.P.P.S. Sisters of Dayton, and the Religiosas de la Preciosa Sangre, initiated a series of biennial study weeks on the Precious Blood in 1982. Four volumes of proceedings appeared by 1988. These were attempts to interpret the meaning of the Blood of Christ for Latin America.¹⁸

In the United States, beginning with a conference in 1983 to honor the ninetieth birthday of Fr. Edwin Kaiser, C.P.P.S., a tireless writer on Precious Blood spirituality, the Cincinnati Province of the C.P.P.S. engaged

in a number of study days to examine what a Precious Blood spirituality might mean in North America today.¹⁹ The publication of a study on the biblical spirituality of the Blood of Christ in 1988, inspired by the encounter with Latin American realities, and later expanded to cover wider areas, represented an important attempt to articulate a spirituality of the Blood of Christ which met the challenges to renewal which have been explored in this section. For many, it marked the arrival of a spirituality of the Precious Blood for the new situation.²⁰

The impulses of the 1980s toward a new spirituality of the Blood of Christ laid the groundwork for continuing work through the 1990s. The Brazilian Vicariate (in 1994) and the Iberian Province (in 1995) initiated annual study weeks on the spirituality of the Blood of Christ.²¹ The Kansas City Province began a periodical entitled *The Wine Cellar*, edited by Joseph Nassal, C.PP.S., at about the same time. The Italian Province continued to publish studies aimed at a renewed understanding of the Blood of Christ, as well as a series on patristic texts relating to the Blood of Christ.²² At the meeting of the C.PP.S. major superiors in 1995, the moderator general and general council were mandated to issue an anthology of writings on this new spirituality. This appeared first in English as *A Precious Blood Reader*, and has appeared in German, Italian, and Spanish translations.²³ Since 1996, the general curia has published a semiannual periodical in five languages devoted to developments in Precious Blood spirituality.²⁴

A series of international symposia were also held in the 1990s to look at specific areas of Precious Blood spirituality. The Teutonic and Iberian Provinces, and the Chilean Vicariate, sponsored two symposia on Precious Blood Spirituality and education ministry, held in Santiago de Chile and Neuenheerse, respectively. The Cincinnati Province sponsored an international symposium on Precious Blood spirituality and parish ministry in Dayton, Ohio in 2002.²⁵ Two international symposia

on Precious Blood spirituality and the ministry of reconciliation were held in Cáceres (1998) and Lima (1999).²⁶

Finally, the work of Fr. Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S., has played a key role in developing this new spirituality. Along with numerous articles, his book *Along the Road Marked by Blood* related themes of Precious Blood spirituality to his experiences in Chile and Guatemala. His most recent work, *Il Grito del Sangue 'The Cry of the Blood,'* extends his horizon to the entire C.P.P.S. community, and to how this renewed spirituality can lead to a genuine "refounding."²⁷ An important distinction he has developed has now become commonplace in the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, namely, "the cry of the blood," and "call of the Blood." The "cry of the blood" refers to the situations of suffering and injustice we discover in our world today, crying out as it were for a response. The "call of the Blood" refers to the resources of our heritage of Precious Blood spirituality which we can bring to bear upon those situations crying out for healing and liberation.

I provide this long catalogue of work in Precious Blood spirituality over the past two decades to show that we have arrived at a new moment in reflection on our spirituality. It is safe to say that never in the history of our Congregation has there been such an amount of reflection going on regarding all aspects of our spirituality. It is upon these wonderful developments that we build our future.²⁸

Principal Themes in a Spirituality of the Blood of Christ

Just as there were discernible themes in Precious Blood devotion, so too are there recurring themes in a spirituality of the Blood of Christ. In order to understand those themes, we must begin with the larger significance of "blood" in the Scriptures. Blood is a symbol both of life and of death. Blood is a symbol of life because it was believed that the very breath of God was in the

blood, and it was this that made humans and animals alive. To spill blood was therefore a sign of death. The spilling of blood in the case of murder was a profanation of God's creation. (In this regard, it is interesting that the first reference to blood in the Old Testament is to the blood of the murdered Abel [Gen 4:10].) Blood shed in sacrifice became a unique medium of communion between humanity and God. This forms the backdrop for understanding the more than four hundred references to blood in the Bible.

At this point in its development, the spirituality of the Blood of Christ finds expression in four principal themes. I would like to explore each of them briefly here.

The Blood of the Covenant

The symbol most connected with Blood in the Bible is the covenant, that bonding of God with humanity in a series of promises to remain faithful. The Old Testament recounts a series of covenants, from that made with Noah, through that with Abraham, and most especially with Moses and the people of Israel. The death and resurrection of Christ marks a new and everlasting covenant for Christians in the New Testament. All of these covenants are sealed in blood. What gives Christ's Blood such preeminence is his being at once human and divine, and therefore able to bring humanity and God closer than ever before. All the language of redemption and salvation hinges on this idea of covenant.

In the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, the Blood of the covenant finds its meaning today in acts of solidarity with those who have been excluded or oppressed. It is an invitation to belonging, for those who are excluded for whatever reason in society (race, class, gender, ethnic origin, or whatever). It also speaks to the loneliness, lack of self-esteem, and anxiety of individuals in society. Under the impulse of the teaching of Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, it speaks to the dignity of each human person, and the protection of

life in all its stages—from conception to death—and to the creation of what he calls a “culture of life.”

The parallel to the language of the covenant in Precious Blood devotion is that the Precious Blood is a sign of God’s unbounded love for humanity. In the language of spirituality, it is more biblically based and better positioned to address different social circumstances in which people find themselves.

The Blood of the Cross

The Blood of the cross speaks in a special way to the suffering experienced in the world today. The cross stands as a sign, first of all, of the unjust suffering of so many in our world who are hungry, poor, ill, abandoned, oppressed, and excluded for no reason of their own actions. This reflects the state of perhaps the majority of people living on our planet today. The suffering of Christ on the cross, as the one who knew no sin, stands in solidarity with those who suffer today.

The Blood of the cross reminds us also of the suffering we inflict on one another through war, violence, hatred, discrimination, and oppression. The Blood of the cross reminds us of how sin stalks our world, and how much the world is in need of suffering.

The cross stands too as a sign of contradiction. It reminds us of the limitation of human power and all that counts for human success. It reminds us that we, of ourselves, cannot bring ourselves to completion or perfection.

The cross, in summary, becomes the place where we take the suffering of our world and unite it with the suffering of Jesus. Suffering in itself does not ennoble the human being; by itself, it is destructive. Only when we can place our sufferings in the suffering of Christ—conform our sufferings to the suffering of Christ (cf. Phil 3: 10)—do we have hope in sharing in Christ’s triumph over suffering in his resurrection.

The spirituality of the Blood of the cross reminds us of all these paradoxes and contradictions. The world is

not what it seems or how it wants to present itself to be. The Blood of Christ shed on the cross reminds us how much wrong there is with our world, and how we need to stand critically against it. At the same time, it invites us into solidarity with those who suffer.

An important passage for the spirituality of the Blood of the cross today is Hebrews 13: 10–13. In that passage we are reminded that we will not find God in the sanctuary, safe inside the camp. Rather, we must go out to Christ, crucified outside the gates, and take upon ourselves the ignominy he has borne. What this means is that the presence of God can be found today most acutely outside the gates of safety, in the garbage dump, among those considered the refuse of humanity.

Precious Blood devotion stressed the bloodsheddings of Christ in his Passion and death. These remain legitimate sites of meditation. What the spirituality of the Blood of the cross does is expand that vision to contemplate suffering. Why is there so much suffering in the world? How does the Blood of Christ give us perspective and lead us to a new place in dealing with suffering?

The Blood of the Cup

The spirituality of the Eucharistic cup has opened up for us the full meaning of the symbol of the cup in the Bible. The cup is first of all a measure of destiny. Can we drink of the cup which is being offered to us?

It also encompasses two other meanings. The first of these is the cup of suffering. The Book of Revelation presents the cup of God's wrath being filled with the suffering of God's faithful people (15: 7; 16: 1). At the appointed time, the cup of suffering will overflow in God's judgment against evildoers.

But the cup is also the cup of hope, the cup Jesus offered to his disciples at the Last Supper as the "new and everlasting covenant" (Luke 22: 20).

The reintroduction of the cup for receiving communion among the laity underscores an important dimension of a spirituality of the Blood of Christ. In the Eucharistic cup which is offered us, we are accepting what God has prepared for us. In drinking of that cup, we take upon ourselves in solidarity the sufferings of others. We also place in that cup our hope for a redeemed humanity. The giving and the sharing of the Eucharistic cup is more than a reception of the sacrament. It is an act of commitment to live a life in solidarity with those who suffer, and to watch and wait with those who hope.

The Eucharistic chalice in Precious Blood devotion was often depicted as the vessel which caught Jesus' Blood being shed on the cross, and is then offered to God in reparation for sin. These elements are still very much part of the understanding of the Eucharistic sacrifice, but as we have seen, the liturgical reform expanded our view of the Eucharistic action. Those elements of a spirituality of the cup which I have just presented now become part of our celebration of the Eucharist.

Precious Blood devotion placed great premium on Eucharistic adoration. As was noted above, liturgical reform has caused us to refocus our practices of Eucharistic adoration. Perhaps in this renewed understanding, our attention is less focused on the distance between God and ourselves, and now more how the Eucharist, as a memorial of suffering and hope, illumines and heals a world broken by suffering and sin.

The Blood of Reconciliation

A fourth theme has come forward strongly in a spirituality of the Blood of Christ since 1990: reconciliation in the Blood of Christ. The 1990s saw an intense growth of interest in reconciliation in a world overcoming war, totalitarian oppression (Soviet Europe, South Africa, Latin America), discrimination and exclusion, abuse in families and in the Church, and the depredations of globalization. The great themes of reconciliation in

Christian faith have been called forward in a distinctive way at this time.²⁹

God is reconciling the world in Christ through Christ's Blood. He has brought those who once were far off near through the Blood of Christ, making of enemies a single household of God (Eph 2: 12–22). In the midst of conflict, God is making peace through the Blood of the cross (Col 1: 20), and is reconciling all things to himself (Eph 1: 18–23). That reconciliation is possible is a message for which so much of the world yearns today.

Reconciliation was certainly part of the message of Precious Blood devotion. There it was expressed especially in the forgiveness of sins, especially with the sacrament of Penance. What is new about the current interest in reconciliation is how God reaches out to the victim, and can heal the victim even when the wrongdoer refuses to repent. This perspective on reconciliation brings new approaches to understanding forgiveness, memory, and how healing works in people's lives.

CONCLUSION

Developments in a spirituality of the Blood of Christ continue to unfold. This is especially so as Missionaries of the Blood of Christ have expanded into a worldwide Congregation in the past two decades. I hope that these two presentations have shown not only the roots of our understanding of the Precious Blood in the history of devotion and in recent developments in spirituality; I hope it is also clear that one does not preclude the other; indeed, they can enrich each other.

What is happening around us as we come of age often becomes determinative of our view of the world through much of our adulthood. It is my hope that these reflections will help us identify how our contexts—matched to our heritage—create expressions of the importance of the Blood of Christ in our lives. In our work of formation, we need to prepare candidates to

engage in these kinds of reflections, even as they grow in their love for the Blood of Christ. At the same time, none of us need be limited by our own specific experience. Indeed it is incumbent upon us to learn from the experiences of others—both in the past and in the present—so that we can be a source of enrichment for those whose lives we touch. We have a great heritage. And we have a great hope. In these opening years of the twenty-first century, let us hope that we can achieve something of that vision of the Blood of Christ given to us by St. Gaspar, and so marvelously expanded through the years in his Congregation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

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Precious Blood Spirituality and its Symbols

Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SYMBOL

Theology is often formulated in concepts. Symbols, however, really nourish us and sustain our spiritual lives. Concepts can be a way of our identifying a whole body of information, but symbols stimulate our imagination. They create entire worlds for us, weaving memory, thought, and feeling together. Concepts have a role to play in spirituality, to help us define the limits of our thinking and to relate our spirituality as a body of ideas to other spiritualities. Thus, concepts are useful in relating Precious Blood spirituality to a spirituality of the heart of Jesus, for example, or to liberation theology. But we find ourselves returning to symbols, since they create the space not only for our imagination and feelings, but also the space for relating to the rest of our experience as members of a Congregation devoted to the Blood of Christ, and in the apostolates we undertake.

This presentation will explore four basic symbols of Precious Blood spirituality. They are: *covenant*, *cross*, *cup*, and the *Lamb*. All of these are rooted in the Scriptures, and evoke a wide range of meanings and memories. Each symbol will be presented as to its basic meanings as presented in the Scriptures, and then some of the meanings it has for us today, both in our personal

and communal lives in community, and also those connected with the work we do for the sake of the Church and the Reign of God.

Covenant: Commitment, Connections, Community

Covenant is the fundamental symbol of Precious Blood spirituality. The special relationship between God and God's people—sealed first in the blood of lambs and bulls, and later with Christ's own Blood is the foundation upon which other symbols are built. The Blood of the cross takes its meaning from covenant, for the Blood of the cross is the means by which God reconciles the world (Col 1: 20), bringing near those who once were far off (Eph 2: 13). The Eucharistic cup is a new covenant in Christ's Blood (Luke 22: 20) that prefigures the Eucharistic banquet in heaven. Those who have suffered are reunited to God in heaven, washed clean by the Blood of the Lamb (Rev 5: 9). All of the symbols associated with Precious Blood spirituality that we are examining here—cross, cup, the Lamb—go back to that fundamental symbol, the covenant.

Covenant is one of the richest of the biblical symbols, and can be viewed from a number of angles. Seen from one side, covenant is about how God touches the world. That touch is a call into intimacy with an intimacy that transforms those who are so called. In the covenant with Noah and his children (Gen 9), God draws near to the survivors of the flood and promises them a new life. Abraham is called out of his own country and is promised that he will be a blessing on the earth, and that he and Sarah will be blessed with many descendants (Gen 12). But perhaps the most dramatic transformation is that of the Hebrew slaves in the Sinai desert, who through a covenant become God's special people (Exodus 24). In all of these instances, those who come into covenant with God experience new things. They are given new identities by God's coming close to them. With that new identity they receive a new destiny

as well. As God's special people, Israel receives not only a privileged relation but special responsibilities: their lives together must mirror the compassion, the justice, and the mercy of God.

Seen from another angle, covenant is much more than merely a contract or agreement. Covenant is a *belonging* to God, a kind of belonging that opens up our deepest capacities for being human for being in the image and likeness of God. Those capacities for being human—our ability to trust, to love, to struggle for justice, to show compassion and care—are opened up by the call into covenant by God. It is a call to become part of something (and of someone) greater than ourselves, a call to understand what it means truly to belong. It is that belonging to God that reaffirms our destiny, to become daughters and sons of God.

Covenants do not simply define our past by reminding us of how God has worked in our history. Covenants carry with them a vision for the future. Like the rainbow that marked the sky in the story of Noah and his family, covenants promise a different kind of future. They promise safety in an uncertain and dangerous world. They promise in the story of Abraham and Sarah that they will live on in the descendants they thought they would never have. To the Hebrew slaves, the covenant promised a land of their own where they might live justly and freely. But more than any other covenant, the one offered us by Jesus in his own Blood holds up the vision of the coming Reign of God, where there will be no hunger or thirst, and every tear will be wiped away. Covenants have a vision, then, of what the world really looks like when God draws near.

Covenants were sealed by the blood of sacrifices. The Blood was the seat of life and carried in it the breath of God, who breathed life into the first human being (Gen 2: 7). In Exodus 24, we read how the sacrificial blood was sprinkled on the people to show their unity with God. At the Last Supper, Jesus offers a new

covenant, sealed with his own Blood, and invites us into communion with him.

In a previous presentation, we looked at sacrifice in some detail, especially at recent objections for including it in theological symbolism. But we should not let these objections, legitimate as they are, block us from other meanings. Sacrifice is about coming into communion with God. The Blood signifies the seriousness of that communication, and reminds us that communion with God touches the very life that courses through us. The Blood also keeps before us all those situations in our world where life is not respected, crying out with the blood of Abel (Gen 4: 10). The Blood of the covenant reminds us that God is the source of all life, and that we dare not spill the blood of God's children, for all of them are our sisters and brothers.

There are three aspects of covenant that I wish to highlight here: covenant as *commitment*, covenant as *connections*, and covenant as *community*.

As was just noted, covenant is more than a contract or agreement. Because of the very nature of the relationship between God and ourselves which is covenant, it entails commitment. Commitment has to do with decisions and choices that see beyond the present moment. By so seeing beyond the immediate moment, we affirm more fundamental things that are lasting over the fleeting character of the present.

Some of you come from wealthy societies in Europe and the United States where life can be very fast-paced and therefore temporary and provisional. These consumer societies have built-in obsolescence, so that things do not last. Those same societies create comfort by allowing much to be wasted and thrown away because it is not convenient to continue to hold on to some things. The very temporary nature of just about everything not only makes commitment difficult; it also makes it look senseless.

It is not surprising that in such fast-paced, throw-away societies that many young people in their twenties find themselves postponing life decisions as long as possible. They are no less capable of commitment than previous generations, but they are being presented with a world that is so uncertain that it becomes harder and harder to see the consequences of commitment and to trust the values of long-term commitment.

Covenant is about long-term commitment, through thick and thin. It is about a God who stays in the desert with former slaves for forty years, seeing something in them that they cannot see in themselves. It is about an aged couple, Sarah and Abraham, who can still dream about new possibilities. And it is about Jesus, who thought that the new covenant was worth dying for. A covenant spirituality promotes what Pope John Paul II in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* called a prevailing "culture of death." Accepting everything in life as merely short-term and therefore unworthy of commitment goes against a culture of life. By deeming everything short-term we end up living a life that says nothing (and no one) is all that important. We create an environment or culture in which little or nothing is taken seriously, an attitude that undermines trust, care, and finally human dignity itself.

The Blood of Christ is a constant reminder that there are people and values worth dying for. If we do not dare reach down into the depths of our beings to touch and care for those values, if we do not reach out in commitment to other people around us, we have broken the covenant and the blood of those people we would not touch will cry out.

Second, covenant is about connection, the bonds of belonging. To be connected is to be acknowledged and recognized, to be accorded our dignity as humans. In Africa, theologians have come up with an alternative to Descartes' famous "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito ergo sum*). They say instead, "I am because we are." That

captures the essence of covenant as connections: the recognition of those bonds that those of you who come from societies where the bonds of collectivity are still strong have much to teach those who come from societies that prize the individual above all else. Individuals sometimes make up for the lack of bonds by accumulating a lot of things to fill up the void. Consumerism is based on that principle. But a spirituality of the covenant speaks of something different.

Societies can also create false connections that turn people into objects. Unfortunately, human societies are rife with such false connections: addictions, abuse, prejudice, oppression, racism. False connections may abound in a society, but a covenant spirituality strives to overcome them. The first mention of blood in the Scriptures is about a broken connection: the death of Abel at the hands of his brother, Cain. The cross, as we shall see, stands as a constant reminder of the broken character of so many of our relations and the insidious false character of still others. We have been bought at a great price (I Peter 1: 18). People who have become unconnected with others through age or accident, or who suffer under the burden of false connections, should be our special concern. It is the power of Christ's Blood that gives us the assurances that our efforts to make connections are worthwhile, even when the society we live in says otherwise.

Third, the word "community" often comes too easily to our lips. True community, however, is based on commitment and connections. It is marked by a commitment that does not evaporate at the first sign of difficulty. It is also marked by a sense of connection that can encompass difference and find a commonality in a shared humanity, a humanity created in the image and likeness of a God who is one yet triune. As a community of covenant, it holds up a vision of what a redeemed community can become despite all its brokenness in the present. Community is not easily achieved, and a

covenant spirituality reminds us that for a community to succeed as a community, it must be rooted in God's call to covenant.

Certainly the Blood of the covenant, celebrated in the Eucharist, is both a potent symbol of the community we share and the communion for which we hope. The cup of blessing which we share draws us deeper into that communion, and recalls for us how much we depend upon God to create that community. Bonded together in God's great love for us, we dare to imagine community in situations that may now seem so distant from it.

The Cross: Outside the Gates

Up until now, the cross has been the predominant symbol of Precious Blood spirituality. This is not surprising, because it is Jesus' shedding of his Blood on the cross that stands at the very center of the Paschal mystery. That symbol draws so many things together. It speaks first and foremost, as Saint Maria De Mattias and Saint Gaspar del Bufalo were wont to say, of God's unbounded love for us, that Jesus would give his very lifeblood so that we might be reconciled to our Creator. The cross speaks therefore of that restored relationship to God, caught in the many terms that theologians call soteriology: redemption, liberation, justification, reconciliation. For Paul it stands as the "great sign contradiction," a "stumbling block" to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, but to those who have been called, "the power of God and the wisdom of God." (I Cor 1: 24). And for countless generations of Christians, the cross has been the key to the riddle of their own sufferings. By uniting their sufferings to those of Jesus, their suffering can become redemptive—that is to say, rather than having the pain destroy them, it gets placed in the larger context of the Jesus story in order to participate in the saving power of Jesus' own suffering. Such redemptive suffering allows the one suffering to open her- or himself as Jesus opened his own life. Because the symbol of the

cross is so rich, I want to concentrate on just one meaning of it for our spirituality, one that has become very important for me. It is based on the thirteenth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. It reads:

The bodies of the animals whose blood the high priest brings into the sanctuary as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate to consecrate the people by his own Blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the reproach that he bore. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one that is to come (13: 11–14).

This passage sets up a strong tension between being inside and being outside, being in the very center of things and being discarded or thrown away. It begins by looking at the sanctuary that stands at the center of the camp. The camp of the Israelites in the desert (and later, the city of Jerusalem) represented a place of safety in a hostile desert environment. To be inside the camp was to belong to God, to have value in the eyes of God and in the eyes of others gathered there into community.

Outside the camp was the wilderness, a place of danger. If one lived outside the camp, there was no guarantee of safety. Moreover, outside the camp, as today outside the city, was the garbage dump where the refuse of the community was pitched and burned. In the passage from Hebrews here, the remains of the sacrifices were burned in the dump. The garbage dump, then as now, stands for the very opposite of the organized and civilized life within the camp: inside the camp was order, security, belonging, intimacy; outside the camp was chaos, danger, alienation, and loss.

The image of the garbage dump would have had a further, and terrifying, meaning for the Letter to the Hebrews' first-century readers. The Romans frequently carried out crucifixions in the garbage dump. Crucifixion was not only a painful way to die, it was meant to be a

shameful one as well. Victims were typically crucified naked, to shame their bodies. Such exposure was meant to deprive them further of their dignity. Typically, after the victim had died, the body was taken down from the cross and unceremoniously thrown into the garbage. This was meant as the final humiliation. It was the first century equivalent of the horrors of our own century, where people have been herded into pits and ditches to be shot, or the bodies of the “disappeared” in Latin America are dropped alongside roads.

It is against this stark background that we read the startling words in verses 12 and 13: “Therefore Jesus suffered outside the gate, to consecrate the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the reproach he bore.” The atonement for sin is no longer being done in the sanctuary but in the windswept, foul-smelling expanse of the garbage dump.

The significance of this passage was made transparent for me a number of years ago. A promising young theologian whom I had advised on his doctoral dissertation abandoned his teaching career to become a voice for the people in the Philippines who lived on Smoky Mountain. Smoky Mountain is the garbage dump of metropolitan Manila. It is indeed a mountain of waste, garbage and human refuse. Like garbage dumps everywhere, the rotting of organic waste creates a methane gas that periodically combusts, creating fires and a thick, acrid smoke that hangs over the site. Hence this garbage dump’s name, “Smoky Mountain.”

Smoky Mountain was home to more than twenty thousand people who built their homes from the scraps of wood, tin, and cardboard that had been dumped there. They scavenged for thrown-away food and any items that could be resold. So they lived, the people of Smoky Mountain.

This young priest had committed himself to work among the inhabitants of Smoky Mountain and served also as their advocate to the outside world. When I asked

him what kept him going in such a demanding ministry, he said simply, “Christ was crucified outside the gates. Here is where we must come to meet him.”

His words brought alive for me the meaning of this passage from Hebrews like nothing else ever could. What Hebrews is telling us here is that God has chosen to dwell most intimately in the very place where there seems to be no possibility of belonging, of safety, or of community. In the place of the carefully arranged sanctuary as God’s dwelling place we now see a cross in a garbage dump. To see the cross as the place where God dwells reverses many of our ways of thinking. The all-powerful God now says that true power can only be found in the helplessness and the same of that victim on the cross. In a space of degradation God can be most intensely experienced. Among the castoffs of society, God is gathering a new chosen people. At the foot of the cross, those new chosen people are consecrated in Christ’s Blood.

And, as Hebrews reminds us, we cannot peer out toward the cross from the safe confines of the camp. To experience the living God, we must go out of the gate, to meet Christ in the very reproach he suffers on the cross.

It is hard not to be moved by this powerful image from the Letter to Hebrews. It is overwhelming. And it also gives us an insight into the meaning of the cross for Precious Blood spirituality. It is about the very essence of our lives, stripped of any decoration and well-crafted disguise. It is about a vulnerability that gnaws away at the most carefully defined postures we may assume. It reminds us that all the human power we can accumulate will end up falling between our fingers like so much dust. It reminds us that what allows us to exist at all is not our own: it is a gift—the gift of life.

Throughout the Scriptures, the message of the Blood is the message of the fragile boundary between life and death. God’s own life is in the Blood that animates every living being. Yet we are always but a step away from our own dissolution.

The cross stands on that boundary between life and death. The Blood shed there reminds us of the fragility of all we undertake and hope to achieve. The cross calls us to go outside the gates, and live on that tenuous boundary. It reminds us that we cannot stay forever within our zone of comfort but must come to face the contradictions and the pain of the world. It is in the vulnerability that the cross so starkly signifies that we come to understand how God sees us and our world: a world so precious to God yet wounded deeply in so many ways. Nonetheless, it is called repeatedly to new life. The shattered fragments of lives—the losses, the regrets, the disappointments, the failures, the tragedies—are lifted up and drawn into the wounds of Christ, who brings all things together in himself. To be consecrated in Christ's Blood means that those who had been consigned to the rubbish heap of society have been redeemed. They are given new life. They are given a chance to be restored to their full dignity.

An important aspect of the spirituality of the cross for us, then, is to go outside the gates to those whom Jesus is consecrating in his own Blood. For our own spirituality, this was made real two years ago when I met some of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood from Korea who lived in the garbage dump of Seoul to be with those who made that dump their home and livelihood. An important question to ask of ourselves is: where is "outside the gates" for each of us?

The Cup: Suffering and Blessing, Memory and Hope

We had an opportunity to consider the cup in another presentation. It was noted there the biblical significance of the cup as the measure of one's destiny. The cup offered to Jesus was a cup of suffering—his destiny was to suffer on behalf of all of humankind. We saw too the significance of the cup in Jewish ritual, at the center of the worship of God in praise and thanksgiving.

For Christians, the cup has a deep Eucharistic significance. This is even more so the case since the receiving of Holy Communion under both species has been restored to the whole Church. No longer is the chalice something glimpsed from afar, but is now placed in the hands of each person who approaches the Eucharistic table. As communities devoted to the Blood of Christ, we have not yet reflected adequately on what this means for our spirituality. To be sure, nothing has changed in doctrine, but the symbolic difference is considerable. We have yet to plumb the significance of this important symbolic change.

One difference I suggested in another presentation has to do with the meaning of the cup as a measure of destiny and the cup as a sign of communion. When we offer the cup as a Eucharistic minister to others, or when we take the cup in our hands as a communicant, are we willing to accept the responsibilities that this act entails? Are we willing to accept what God is asking us to do? In the words of Father Winfried Wermter, are we willing to be “living chalices” into which God pours our destiny and vocation? In giving and receiving the chalice from one another, are we willing to share one another’s burdens? All of this gives new meaning to Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the Body and Blood of the Lord” (I Cor 11: 27).

The cup is the place in our spirituality where suffering and blessing come together, where memory and hope meet. The cup offered to many is a cup of suffering: the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized. Part of our vocation as communities in the Blood of Christ has been to share their cup in our apostolates. Saint Maria De Mattias’ commitment to the education of poor girls was precisely an attempt to relieve them of some of their suffering. Today that sharing in the cup of suffering takes on many forms in the varieties of work that we do. Just

as Jesus asked the disciples who wanted to share in his glory whether they could first share in his sufferings, so too we need to ask ourselves about our ability to share in the cup of suffering that others have been given.

The cup is a cup of blessing. In Jewish ritual, the blessing cup was raised as God was praised and thanked for all the goodness of the world. Today we raise the cup to remember what the Blood of Christ means for us. As the salvation of the world it holds up a vision of a world redeemed from the powers of sin and evil, a world liberated from oppression and poverty, a world free of all the things that human beings inflict upon one another. The blessing cup also is held up in the name of God's creation, that what humankind has done to the earth might not be irreparable damage, but rather that the earth's healing might come about. The blessing cup helps us imagine a reconciled world, reconciliation between men and women, between factions within countries, between countries themselves, between religions. The blessing cup blesses us, it blesses our world. Steeped in the Blood of Christ, the life-giving power of the Blood makes of us a new creation.

The cup also celebrates memory and hope. The cup is the place where memories are gathered. The bowl of the cup brings them together, allows them to flavor one another and create together the identity of a community. So what memories do we pour into the cup? How might one memory temper the other or bring out its distinctive flavor? The cup is passed around, and the brew of memories is shared.

Partaking of the Blood of Christ is partaking of his memory so that the form of his life might become our form as well. As his memory blends with our own memories we become more and more conformed to him.

Jesus' offering of the blessing cup at the Last Supper was given with the pledge that he would not drink of the cup again until they all drank it together in the Reign of God. The Blood of Christ is a sign of hope to

us. The Blood that was shed was not shed in vain. It led, not to dissolution, but to new life, and continues to do so for those who partake of it. We often fail to see how important hope is, especially if we lead relatively comfortable lives. Yet it is hope that sustains so many of the poor of the world. With hope comes the ability to celebrate the small victories in the face of often overwhelming odds of hopelessness. Hope allows us to discover the beauty of little things, to appreciate the small gesture of kindness, the smile. It urges us into celebration that the gift of life is still being given, and that joy and laughter can still be experienced.

The spirituality of the cup is, therefore, a spirituality of mingling, of sharing. It is a spirituality of remembering and of looking forward. The Blood of Christ makes that possible inasmuch as Blood is the seat of life, and the mystery and meaning of life continue to draw us onward. The spirituality of the cup is a spirituality of celebration, a spirituality with an eye for the fullness of God to be found in all things.

The Lamb: Symbol of Reconciliation

This brings us to the fourth and final symbol under examination here: the symbol of the Lamb. The Lamb figures in the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, with a single reference each in the Acts of the Apostles and the First Letter of Peter. Paul, for example, never mentions it.

The Lamb of the New Testament, who is Christ, is prefigured in the lamb sacrificed in the Passover. It is an important part of the linkage that New Testament writers made between the great saving events of Israel and God's saving work in Christ. The Lamb in the Book of Revelation carries within it a paradoxical meaning: it is standing, as if alive, but bears the marks of having been slaughtered (Rev. 5: 6). The slaughter referred to here is not ritual slaughter, but death by violence. Although still bearing those marks of death, it has clearly

overcome death, and now makes it possible to rescue the others who have suffered persecution.

I would like to suggest that the Lamb—who has always figured prominently in the iconography of the Precious Blood—is a symbol for a part of our spirituality and our apostolates that has taken on increasing importance in recent years, namely, that of *reconciliation*. The Lamb of the Book of Revelation redeems those who have come through the great tribulation; he redeems them with his Blood. The fact that he has made the passage from death to life allows him to lead us along the same path. He restores to the victims of violence their dignity and their humanity and leads them to a safe place (cf. Rev. 6: 9–10). Eventually they come to live in peace:

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7: 16–17).⁵

The Lamb, having reconciled death and life in his own body, now through his Blood, extends that reconciliation to victims everywhere.

Ministry of Reconciliation

Because reconciliation has become such an important theme for our spirituality, I would like to conclude this presentation with some thoughts about the shape of a ministry of reconciliation. As was noted in the previous presentation, it is God who brings about reconciliation, not us. Our task is to create the environment in which reconciliation might take place. To that end, it behooves us to create communities of reconciliation to engage in those disciplines and practices that will form us into such communities. I would like to suggest that there are four parts to a ministry of reconciliation.

The first is an *intense accompaniment of victims*. It is marked by a listening patience that allows the victim first to trust, then to struggle to unburden the painful past. This takes a lot of time, since the nature of the burden is such that it cannot be gotten rid of quickly. Often, in the case of abuse or torture, the lies perpetrated on the victim have become so interwoven with the truth that to tear out the lie would bring down the truth as well. This first stage of a ministry of reconciliation is one of patience and learning the discipline of knowing how to wait. Waiting is not simply an empty space that precedes an event. It is a cultivation of a mindfulness and a watchfulness that gives a focus to what has been a shattering experience.

The second stage in the ministry of reconciliation is *hospitality*. A hospitable environment exudes trust and kindness. It also creates an atmosphere of safety. For victims of violence, trust, kindness, and safety are precisely the things that are sorely lacking in their lives. An atmosphere of trust makes human communication possible again. Kindness reaffirms that violence is now past and that the vulnerability that healing requires can count on a place in which to operate. Safety is the other side of trust. For those who have been threatened and have experienced danger, the restoration of safety allows the bonds of trust to be rebuilt.

Hospitality carries with it also a sense of gratuity, a graciousness that is not measured in a *quid pro quo*, but in an abundance that allows thinking about new possibilities. One of the most difficult aspects of reconciliation is coming to terms with the violence that has been done to the victim. In assessing the damage that has been done—be it the loss of loved ones, the destruction of one's home, the experience of torture, or a long imprisonment—victims try to imagine for themselves what it will take to redress the wrong. That is what many people mean by "justice." But reconciliation does not take us back to redress the wrong along a route that we have

traced out. Reconciliation always comes by a different path that surprises us. That is why hospitality, which sets up an environment of trust, kindness, and safety, is the prelude to reconciliation. It helps prepare the victim for the welling up of God's healing grace in their lives, in the restoration of their humanity—not as a restoration to an earlier, unviolated condition, but by bringing them to a new place.

The third stage of a ministry of reconciliation is *reconnecting*. Victims are often disconnected or even isolated from the community. The ultimate example of such victimhood is the plight of the refugee separated from home, often from family, completely dislocated and lost. Reconnecting is about ending the isolation that severs trust and presses the victim to believe the lies the wrongdoer tells about them—that they are not worthy of human treatment, that no one can rescue them, that they are despicable. Violence strives to inculcate that lie, that hatred of self in the victim, since that self-hatred will keep them in the bondage of victimhood. Reconnecting is the establishment of truth about the victim, that the victim is made in the image and likeness of God and is therefore of inestimable value. Reconnection recreates the bonds of trust and belonging that make us human. It is during this stage that reconciliation actually takes place.

The fourth stage of a ministry of reconciliation is *commissioning*. At this stage, the reconciled victim feels reconnected, and then called by God and by the experience of reconciliation to follow a particular path. That the commission grows out of the experience of reconciliation means that the call may be related to the original experience of violence: the restored victim may feel called to work with other survivors of torture, or to create understanding to avoid future conflicts. Again the reconciling community does not give the commission. It comes via the experience of reconciliation from God. But if a community is skilled in listening and waiting it can

help the restored victim hear the call and its meaning. The going out to serve in this fashion is characteristic of the reconciled victim: the victim is now able to show the same self-giving love that is a sign of God's form in the world.

The Blood of the cross makes peace. Those who have come through the great tribulation have washed their robes in the Blood of the Lamb. The Lamb signifies that end-point of reconciliation. The reconciling Blood of Christ is revealing to us, I believe, what might be the crucial ministry for our time.

CONCLUSION

This all too quick survey of some of the riches of Precious Blood symbolism opens up some avenues for renewal in ministry and in community life. The symbols of covenant, cross, cup and the Lamb open up so many possibilities for us. I would like to close echoing again the words of Saint Maria De Mattias: it is my hope that the reflecting on these powerful symbols might help bring about "that beautiful order of things that the great Son of God came to establish upon earth through his Divine Blood."

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NOTES

Romano Altobelli, C.P.P.S.

¹The decree is of December 17, 1841, of the Pro-Prefect Cardinal Patritius, approved by Gregory XVI. It is found at the end of the *Rule* printed in 1881. It is missing in the printing of Carthagena, Ohio, of 1923, of which we have a photocopy on hand.

²St. Gaspar del Bufalo, *Letter 1215*. Hereafter references to the letters of St. Gaspar will simply be cited as *Letter* ____.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Cf. Nolti, Gianfranco, "Il Sangue nel Vecchio Testamento" in *Fonti Vive*, n. 14 (June 1958), 60.

⁸Memorandum to Gregory XVI (1831), *Letter 2140*.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Memorandum to Pius VIII, *Letter 1946*.

¹¹"Historical Report," 23.

¹²Tillard, "Le grandi leggi del rinnovamento," in *Il rinnovamento della vita religiosa* (Firenze, 1968), 123.

¹³Ibid., 128.

¹⁴Tillard, op. cit., 129.

¹⁵Ibid., 129.

¹⁶Cf. Eph. 5, 25; Acts.

¹⁷Mancini, Italo: *Bonhoeffer*, 77.

¹⁸Ibid., 71.

¹⁹Mancini, op. cit., 76.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Bonhoeffer, “Cristologia,” in E. Betge, *Bonhoeffer, una biografia*, 1031.

²²Ibid.

²³Bonhoeffer here cites 1 Cor 12; Eph. 2, 14–18.

²⁴Bonhoeffer, loc. cit., 1032.

²⁵Memorandum to Gregory XVI (1831), *Letter 2140*.

²⁶*Letter 1215*.

²⁷“Historical Report,” 24.

²⁸*Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 15.

²⁹“Historical Report,” 9.

³⁰Tillard, op. cit., 129–130.

³¹Cf. Mancini, I., *Bonhoeffer*, 120–123.

³²“Historical Report,” 9.

³³*Editor's note:* In the most recent edition of Gaspar's letters there are eleven letters to Maria Tamini, written during the years 1809–1813. The letters are numbers 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 20, 24, 36, and 53.

³⁴Tillard, op. cit., 130.

³⁵"Historical Report," 39, no. 45. It would be opportune to verify the *Normative Texts* of 1969, art. 41–44, and the Italian Provincial Statutes of 1970, art. 1, 2, 5, 8.35.

³⁶"Historical Report," 24, no. 21.

³⁷Tillard, op. cit., 104.

³⁸Ibid.

John Klopke, C.PP.S.

¹Cf. Luigi Contegiacomo, C.PP.S., *St. Gaspar's Prison Experiences 1810–1813* (Edited and translated by Raymond Cera, C.PP.S., Carthagena, Ohio: Messenger Press, 1988), pp. 57–59.

²*More Essays in Honor of St. Gaspar* (Carthagena, Ohio: Messenger Press, 1993), p. 24.

³Ibid., p. 70.

⁴Ibid., pp. 32–33.

⁵Ibid., p. 93.

Beniamino Conti, C.PP.S.: Apostolate

¹For the more common citations the following abbreviations will be used:

a) The manuscripts of St. Gaspar are cited: the volumes with Roman numerals; the folios with Arabic numbers.

[*Editor's note*: The letters of St. Gaspar will also be cited using the current numeration simply as *Letter* ____.]

b) MM = *Metodo delle Sante Missioni* . . . , Rome 1819.

c) R = *Regula Congregationis Missionis a Pretioso Sanguine D.N.J.C. cum Praxi*, Rome.

RP = *Regula et Praxis*.

P = *Praxis*.

²St. Gaspar del Bufalo, "Eccitamento per il mese del Divin Sanguie 'Exhortation for the month of the Precious Blood,'" in *Scritti Spirituali I*, ed. Beniamino Conti, C.PP.S., Rome, 1995, pp. 442–443.

³Cf. Conti, B., *San Gaspare Apostolo del Sanguie di Cristo*, Roma, 1970, pp. 87–132.

⁴*Editor's note*: The author here cites testimony given for the beatification of St. Gaspar, *Processo Ordinario di Albano*, published in five volumes.

⁵*Editor's note*: The author here cites another document that contains material regarding the beatification of St. Gaspar, the *Processo Apostolico di Roma*, in two volumes.

⁶Cf. P., 30; *Opere che sogliono stabilirsi dai Missionari*, Rome 1819, pp.67–103.

⁷*Regolamenti: La Congregazione dei Missionari del Preziosissimo Sanguie (1815–1837)*, ed. Beniamino Conti, C.PP.S. (Rome, 1998), pp. 363–364.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 363–364.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 364–365.

¹⁰"Avvertenze per stabilire una Casa di Missione 'Directions for Establishing a Mission House,'" *Regolamenti I*, op. cit., p. 225.

Barry Fischer, C.PP.S.: Challenge

¹*Scritti Spirituali di S. Gaspare del Bufalo*, vol. I, Roma: 1995, p. 519.

Luigi Contegiacomo, C.PP.S.

¹*Regula*, p.8. This is a reference to an edition of the *Rule* approved in 1841. This *Rule* governed the Congregation until 1942.

²*Letter 1214*.

³*Regula*, Preface, p. 7.

⁴*Letter 118*.

⁵*Regula*, art. 1 (cf. arts. 2 and 7).

⁶*Letter 1878*.

⁷*Circular Letter I* (1826). Quotations from the letters are from the translation by Raymond Cera, C.PP.S. (Carthagena, Ohio: Messenger Press, 1986). These circular letters are those written on the occasion of the annual retreats. There are other circular letters to which one finds reference on occasion.

⁸Cf. *Processo Ordinario di Albano*, III, p. 1343 (Merlini). Hereafter cited as *Processo*. Cf. also the volume "Congressi della Casa di Albano," July 25, 1835, C.PP.S. General Archives. [*Editor's note*: This is a reference to the process for the beatification of Gaspar begun in Albano Laziale, where he had originally been buried.]

⁹"Congressi della Casa di Albano," 1835.

¹⁰*Processo* II, ff. 946–947 (Merlini).

¹¹*Regula*, Introduction.

¹²*Processo* II, f. 947 (Merlini).

¹³*Letter 2191*.

¹⁴*Processo* V, p. 2521 (D. Dom Silvestri).

¹⁵*Processo* I, f. 537 (D. Ben. Romani).

¹⁶*Scritti* XVI (I Processicoli) fasc. XV, p. 88. [*Editor's note:* This is a reference to the writings of Gaspar contained in bound volumes in the general archives of the Congregation in Rome. Where possible, references to published editions of these writings are given.]

¹⁷*Processo* IV, f. 1905 e tg (D. Giov. Pedini).

¹⁸*Processo* III, f. 1555 (D. Ben. Romani).

¹⁹*Letter 3511*.

²⁰*Regula*, Conclusion, p. 86.

²¹*Letter 3151*.

²²Cf. *Letter 1771* to Betti.

²³*Letter 1796* to Betti in the matter of readmitting Pietro Pellegrini.

²⁴*Letter 1766*.

²⁵*Letter 1885*.

²⁶*Regula*, Conclusion.

²⁷*Ibid*.

²⁸*Scritti* XII (*Regolamenti*) p. 20. Introduction to the "Directory for the Houses of Formation."

²⁹*Letter 1590*.

³⁰*Circular Letter 3*, 1829.

³¹*Circular Letter 2*, 1827.

³²*Circular Letter 11*, 1837.

³³Cf. note 18 above.

³⁴Giovanni Merlini: "Storia della Congregazione del Preziosissimo Sangue, specialmente della prima Casa di S. Felice di Giano," p. 26: in the general archives file, "Giano e Fosco."

³⁵Cf. Prat, *Teologia di S. Paolo*, Vol. II, Torino 1928, p. 323 and note 15.

³⁶*Circular Letter 11*, 1837.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Circular Letter 2*, 1827.

³⁹*Circular Letter 4*, 1830.

⁴⁰*Circular Letter 5*, 1831.

⁴¹*Circular Letter 7*, 1833.

⁴²*Manuale Precum C.PP.S.—Benedictio mensae.*

⁴³*Regula*, art. 4.

⁴⁴*Rituale C.PP.S.*

⁴⁵*Regula*, art. 52, p. 60.

⁴⁶*Regula*, art. 52 and *pro Praxi*, p. 60–61.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, art. 9, et *Pro Praxi*, p. 15.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, art. 23, et *Pro Praxi*, p. 28.

⁴⁹Ibid., art. 8, p. 14.

⁵⁰*Circular Letter 1* (1826), p. 13: “*sit apostolus in ministeriis, contemplativus domi*” (cf. *Circular Letter 10*, p. 48).

⁵¹*Regula*, art. 45, p. 53.

⁵²*Circular Letter 2*, 1827.

⁵³*Circular Letter 11*, 1837. “For what purpose are we in the Society? . . . to be united in the bond of charity in order to set up a rampart against the sinfulness of the world . . .”

⁵⁴*Circular Letter 1*, 1826.

⁵⁵*Circular Letter 2*, 1827.

⁵⁶*Scritti XII (Regolamenti)*, p. 49.

⁵⁷*Circular Letter 6*, 1832.

⁵⁸*Regula*, arts. 1 and 2, p. 8.

⁵⁹Ibid., art. 2, p. 8.

⁶⁰*Letter 2140*.

⁶¹Cf. “Evangelization and the Sacraments,” a document of the Italian Episcopate (Rome, July 12, 1973) and many articles of a theological-pastoral nature published in the wake of that document.

⁶²*Regula*, art. 1, p. 8 (“*non solum perfectioni suae adipiscendae, sed aliorum etiam saluti curandae insistant*”).

⁶³*Circular Letter 5*, 1831.

⁶⁴*Circular Letter 9*, 1835.

⁶⁵*Circular Letter 10*, 1836.

⁶⁶*Circular Letter 3*, 1829.

⁶⁷*Letter 1576*.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*Circular Letters 6*, 1832; *2*, 1827; *10*, 1836.

⁷⁰*Circular Letter 2*, 1827.

⁷¹*Circular Letter 10*, 1836.

⁷²*Regula*, art. 7.

⁷³*Circular Letter 2*, 1827.

⁷⁴*Circular Letter 1*, 1826.

⁷⁵*Circular Letter 7*, 1833.

⁷⁶*Circular Letter 10*, 1836.

⁷⁷*Circular Letter 7*, 1833.

⁷⁸*Circular Letter 6*, 1832, p. 36.

⁷⁹*Circular Letter 4*, 1830, p. 29.

⁸⁰*Circular Letter 3*, 1829.

⁸¹*Circular Letter 8*, 1834.

⁸²*Circular Letter 10*, 1836.

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴*Circular Letters 9*, 1835 and *11*, 1837.

⁸⁵*Letter 1946*.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷*Regula*, p. 8.

⁸⁸Cf. Luigi Contegiacomo, C.PP.S., *Il Sangue di Cristo in S. Gaspare del Bufalo* (Rome: Pia Unione del Prez.mo Sangue, 1968), pp. 26–32.

⁸⁹*Ibid.* and p. 22.

⁹⁰Cf. Amilcare Rey, C.PP.S., *Il Beato Gaspare (op. inedita)* Cap. XXVIII, V, n. 4, p. 1101ff.

⁹¹D. Enrico Rizzoli, C.PP.S., *Del Sangue Prezioso di Gesù Cristo e della sanctificazione della Chiesa e dei Fedeli per opera del medesimo, giusta i SS. Padri e gli Interpreti* (Rome, 1865) [*Translator's note: This work, The Precious Blood of Jesus Christ and the Sanctification of the Church and the Faithful According to the Fathers of the Church and Scripture Scholars is by the fourth moderator general of the Congregation.*]

⁹²*Letter 1171.*

⁹³Discorso del 2 giugno 1962, in *La Voce del Sangue Prezioso*, giugno–luglio 1962.

⁹⁴*Circular Letter 5*, 1832.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁶*Circular Letter 4*, 1830.

⁹⁷*Circular Letter 8*, 1834.

⁹⁸*Regula*, art. 5, p. n.

⁹⁹Cf. endnote 93.

¹⁰⁰Frederick William Faber, *The Precious Blood* (Philadelphia: Peter Reilly, 1959).

¹⁰¹*Letter 105.*

¹⁰²Cf. the memorandums to Leo XII, to Pius VIII, and to Gregory XVI (*Letters 1214, 1946, 3722, 2140*).

¹⁰³*Letter 1896*.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, III, p. 44.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, III, p. 101.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.* V, p. 73.

¹⁰⁷Contegiacomo, p. 58.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹¹⁰*Letter 1940*. Cf. Contegiacomo, p. 66.

Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S.: Expressions

¹*Sacra Rituum Congregatione, Romana Beatificationis et Canonizationis Venerabilis Servi Dei Gasparis Del Bufalo Fundatoris Congregationis Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis D.N.J.C. Positio super virtutibus* 'Position on virtues,' Rome, 1870, § 169, 248. Later this will be cited as: *Positio super virtutibus*, the quotation, paragraph, and page.

²Cf. B. Conti, *San Gaspere Apostolo del Sangue di Cristo*. Roma 2002, pp.74–92.

³*Letter 1215*, July 1825.

⁴*Letter 1644*, June 29, 1827.

⁵*Scritti Spirituali*, I, 442.

⁶Cf. *Scritti Spirituali*, I, 252–253; *Letter 1215*.

⁷For the reconstruction of the basic themes in the

preaching of St. Gaspar on the devotion to the Blood of Christ, cf. B. Conti, *San Gaspare Apostolo*, op. cit. 181–214.

⁸Cf. *Scritti Spirituali*, I, 252, *Letter 2603*.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰*Letter 1419*, May 22, 1826.

¹¹*Scritti Spirituali*, I, 443.

¹²Cf. *Letter 1123*.

¹³*Scritti Spirituali*, III, 426.

¹⁴Ibid., 437.

¹⁵*Letter 486*.

¹⁶*Scritti Spirituali*, III, 411.

¹⁷Ibid., 412.

¹⁸Cf. *Scritti Spirituali*, III, 426.

¹⁹Cf. *Scritti Spirituali*, I, 196; *Scritti Spirituali* III, 429/430; *Letter 1215*.

²⁰Cf. *Letter 581*.

²¹Cf. *Scritti Spirituali*, III, 405.

²²Ibid., 391.

²³Ibid., 431.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Cf. *Scritti Spirituali*, I, 443.

²⁶Cf. *Scritti Spirituali*, III, 431.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Cf. *Scritti Spirituali*, I, 443.

²⁹Cf. *Scritti Spirituali*, III, 436; 442.

³⁰Ibid., 430–431.

³¹Cf. A. P. Frutaz, “*Sangue Preziosissimo di N. S. Gesù Cristo*,” in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, X, Città del Vaticano, coll. 1778–1780.

³²*Epistolario*, IV, 156–157. Cfr L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, I, Roma 1968, 126, in *nota*.

³³*Letter 2193* of July 28, 1831.

³⁴*Letter 1216*.

³⁵*Letter 1777* of July 15, 1828.

³⁶*Letters 1190, 2701, 656*.

³⁷*Letter 2140*.

³⁸*Letter 1188* of July 3, 1825.

³⁹Cfr B. Conti, “*Il mese del Preziosissimo Sangue*,” in A.M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo nella Liturgia e nella pietà popolare*, II, Roma, 1989, 289–312.

⁴⁰*Letter 1883*.

⁴¹*Regolamenti*, I, 363.

⁴²V. Pallotti, *op. cit.*, 21.

⁴³Pursuant to this, toward the end of the nineteenth century, when the practice of honoring the Sacred Heart of Jesus (begun in Paris in 1833) had by then spread throughout the Church, the month of the Precious Blood began to be

celebrated in July. Cf. B. Conti, “*Il mese del Preziosissimo Sangue*,” op. cit., 293–295.

⁴⁴*Letter 2180.*

⁴⁵Cf. *Letter 1937.*

⁴⁶*Letter 1449.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸*Letter 1846.* Nevertheless, this practice of the *Settenario* or *Ottavario* after the feast of the Precious Blood did not enter into the *Rule* of the Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

⁴⁹*Regalamenti*, III, 74.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 83.

⁵¹*Letter 2426.*

⁵²Cf. *Letter 1955.* Cf. also a collection of “Spiritual Hymns of Praise for the Holy Missions” (*Laudi spirituali per le Sante Missioni*) in *Regolamenti*, III, 135–182. For a collection of hymns to the Precious Blood from the beginning of the C.PP.S. Congregation to 1989, cf. T. Veglianti, “*I canti al Sangue di Cristo*,” in A. M. Triacca, a cura, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo nella liturgia e nella pietà popolare* (Roma, 1989), 139–287.

⁵³*Letter 2770.*

⁵⁴*Regolamenti*, III, 70.

⁵⁵*Letter 1896.*

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Cf. *Letters 630, 751, 1308, 1612, 1760*, etc. In a letter of April 6, 1834 he asserts the same thing, confirming it with the “elucidation” of Mons. Gregorio Muccioli (cf. *Letter 2701*).

⁵⁸Cf. *Letter 2426*.

⁵⁹Cf. *Positio super virtutibus*, Pedini, § 5, 285.

⁶⁰*Letter 677*.

⁶¹Cf. also *Letter 641*.

⁶²*Letter 2861*.

⁶³Cf. *Letter 1399*.

⁶⁴*Letter 630*.

⁶⁵*Letter 1473*.

⁶⁶*Letter 630*.

⁶⁷*Letter 286*. Cf. also *Letters 2196* and *2417*.

⁶⁸Cf. B. Conti, *Il metodo delle missioni al popolo secondo S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, Roma, 1971, p. 70.

⁶⁹*Regolamenti*, III, pp. 88–89.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²*Letter 2755*.

⁷³*Regolamenti*, I, p. 363.

⁷⁴*Letter 677*.

⁷⁵Cf. *Letters 757, 775*.

⁷⁶B. Panzini, *op. cit.*, 178.

⁷⁷*Positio super virtutibus*, Silvestri, § 163, 246.

⁷⁸Cf. G. Quattrino, “*Intinerario spirituale*,” in *Il Sangue Preziososo della nostra Redenzione* (1965), pp. 54–61.

Beniamino Conti, C.PP.S.: Development

¹*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, LII (1960), 306 ff.

²Sacra Rituum Congregatione, *Romana Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Gasparis Del Bufalo Canonici Basilicae S. Marci de Urbe, et Institutoris Congregationis Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis D.N.J.C. Positio super introductione causae*, Romae, 1851, § 160, 125. Later cited as: *Positio super introductione causae*, paragraph and page numbers.

³*Positio super introductione causae*, § 21, 158.

⁴Cf. B. Conti, editor, *Scritti Spirituali di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, II, Roma 1996, 129–130; 152–156; 273; 174–175. Hereafter cited as: *Scritti Spirituali*, volume and page numbers.

⁵*Ibid.*, 225, note 1.

⁶Cf. the investigation of the youthful spirituality in B. Conti, *San Gaspare Apostolo del Sangue di Cristo*, Roma, 2002, pp. 21–30.

⁷Cf. A. Rey, *Gaspare Del Bufalo*, I, Albano Laziale 1979, p. 351.

⁸Cf. Sacra Rituum Congregatione, *Romana Beatificationis et Canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Gasparis Del Bufalo Fundatoris Congregationis Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis D.N.J.C. Summarium objectionale*, Romae, 1870, Merlini, 64. Hereafter cited as: *Summarium objectionale*, witness and the page number.

⁹*Ibid.*, Merlini, p. 64.

¹⁰Cf. A. Rey, op. cit., I, p. 351.

¹¹A.M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo e l'esperienza cristiana*, II, Roma, 1987, p. 519.

¹²Cf. "Memoria della Pia Adunanza del Sangue Preziosissimo di Gesù Cristo, del Rosario della Beata Vergine Maria, e delle Anime Sante del Purgatorio canonicamente fondata nell'Altare del Santissimo Crocifisso della Perinsigne Basilica di S. Nicola in Carcere Tulliano," in A.M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo e l'esperienza cristiana*, II, Roma, 1987, 513–519; Conti B., *San Gaspare Apostolo*, op. cit., 33–36.

¹³Cf. le "Costituzioni della Pia Adunanza," in A.M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo*, cit., 520–535.

¹⁴More on the history of the Chaplet can be found in the testimony of Merlini in *Summarium objectionale*, Merlini, 65.

¹⁵Cf. A.M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo nella liturgia e nella pietà popolare*, II, Roma, 1989, p. 475.

¹⁶A.M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo e l'esperienza cristiana*, II, Roma, 1987, 519.

¹⁷Cf. *Scritti Spirituali*, IV, pp. 575–576.

¹⁸Cf. the discourse in *Scritti Spirituali*, III, pp. 18–27.

¹⁹St. Gaspar, *Letter 3*.

²⁰Cf. V. Pallotti, *Gaspare Del Bufalo come l'ho conosciuto*, Roma, 1989, pp. 18–19. The English translation, by Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S., is available in photocopied and digital formats. The reference here may be found in chapter 2 of the English translation.

²¹G. Merlini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo. Un santo scruta un santo*, Roma, 1984, 403. An English translation of this work was also made by Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S. It exists in

photocopied and digital formats. The reference may be found in chapter VI, p. 278, of that translation.

²²This assertion is made only by D. Pietro De Victoriis (cf. General Archives C.PP.S., vol. *Memorie di Albertini*, 101/37) in the manuscript biography of Albertini.

²³Cf. G. del Bufalo, *Scritti vari*, Roma, 1999, 202–237.

²⁴Cf. D. Rops, *Storia della Chiesa del Cristo*, VI: *La Chiesa delle rivoluzioni, tomo I: Di fronte ai nuovi destini*, Torino-Roma, 1966, 164.

²⁵Cf. the “Atti del Convegno di Studi Piacenza—Palazzo Fogliani November 9, 1986,” in AA.VV., *S. Gaspare del Bufalo e Piacenza nell’età napoleonica*, Piacenza, 1987.

²⁶Cf. the General Archive C.PP.S (AGCPPS), *Memorie di Albertini*, 101/38; L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare del Bufalo*, III–2, Roma, 1991, pp. 326–331; N. Pagliuca, *Mese del Sangue Prezioso*, Benevento, 1908, p. 30.

²⁷Cf. E. Gentilucci, *Compendio della vita del Venerabile Servo di Dio Gaspare Del Bufalo*, Roma, 1852, p. 36.

²⁸Letter 23.

²⁹F. Albertini, *Introduzione alla vita umile*, Parte II, Roma 1830, 122. Cfr N. Pagliuca, op.cit., p. 30.

³⁰Letter 10.

³¹Letter 9.

³²G. De Libero, *S. Gaspare Del Bufalo Romano*, Roma, 1954, pp. 109–110.

³³Cf. *Summarium objectionale*, Lipparelli, p. 53.

³⁴V. Sardi, *Vita del B. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, Roma, 1904, p. 86, note 1.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶V. Sardi, *Vita del B. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, Roma, 1904, p. 86, note 1.

³⁷A. Santelli, *Vita del Canonico Don Gaspare Del Bufalo Missionario Apostolico*, Roma, 1992, p. 92.

³⁸Cf. *Letters 1–21*.

³⁹Cf. L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, III–1 (Roma, 1982), 13; B. Conti, editor, *Scritti di Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi. I—Lettere* (Roma, 2000), 11–12.

⁴⁰C. Bentivoglio, *Letter 14*.

⁴¹*Letter 22*.

⁴²*Letter 23*.

⁴³Cf. L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, III–3, Roma, 2001, pp. 251–254.

⁴⁴*Letter 112*.

⁴⁵Cf. L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, III–3, Roma, 2001, 62–64; 255–257.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 245–295, especially pp. 255–264.

⁴⁷*Letter 33*.

⁴⁸*Letter 38*.

⁴⁹Cf. *Letters 54, 58, 59, 79*.

⁵⁰*Letter 65*.

⁵¹Cf. L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, III–2, Roma, 1991, pp. 328–331.

⁵²*Process Ordinario Albanese*, I, 209.

⁵³*Letter 38*.

⁵⁴V. Pallotti, *op. cit.*, ch. II, p. 14.

⁵⁵*Letter 40*.

⁵⁶*Letter 48*.

⁵⁷*Letter 66* of May 10, 1813.

⁵⁸*Letter 97*.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰B. Valentini, *Gaspare del Bufalo*, *cit.*, 55. [*Editor's note*: The English translation of this work exists in digital form on a CD-ROM but is not, to his knowledge, available in print. The English translation of this quotation comes from chapter 2, page 1, of that version.]

⁶¹*Letter 102*.

⁶²This letter (number 870) reveals the maturity Gaspar had achieved just as he turned twenty-eight.

⁶³*Letter 99*.

⁶⁴G. Merlini, *Gaspare del Bufalo: Un Santo scruta un Santo*, p. 190. [English translation: chap. IV, p. 32].

⁶⁵Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 154–157; B. Conti, ed., *Regolamenti I: La Congregazione dei Missionari del Preziosissimo Sangue (1815–1837)*, Rome, 1998, pp. 28–32. Hereafter this is cited as *Regolamenti*, the volume and page numbers.

⁶⁶Cf. B. Conti, *San Gaspare Apostolo*, pp. 93–99.

⁶⁷Cf. A. Santelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 196–197.

⁶⁸*Letter 1216.*

⁶⁹Cf. *Summarium objectionale*, Lipparelli, pp. 53–54.

⁷⁰General Archives of the C.P.P.S., volume *Arciconfraternita del P.S. e Temporalità*, 35.

⁷¹Cf. G. Merlini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo: Un Santo*, op. cit., pp. 196–197. [English translation: ch. IV, p. 131].

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³B. Valentini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo*, op. cit., p. 59. Cf. also *Regolamenti*, III, pp. 6–9.

⁷⁴G. Merlini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo: Un santo*, cit., 196–197 [English translation: ch. IV, p. 132]. Cf. the report of the appointment of St. Gaspar as Missionary of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood (dated March 31, 1818) in *Regolamenti*, III, 342–344.

⁷⁵Cf. G. Merlini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo. Un santo*, cit., 197, 400 [English translation: ch. IV, p. 131, and ch. VI, p. 276].

⁷⁶Cf. B. Conti, *San Gaspare Apostolo*, op. cit., pp. 99–146.

Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S.: Devotion & Spirituality

¹Michele Colagiovanni, “Il sangue di Cristo in San Gaspare del Bufalo Fondatore dei Missionari del Preziosissimo Sangue,” in Achille M. Triacca, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo e l'esperienza cristiana* (Roma: Ed. Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, 1987), 575f. See also Robert Schreiter, “Introduction,” *In Water and in Blood: A Spirituality of Solidarity and Hope* (New York: Continuum, 1988; Carthage: Messenger Press, 1994).

²The use of the term *culto* in the Romance languages denotes more or less the same thing.

³For example, Beniamino Conti, *S. Gaspare del Bufalo Apostolo del Sangue di Cristo* (Roma: Missionari del Prez.mo Sangue, 2002), 17–30; Colagiovanni, *op.cit.*; Alberto Santonato, “Il Sangue di Cristo negli scritti di Mons. Francesco Albertini,” in Triacca, *op.cit.*, 555–573.

⁴For both a history and some useful suggestions on how to pray the Chaplet, see Romano Altobelli, “La meditazione delle sette effusioni del Sangue di Cristo nella Coroncina,” in Achille M. Triacca (ed.), *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo nella liturgia e nella piete popolare* (Roma: Ed. Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, 1989), 15–46.

⁵Santina Dio, “Preghiere al Sangue di Cristo,” in *ibid.*, 93–138; Tullio Veglianti, “I canti al Sangue di Cristo,” in *ibid.*, 139–287; Beniamino Conti, “Il mese del Preziosissimo Sangue,” in *ibid.*, 289–312; Matias Augé, “Le litanie del Sangue di Cristo nelle formulazioni precedenti all’attuale,” 47–92.

⁶Colagiovanni, *op.cit.*

⁷Nicla Spezzati, “San Gaspare: I suoi tempi,” in *San Gspare del Bufalo. Tempi—Vita—Personalita—Carisma* (Roma: Ed. Pia Unione del Preziosissimo Sangue, 1980), 21–72.

⁸For a nuanced reading of Gaspar’s place in the Restoration, and how to read that in light of subsequent political developments in Italy, see Mario Spinelli, *Vita di Gaspare del Bufalo: Senza voltarsi indietro* (Roma: c.m.pp.s., 1996), ch. 14.

⁹William A. Volk, “Le reliquie del Sangue di Cristo,” in Triacca, *op.cit.*, II, 325–334.

¹⁰For a historical study, see Dante Balboni, “Il miracolo eucaristico di Ferrara” (28 marzo 1171) in Triacca, II, *op.cit.*, 415–452.

¹¹For a late-twentieth century interpretation of this see Spinelli, *op. cit.*, ch. 17.

¹²Perhaps the single best book on worldwide Pentecostal faith is David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World, Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

¹³“Aujourd’hui, la dévotion au Précieux Sang marque un temps d’arrêt.” *DS XIV*, 319–333. The citation is at 333.

¹⁴An exploration of this malaise from that period can be found in Robert Schreiter, “Communicating Precious Blood Spirituality Today,” *Summary of the Precious Blood Congress, August 1–4, 1986*, St. Louis, Missouri (mimeographed), 25–35.

¹⁵In the United States, Edward Siegman, C.P.P.S. and Robert Siebeneck, C.P.P.S. led this work. Siegman was one of the pioneers of biblical renewal in the United States. The first edition of the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, the fruits of the biblical renewal published in 1967, carries a special dedication to him. Siebeneck published meditations on the biblical passages in *The Precious Blood Messenger* in the 1950s and 1960s, which have been collected in mimeographed form. Patrick Sena, C.P.P.S., continued and synthesized this research in the early 1980s. See his contributions in *Nel Sangue di Cristo* (Roma: Ed. Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, 1981), 7–50.

¹⁶The proceedings of the three study weeks were published by the Precious Blood Institute at Saint Joseph’s College in Rensselaer, Indiana, U.S.A. A guiding figure behind this effort was Fr. Edwin Kaiser, C.P.P.S. (1893–1984) who also wrote numerous books and articles on this topic.

¹⁷D. Beniamino Conti has published an index of these volumes up to 2002, *Sangue di Cristo, Sangue dell’uomo. Indice degli atti, “Sangue e antropologia” e “Sangue e vita”* (Roma: Centro Studi Sanguis Christi, 2002).

¹⁸*Cuadernos de la Espiritualidad de la Sangre de Cristo* (Santiago: SUSC, 1982–1988). 4 vols.

¹⁹Papers from these encounters can be found in the *C.P.P.S. Newsletter* of those years, especially a seminar held in

July 1984, which mapped out directions for the development of a renewed spirituality.

²⁰Robert Schreiter, *In Water and in Blood: A Spirituality of Solidarity and Hope*, op.cit. This work has also appeared in Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and German editions.

²¹A number of those from Spain have been published as *Quartos de Jornadas de la Espiritualidad de la Sangre de Cristo* (Cáceres, 1995–).

²²Here the pioneering work of D. Luigi Contegiacomo, C.PP.S. (1914–2001) must be noted. D. Tuglio Veglianti, C.PP.S., edits the *Testi Patristici sul Sangue di Cristo* (Roma: Centro Studi Sanguis Cristi, 1992–). As of 2003, 7 volumes.

²³Edited by Barry Fischer, C.PP.S. and Robert Schreiter, C.PP.S.

²⁴*The Cup of the New Covenant* appears in April and October each year. Each issue is devoted to a specific theme, and draws upon authors from around the world.

²⁵*International Symposium—Parish Communities: Called, Nourished, and Sent by the Blood of Christ, Dayton, Ohio, July 22-26, 2002, C.PP.S. Resources—27*, Carthage, Ohio: Messenger Press, 2003.

²⁶The results of the Lima symposium were published as *Reconciliación* (Lima: CEP, 1999).

²⁷Published by the Italian Province. The English version is *The Cry of the Blood: The Challenge of Refounding*. Carthage, Ohio: Messenger Press, 2004.

²⁸This overview does not include the extensive publications on the Precious Blood which have appeared in Poland, especially from the hand of Fr. Winfried Wermter, C.PP.S. I do not read Polish, and so am not in a position to evaluate them. From what has appeared in translation, it would appear that they focus (rightly so!) on the Polish situation, and reflect

a stance closer to that of Precious Blood devotion than to what has been described here under the rubric of spirituality. But again, I cannot judge this.

²⁹I have developed this in *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992—also in Croatian, German, Indonesian, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish translations); and in *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: 1998—also in Indonesian, Portuguese, and Spanish translations).

Resources for Further Study: An Annotated Bibliography

We hope that many of our readers will want to explore other resources after having read these two volumes. We are including this brief annotated bibliography of some of the most important of those resources.

The Italian Province has taken the lead in publishing many historical and theological articles and books. Unfortunately, most of these have not been translated into English.

The extant letters of St. Gaspar number more than 4000, and the standard edition of those letters (in Italian) has been edited by Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S., in eleven volumes that have appeared from 1986 through 2000.

Other writings of St. Gaspar have also been published in critical editions thanks to Beniamino. The “spiritual writings” (*Scritti Spirituali*) appeared in four volumes published in 1995 and 1996. Three volumes of writings pertaining to the first rules of the Congregation as well as guidelines for community life and the apostolate were published in three volumes entitled *Regolamenti* from 1998 through 1999. A volume of miscellaneous writings of our founder appeared in 1999.

Other resources in Italian that should be mentioned are the series *Collana Sangue e Vita*, in eight volumes, on a variety of historical and theological topics, edited by Francesco Vattioni (1981–1993); the series *Collana Sangue e Antropologia*, published in 17 volumes between 1981–2002); and the ongoing publication of patristic

texts related to the Blood of Christ being edited by Tullio Veglianti, C.PP.S. (*Testi Patristici sul Sangue di Cristo*, with 10 volumes published from 1992 to date).

Historical Resources in English

All of the letters of St. Gaspar as well as some of his other writings have been translated into English by Raymond Cera, C.PP.S. They were published in a set of loose-leaf binders and are now available in digital form, thanks to the efforts of Milton Ballor, C.PP.S., who has produced a CD-ROM containing the English translations as well as other resources, some of which are mentioned below.

In addition, the depositions for St. Gaspar's canonization given by Venerable John Merlini (*A Saint Scrutinizes a Saint*) and St. Vincent Pallotti (*Saint Gaspar as I Knew Him*) have also been translated by Fr. Cera and are available in digital form on the same CD-ROM.

A number of biographies of St. Gaspar have been published in Italian. One of the most recent, *No Turning Back*, by Mario Spinelli, appeared in English translation in 2003 (Carthage, Ohio: The Messenger Press. The translation was by John Klopke, C.PP.S.; edited by Raymond Cera, C.PP.S., and Robert Schreiter, C.PP.S.). A preliminary version of that translation appears on the CD-ROM cited above, but it is not the final version that appeared in the print edition. An English translation of the biography of Gaspar by Amilcare Rey, C.PP.S., is also found on the CD-ROM, translated by Andrew Pollack, C.PP.S.

The only recent history of the entire Congregation in English was published in a second, revised edition in 2002 (*Historical Sketches of the C.PP.S., Revised Edition*, by Andrew Pollack, C.PP.S., edited by Robert Schreiter, C.PP.S. Carthage, Ohio: The Messenger

Press). The history of the C.P.P.S. in North America from its origins in Europe through the year 1859 is well documented in the two volumes of *American Province C.P.P.S.* by Paul Knapke, C.P.P.S. (Carthage, Ohio: The Messenger Press, 1958 and 1968). A history of the Congregation through the year 1929 was written by Isidore Oberhauser, C.P.P.S. (who later became a Passionist) and may be found on the CD-ROM mentioned above.

Other historical resources can be found in the *C.P.P.S. Resources* series published by the Cincinnati Province, with 26 volumes currently published.

Resources for the Theology and Spirituality of the Precious Blood in English

One of the classics of Precious Blood spirituality is Frederic William Faber's *The Precious Blood*. Faber, a friend of John Henry Newman, first published the work in 1860 and it has been in print continuously since then. The most recent edition was published by TAN Books (Rockford, Illinois) in 1979.

The Precious Blood Study Weeks, held in 1958, 1960, and 1968, were instrumental in helping to reframe devotion to the Precious Blood in the light of sound modern scholarship and in response to the "signs of the times." The proceedings of those study weeks were published by The Messenger Press.

The Precious Blood in Our Spirituality (Carthage, Ohio: The Messenger Press, 1978), published by Edwin Kaiser, C.P.P.S., in his eighty-fifth year contains much of value even if it is somewhat discursive in style.

In the past two decades, the work of Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S., has been of great importance to the development of Precious Blood theology. His book, *In Water and in Blood*, published in 1985 as part of the *C.P.P.S. Resources* series (Carthage, Ohio: The

Messenger Press, 1988 to date), has been translated into many languages. He has also published two books on the theme of reconciliation, an important theme in the spirituality of the Blood of Christ today. (*Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992; *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999).

Barry Fischer, C.PP.S., has also been influential in the development of our understanding of the meaning of the Blood of Christ for today. In addition to having made the letters of St. Gaspar better known in English through his *Strokes of the Pen* series as well as a calendar for the year with quotations from St. Gaspar, he published *Along the Road Marked by Blood* in 1992 (Carthagena, Ohio: Messenger Press, 1992; Precious Blood Resources Series, no. 9). His *The Cry of the Blood*, published in 2004 (Carthagena, Ohio: The Messenger Press), links a spirituality of the Precious Blood with the refounding of the Congregation. He and Robert Schreiter also edited *A Precious Blood Reader*, which appeared in 1996 in the *C.PP.S. Resources series* (No. 22). Also of note has been the work of Joe Nassal, C.PP.S., especially his *Passionate Pilgrims: A Sojourn of Precious Blood Spirituality* (Carthagena, Ohio: The Messenger Press, 1993).

Two regular publications that have been in existence for just over a decade continue the process of reflecting on the meaning of the spirituality of the Blood of Christ for believers today. *The Wine Cellar*, published by the Kansas City Province, publishes issues devoted to a theme of Christian life seen through the lens of Precious Blood spirituality. The twice-yearly publication of the C.PP.S. general curia, *The Cup of the New Covenant*, also publishes articles on the spirituality of the Blood of Christ and the charism of the Congregation. It is available in Spanish, Italian, German, and Polish in addition to English.

Internet Resources

The C.P.P.S. general curia website currently has over 500 documents available for download, most of which deal with topics and themes related to the history of the C.P.P.S., the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, and the mission and community life of the Congregation. There are also links to other sites of interest, especially those belonging to the “Precious Blood Family.” It is regularly updated with news from the worldwide C.P.P.S.

The URL of the site is:

<http://www.mission-preciousblood.org>.

