

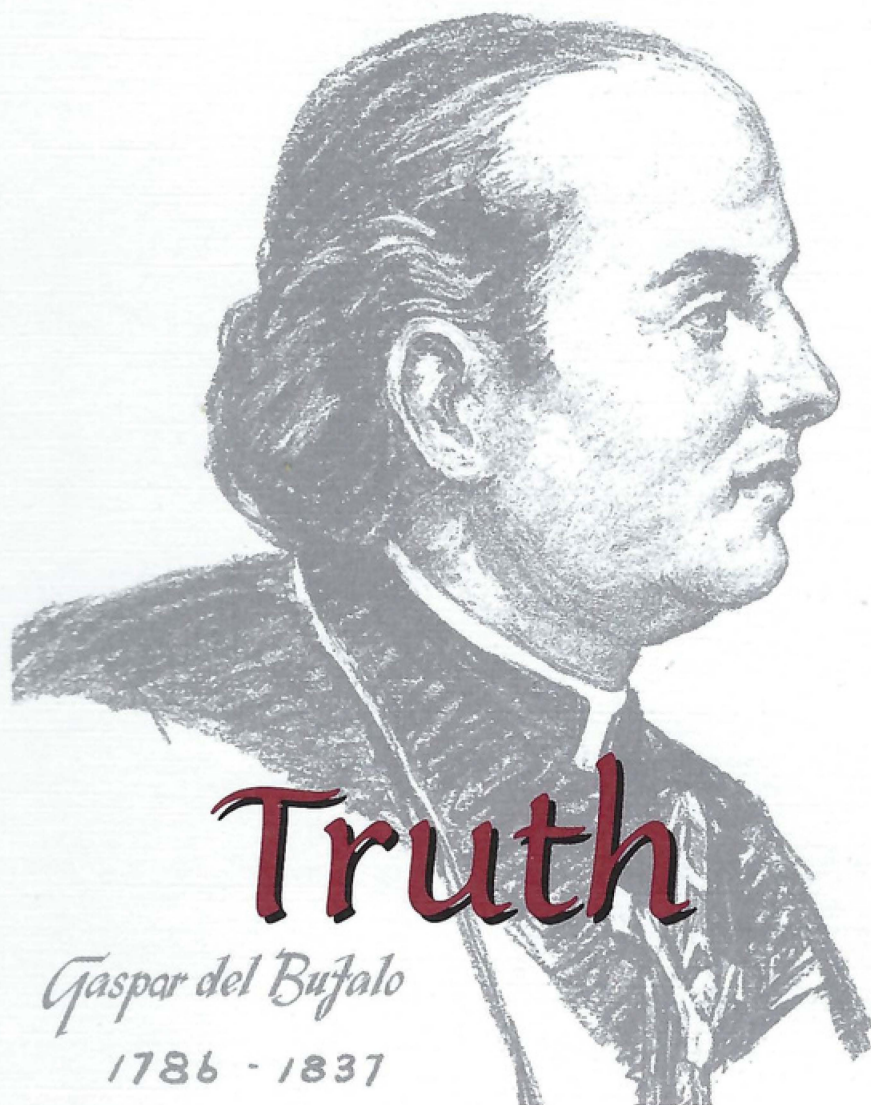
*An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality*

A decorative illustration of a red grapevine with leaves and clusters of grapes, extending from the top left towards the center of the page.

**THE WINE**  
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**Truth**

*Gaspar del Bufalo*

1786 - 1837

*The heart of Jesus  
is the wine cellar  
of the Blood of Christ*

**Gaspar del Bufalo**

*The  
Wine Cellar*

***An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality***

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From the  
*Wine Cellar*



## Telling the Truth

*You love those centered in truth.*

*In wisdom, center me.*

Psalm 51

**I**n his book, *Fooling With Words: A Celebration of Poets and Their Craft*, Bill Moyers writes of watching the poet Lorna Dee Cervantes mesmerizing a group of older teenagers with a poem about a derelict “frozen to death in a public restroom in Boulder, Colorado.” As Moyers listens and watches the young people he describes as “suburban” and “favored,” he sees how they had “entered a world that is light-years beyond their experience but not beyond their capacity to feel.” When the poet leaves the stage at the conclusion of the reading, “the young people I have been watching do not stir,” Moyers writes, “not one of them. They are still in that faraway place, and I’m not sure they know how to get back. They have been touched by the reality of another life.”

This is the great gift of storytelling: to touch another’s life with truth, with the reality of life.

Sometimes when I tell a story at a retreat someone will ask, “Is that a true story?” And I often respond, “There are *true* stories and there are *truth* stories.” As I understand the difference, a *true* story means all the facts of the story happen just as they are presented. A *truth* story may not have all the facts but conveys a basic understanding of the human experience. A *true* story echoes the famous line from the old Dragnet detective: “Just the facts, ma’am.” But a *truth* story evokes more than a quantity of facts; it reflects the quality of faith. A *truth* story connects us to the deeper reality that each of us is made in the divine image and is in relationship with our Creator, with one another, with all creatures and all of creation.

This issue of *The Wine Cellar* celebrates Gaspar del Bufalo, storyteller and saint, poet and prophet, preacher and founder of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood, as a truth-teller. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his canonization, we consider how Gaspar told and lived the truth in his day and its implications for those committed to precious blood spirituality today. Father Robert Schreiter begins by exploring the connection between truth and the ministry of reconciliation. He examines how truth-telling is an essential component in the work of social reconstruction, clarifying the “meaning of truth in our biblical and spiritual traditions” while offering ample evidence of how Gaspar “told the truth in the face of the injustice and lies in his own society.”

Telling the truth often meant that Gaspar found himself on the outside of ecclesiastical circles. Father John Colacino argues convincingly how Gaspar was “an outsider when it came to certain institutional facets of the church of his day.” He outlines several implications for those who embody the “gasparian charism” today, including our identification with those who are pushed to the margins of society and church.

The courage to speak and live the truth and the willingness to stand in solidarity with those “outside the gates” begins when we understand and embrace our own truth. Father Barry Fischer looks at how “an important part of this process of personal reconciliation resides in accepting the truth about ourselves.” We find this truth “at the foot of the cross” where we hear the call to be “ambassadors of reconciliation in our broken world.”

While Gaspar was poetic and prophetic in his fidelity to the truth and “found the truth presented most clearly in the crucifix,” we also find the truth expressed in architecture and art, in places and paintings that evoke the Divine Presence. Father Jim Sloan reflects on this intimate connection between art and truth, and how on his own journey, “while searching for a deeper understanding of life and sometimes finding it in works of art, it has become more clear that it is truth that I have been seeking.”

Seeking and speaking the truth is the call of the prophet. In the final essay, I reflect on the prophetic dimension of our gasparian charism. When I think of Gaspar’s preaching, his fire, his desire, I think of the Suffering Servant: “God has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary, a word that will rouse them (Isaiah 50,4).” Gaspar sounds like Isaiah as he writes in one of his letters that his mission is “to rouse the indolent, give courage to the faint-hearted, comfort the good, and bring to realization in everyone that ‘go, set afire, inflame everything (2130).”

St. Gaspar del Bufalo was a storyteller whose words and witness revealed the truth. Because the world he lived in and the worlds we inhabit are so filled with lies (we go to war to make peace and kill people to teach people that killing people is wrong), the truth takes us to places where we've never been before. As Bill Moyers reminds, when we visit these places through the power of a story, we may not be able to find our way back to where we were before. Therefore, it is always advisable to leave breadcrumbs or perhaps some empty wine bottles to serve as landmarks along the way, recalling what Elie Wiesel once noted: "Truth can be found everywhere, even on the lips of drunkards in the noisiest of taverns."

That is if you want to find your way back. But truth be told, once we discover the truth we don't want to go back to where we were before. Indeed, these elements of our Eucharistic memorial, bread and wine, become the very source and substance of our desire to be people of the truth rather than "people of the lie." They are the breadcrumbs of life that show us the way to one another; the trail of blood that leads to that safe place where "Jesus assures our entrance into the sanctuary by the new and living path he has opened up for us (Hebrews 10, 19-20)."

In one of his letters (2177), Gaspar refers to "the sacred ciborium" as "the wine cellar wherein Jesus captures our affections and draws us to himself." Our close encounters with the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist gives us the courage to touch our own truth and live that truth with compassion and courage. My hope is that the time you spend in this issue of *The Wine Cellar* will echo what our founder wrote in that same letter: "When you are in the wine cellar, beg for me holy divine love; also, the reform of my heart. Pray that I be inflamed with the fire of love that will compensate for my past acts of coldness and that I will be stimulated to a new life of fervor."

**By Joseph Nassal, CPPS**



# Truth for Reconciliation in Social Settings

By Robert Schreiter, CPPS

**A**chieving reconciliation in social settings is a complex process. To be sure, coming to reconciliation even for individuals is often a long and difficult journey. The challenges faced in individual reconciliation are compounded in social settings when large populations are involved and wrongdoing has sometimes spanned generations. The issues themselves are often so tangled that it becomes difficult to identify what are actually the principal causes.

Social reconciliation strives to name and heal the wrongdoing of the past and create conditions in society so that such wrongdoing can never happen again. From this working definition it is clear that a number of different things need to happen. The wrongdoing in the past has to be named for what it is, and attempts have to be undertaken to heal the consequences of the wrongdoing. Structures and ways of acting in society have to be cleansed from the patterns of wrongdoing and new structures put in place that direct people into just living. Moreover, safeguards have to be put in place so that people and institutions in society do not lapse back into their old ways.

A central part of this work of social reconstruction is truth-telling. Correcting the story of the past to reflect truth (instead of the falsehoods often propagated) is part of establishing a secure foundation for the new society. Practicing truth-telling is part of establishing just and trustworthy relationships.

This article will explore some of the dimensions of truth-telling for the sake of working toward reconciliation. It will examine, first of all,

how truth-telling functions in social reconciliation. Knowing at what moments to emphasize these practices is important for the sequence of rebuilding society and the relationships that will assure its functioning in a healthy manner. Second, the biblical and spiritual understanding of truth that support the building of a just society will be presented. The ministry of reconciliation is as much spirituality as it is a strategy: there are abiding attitudes that make reconciliation possible. There will also be a brief reminder of how this understanding of truth relates to Precious Blood spirituality. The third part will allude to the practices of truth-telling in the life of Saint Gaspar. In the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of his canonization, it is worthwhile to see how he struggled against falsehood and sought to establish the truth in the troubled society of his own time. His activity can inspire us to try to live more truthfully and justly today.

## **Truth-Telling in the Work of Social Reconciliation**

**E**stablishing the truth about what happened in the past has become one of the most important building blocks for reconstructing a society after a time of violence and wrongdoing. There are four elements that I would like to describe in this process: (1) breaking the silence about what happened; (2) setting the story straight about the past; (3) the role of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions; and (4) truth as a prelude to doing justice.

### ***Breaking the Silence***

Wrongdoing flourishes under the cover of silence and deceit. In times of war and under dictatorships, people are abducted and taken to places unknown by their loved ones. In the violence that stalked many Latin American countries in the 1970s and 1980s, this practice was known as “being disappeared.” Sometimes the disappeared were never found again, and what happened remains unknown to this day. In other instances, their bodies would be dumped in a conspicuous place or even on the doorsteps of their own homes—as a warning against any protest or outcry against the injustice. The purpose of such actions is to create a climate of fear, so that no one will speak out. Silence shrouds the wrongdoing and the atrocities.

Silence is created in yet another way. Distrust is sown among neighbors and even within families. People become afraid that any casual thing they may say will be reported to the authorities and result in arrest and interrogation, so they are loathed to take initiative or engage in any public action or protest against injustice. In Central



Europe during the Communist period, this created a stunted form of being human that has been dubbed the *homo sovieticus*. Such reluctance to band together in voluntary associations or to speak out in public debate has made it difficult to build the civil societies that are necessary for democracy to flourish.

The revelations of clerical sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in 2002 revealed a use of the culture of silence to protect priests and bishops from exposure of their wrongdoing. Silence—an implicit agreement not to talk about certain things—often reigns in religious communities and dysfunctional families as well. This kind of silence is more than not communicating. It conceals wrongdoing and patterns of dysfunction, and in so doing is a kind of untruth.

The beginning of truth-telling—either at the level of whole nations or institutions within them—is to acknowledge this culture of silence and to take deliberate steps to break through the miasma it creates. For example, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany opened up the Stasi (secret police) files on individuals. These files listed not only what had been reported about individuals, but also who had done the reporting. This practice has been repeated in many countries, especially to uncover the wrongdoing that governments had tried to keep hidden. The patterns of silence within institutions such as the Church or the family are often difficult to break through, since they have become deeply engrained habits of behavior. If confronted with any evidence leaking through the silence, denial becomes the preferred response. Breaking the silence in all of these instances is a commitment not only to reveal what had been hidden. It is also a statement that such cultures of silence will not be tolerated in the future. To that end, policies and practices of reporting have to be put in place. Dioceses and religious communities have tried to do this in responses to the clerical sexual abuse scandal.

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### *Setting the Story Straight about the Past*

Breaking the barriers of silence that have surrounded the past is the first step in the quest for truth in the process of social reconciliation. The second is trying to build an accurate account of what actually did happen. This involves undoing the lies told about the events of the past

as well as getting the facts as straight and clear as possible.

Living in a war zone or a situation of growing conflict is usually marked by lies and rumors. It has often been said that the truth is the first casualty of war as both sides try to justify their actions and win support for what they are doing. Rumors are used to spread falsehoods about the perceived enemy and to incite violent action.

*Not to recast the narrative  
robs the victims  
of their dignity.*

The lack of safety and the climate of fear that surrounds situations of violence have other effects on the truth-telling. People who have been arrested or families who have loved ones that have disappeared or simply killed come to carry a stigma. People who have been arrested or disappeared are designated as wrongdoers and

enemies of the state. Calling any opponent of a dictatorship in Latin America or South Africa a “communist” was a way of justifying the treatment meted out at the hands of the state. In Guatemala, indigenous people mistreated and killed by the army were branded as guerrilla insurgents. These judgments function as though these people have a contagious illness: any contact with them may bring down the same punishment on their neighbors, friends, and relatives. Lifting that stigma by exposing what had truly been done is important in re-establishing the truth—the human dignity—of those who have been so marked by an unjust regime.

Efforts have then been made to document what had really happened, and especially what had befallen the victims of violence. In Guatemala, the REMHI (Recovery of Historical Memory) Project documented the massacre of whole villages by the armed forces. A similar action was undertaken in Peru to document the victims of both the army and the insurgent Shining Path Movement. This setting straight of the historical record is essential for recasting the historical narrative of the country. The story we tell about our nation needs to reflect what happened, and not just the perspective of the rich or the powerful. Not to recast the narrative robs the victims of their dignity. For the dead, sometimes it is only the truth that can serve as a monument to their suffering.

### *Truth and Reconciliation Commissions*

One of the tools for setting the story straight and rebuilding society has been Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. These are national commissions, usually mandated by the post-conflict government, to

serve a specific purpose in rebuilding the country. There have been some thirty such commissions in different parts of the world since 1980. At the beginning some of them were called Justice and Reconciliation Commissions, since the intent was to bring about justice. But genuine justice has to come not from appointed commissions but from duly constituted governments and well-functioning judiciaries.

The prototype that inspired the earliest Truth and Reconciliation Commissions was the Nuremberg War Trials in Germany in 1946, in which leading officials of the Nazi regime were tried publicly. The best known of the

contemporary Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have been those in Chile and South Africa.

What has become clear in all such commissions is that the total truth will never be able to be told. Often

the wrongdoing was on such a massive scale that careful documentation of every atrocity is impossible. What has now become the established pattern is that such commissions set out to do two things. First of all, they are to address some aspect of the wrongdoing of the past and provide documentation on that area. Second, they are to contribute to the building of the new society. Typically, such commissions are given a specific set of mandates and a timeframe in which to complete them.

The Chilean Commission, for example, was asked to collect and document information on some 3,000 people who were killed during the Pinochet regime, and make suggestions about compensation for the surviving families of those killed. In South Africa, the Commission was a forum where surviving family members could report atrocities committed by the Defense Forces (and also those groups opposing apartheid), and those who had committed atrocities could report their deeds and petition for amnesty. The dual purpose was to deal with the past and start the rebuilding of South African society. The Commission currently under way in Ghana is looking at wrongdoing dating back to the independence of that country.

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions try to arrive at the truth that can serve as a basis for reconciliation in society. They are often controversial for victims because they are unable to deal with all the falsehoods of the past. Wrongdoers who dispute the veracity of their findings frequently challenge them. Though they may be an imperfect

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instrument, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions provide a public way of trying to find out the truth about the past and are a sign of good faith of the new government about dealing truthfully in the future.

### *Truth as a Prelude to Justice*

One thing that Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have achieved is a now widespread awareness that any attempt to bring about justice in the new society requires that it be built on the bedrock of truth. Justice attempted before the truth is known can quickly become simple vengeance. Vengeance may give some temporary satisfaction to victims or their surviving families, but vengeance perpetuates the cycle of

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violence. This is especially the case in long-standing conflicts (such as those in the Balkans) where everyone has been both victim and wrongdoer. The same can be said for the violence in Rwanda and Burundi since the 1950s. Justice has to be understood not only as the punishment of the wrongdoers (although that is an essential element of justice). Justice involves also how the judgment is reached about the wrongdoer: it must reflect fair and full litigation of the crime. Truth in this instance is more than establishing facts. It also involves acting truthfully and in a manner that can be trusted.

### **Truth in Biblical and Spiritual Traditions**

**A**s was noted earlier, social reconciliation is usually a long and often difficult process. To sustain motivation to work for reconciliation, it becomes important to have a spirituality that will keep us on this path. In thinking about the role of truth within the process of reconciliation, it is useful to reflect briefly on the meaning of truth in our biblical and spiritual traditions.

Our concept of truth is heavily influenced by Greek thought, which sees truth as something to be known, such as a fact or a proposition. That understanding of truth can be found in the New Testament as well, and reveals a significant aspect of truth. We have seen its importance in getting the story of the past to correspond with the events that took place.

The Hebrew concept of truth, however, adds some rich facets to our understanding and our spirituality. The Hebrew word *'emet* connotes

dependability, trustworthiness, fidelity, steadfastness. These are a rich blend of concepts that together make truth something that we can trust that does not change arbitrarily or threaten to desert us at the first sign of adversity. Rather than an intellectual concept, truth here is something moral and relational. Truth is something upon which we can rely. God, as the source of truth, is the preeminent source of fidelity. Perhaps the simplest way to understand reconciliation is to see it as a restoring of trust and the capacity to trust. It is trust that has been so fundamentally sundered in violence of any kind. The restoration of trust makes possible the fair and equitable relations that mark a truly just society.

*Rather than an intellectual concept, truth here is something moral and relational.*

It is that trust that we seek especially in our quest for the truth: something dependable and constant that is not subject to arbitrary judgment or random change.

After a time when we have been subjected to the whims of the powerful or the depravations of the violent, we look for what we can rely upon. This aptly describes the truth sought in the reconciliation process: something we can depend upon, uttered by someone we can trust, that corresponds to our experience of what the world ought to be.

God's steadfastness, especially in extending a covenant to Israel, is a recurring theme in the Bible. The covenant stands as the great symbol of whom God is for us, and how God relates to us, even when we are unfaithful. Jesus proclaims to us that he is "the way, the truth, and the life"(John 14:6), and prays that we may be consecrated in that truth (John 17:17). Truth becomes more than a series of propositions or facts: it becomes a way of living in consonance with the very Truth that is God.

A number of years ago in *The Wine Cellar*, I suggested that reconciliation in Precious Blood spirituality finds itself between covenant and cross. In the cross we experience the suffering and anguish that a broken world creates. In covenant we find the healing and the rebirth that marks the experience of reconciliation. The covenant, and the blood that seals it, are for us the firm foundation upon which a new society can be built. The blood of the cross, which acknowledges the suffering of the world and makes peace and reconciliation (Col 1:20), is the pledge that even the depth of brokenness we encounter can be healed.

## Saint Gaspar as Truth-Teller

In this fiftieth year since the canonization of Saint Gaspar, it is worthwhile to reflect how he told the truth in face of the injustice and lies in his own society. I would like to reflect briefly on three moments from his life that illustrate his role as truth-teller.

The first is his refusal to take the oath of fealty to Napoleon in 1810. His famous refusal—"I cannot, I must not, I will not"—marks one of the most courageous and forthright of his utterances, a refusal that would cost him nearly four years in exile. One can see in those words and the sufferings that followed an exercise in truth, a refusal to accept the fiction of the sovereignty of Napoleon over the Pope and the Church. In his words, Gaspar opted for another vision of the world of his time, a vision grounded in the Reign of God over the world rather than the Emperor. He affirmed in word and deed what he viewed to be reliable and constant in the world—God and His Church. It is that "dwelling in truth" that would mark his entire life.

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The second was his program when he returned from exile. As Mario Spinelli notes so clearly in his biography of Gaspar, *No Turning Back*, Gaspar's principal activity in ministry coincided with the Restoration after the defeat of Napoleon and

the return of the Pope to the Papal States. Gaspar's activity could be seen as merely trying to restore the *ancien régime*. But a closer look reveals more than that. His interest was not focused on issues surrounding the sovereignty of the pope but more on a revival of Christian faith and a moral life that would grow out of that faith. The reconstruction of society that Gaspar envisioned was more than a re-arrangement of politics. It was society's reconstitution upon a way of life that was genuinely truthful, that is, grounded in the mystery of Christ. This is found in his preaching north of Rome and in his famous work with the *banditti* in Sonnino and the surrounding area. Gaspar was one to go to the very heart of the matter rather than simply reshuffling the furniture.

The third instance was his defense of the Congregation he had founded against detractors in the Roman Curia between 1825 and 1831. Truth-tellers often provoke the jealousy and wrath of those who are

guided by other lights, and Gaspar felt the full force of their venality in those years. Their twisting of the truth echoes the kind of situation we see in governments today, where truth becomes whatever serves the whims of the powerful. Again, Gaspar refused to back down, and boldly stated what he knew to be true.

In the work of reconciliation to which we are called, may we always try to dwell in the truth as Gaspar did.



### **For Reflection**

- ☛ Can you identify in your own experience and ministry times when a culture of silence cloaked wrongdoing? How did you respond?
  
- ☛ Have you been involved in helping correct views of what happened in the past, especially so that it would reflect more faithfully the suffering of victims?
  
- ☛ Truth provides the proper path to justice. Can you think of instances when knowing more of the truth helped make justice possible?
  
- ☛ The Precious Blood ministry of reconciliation takes place between the covenant and the cross. Can you identify moments in that ministry that have dwelt both in the covenant and at the foot of the cross?



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# St. Gaspar del Bufalo: Ecclesiastical Outsider

By John Colacino, CPPS

In the language game known as theology, a distinction is often made between the words “ecclesial” and “ecclesiastical.” The former word is used to denote aspects of the church having to do with its character as mystery, while the latter denotes the church’s structural or institutional aspects. It is not my intention in this article to oppose these two usages, but I do wish to highlight a certain tension between them that is responsible for the different senses these words frequently convey. I wish, moreover, to make use of the distinction in light of the life, charism, and mission of St. Gaspar del Bufalo.

Before proceeding, let me be clear that there can be no doubt how both these words apply to him in an exemplary fashion. Gaspar’s life was fully ecclesial; one lived in full consonance with the church understood, as we would say today, as Communion-Mission. The spirituality of the blood of Christ that he lived and preached served, moreover, to enrich and deepen his ecclesial personhood, and this because of the devotion’s basis in the Eucharistic cup of *koinonia*.

Gaspar was also an ecclesiastical figure par excellence. His willingness to suffer for the prerogatives of the papacy, as these were understood at the time, as well as his meticulous adherence to liturgical and canonical norms, made the Canon del Bufalo a consummate ecclesiastic.

## Evidence of an Outsider

There is, however, another side to Gaspar’s “ecclesiastical” identity that I would like to explore here, one that highlights how and why the term can be heard in contrast to the word “ecclesial.” For in some respects, Gaspar was arguably an outsider when it came to certain institutional facets of the church of his day. Let me cite the main examples: As the founder of a new form of life for the



secular clergy, he met with incomprehension and resistance on the part of ecclesiastical officials unable or unwilling to recognize its value. His desire to name this Institute after the mystery of the precious blood met with similar misunderstanding, offending some ecclesiastical sensibilities to the point that charges of blasphemy were even leveled against Gaspar, requiring him to defend the title on several occasions—including to the pope. Members of the hierarchy were so opposed to Gaspar and “the Work” that in one instance he was forbidden to exercise the priesthood in a particular diocese.

Factions in the Roman Curia also conspired to rid themselves of this annoying priest by trying to get him to accept an episcopal appointment in far-off Brazil, which Gaspar steadfastly refused to accept. Then there is the infamous episode in which he was publicly rebuked at a papal audience, after which the Founder commented that the Holy Father would one day see how such a thing was hardly in keeping with Christian charity. (The pope in question would eventually alter his estimation of the Canon—while commenting at the same time on the number of enemies Gaspar still had within the Vatican’s walls and elsewhere.)

Most memorable of all is the celebrated incident when Gaspar’s intervention saved the town of Sonnino from a papal directive ordering its destruction for being a stronghold of brigandage; the Founder’s opposition to such a drastic measure included criticism of the inhumane treatment accorded these literal outsiders of the papal domain, especially the practice of nailing dismembered pieces of their bodies to city gates after their execution in a grotesque caricature of the Crucified.

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### **Implications for Mission Today**

**N**ow it seems to me that such items in Gaspar’s biography have implications for his ostensible followers today. So let me frame the remainder of my comments around a few lines from a proposed mission statement eventually adopted by the Atlantic Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood—despite my reservations about the usefulness of such things!

The words read: “It is that Precious Blood which compels us to leave behind the stability and comforts of familiar surroundings, to go wherever the Spirit leads us and to do whatever might be necessary to advance the Kingdom of God.” Also: “Just as that Blood washed away the sins of the world, we seek to restore life and hope to broken humanity by reaching out to those thought most unworthy and undeserving of God’s love and forgiveness.”

Both these lines resonate with the scriptural passages that have meant so much to me in my reflections on Gasparian spirituality, namely, “Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:11) and “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 (Heb. 12:12-13).”

In their own way, these texts are for “ecclesiastical” outsiders too. The first evokes the controversy in the early Christian movement over admitting Gentiles on an equal basis with Jews. The Pauline theology in the second chapter of Ephesians presents the magnificent vision of the one body created after the “wall of enmity” had been broken down between insider and outsider through the saving death of Christ. The text from Hebrews is even more evocative when it identifies redemption as taking place outside the camp, one interpretation of which could mean the enclosing walls of establishment religion.

I have written elsewhere how I first laid eyes on the draft of the aforementioned mission statement as I was going out the door to give a weekend retreat. Something made me stop at the mailbox right before I got in the car and open the letter from our provincial office. I read the proposal and proceeded to my retreat, but during the two-hour drive I could not get those words out of my mind. Moreover, in the background were events of the day before when the Diocese of Rochester permanently suspended a number of priests. I thought to

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myself how they were surely among “those thought most unworthy and undeserving of God’s love and forgiveness.” I also began to imagine what kinds of ministries would make me “leave behind the stability and comforts of familiar surroundings.”

I also thought of St. Gaspar and his work with brigands that I mentioned

earlier. These were people who fled to the hills to escape conscription into Napoleon's army following his occupation of the Papal States. In order to survive, they became highway robbers. After Napoleon's defeat, the brigands were not easily reintegrated into society. They remained outlaws and the papal government was driven to exasperation.

Unlike the authorities, however, who could think only of punishment and retribution, Gaspar's mission to the brigands was motivated all along with Christian ideals of reconciliation and clemency. In one of his letters, he writes:

*one must adhere to a certain decisive action and from among the various possibilities available, to select the one which balances best what is spiritual and eternal with the temporal and external world!.... Whatever may be the principle of the jus publico [civil law] to be taken into consideration, it is certain that we should examine those principles of law, not in a restricted fashion but in a composite sense, that is to say, with mercy, with charity, with zeal for the salvation of souls (Letter 1168).*

### **Dwelling Place: Outside the Gates**

**W**hich brings me to the present time and some pressing questions for Gaspar's latter-day followers suggested by his status as someone who often enough dwelled "outside the gate" in order to "bring those who were far off near." The following, for example, are among those questions I believe we need to ask ourselves. I present them here in lieu of the reflection questions that typically follow these articles:

- "Who are today's 'brigands' who live far off from us but whom we are called to bring near?"
- "Who are those thought most unworthy and undeserving of God's love and forgiveness to whom we might restore life and hope?"
- "Which gates must we pass through in order to go outside the camp and bear the reproach of Christ the Outsider and Excluded One?"
- "What stable, comfortable and familiar surroundings does the blood of Christ impel us to leave behind in order to advance the Kingdom of God?"
- "To what extent must we embrace the condition of the outsider, including a certain distance from ecclesiastical structures and situations that are demonstrably foreign to the gospel of Jesus Christ?"

Allow me to suggest a few possible courses of action that might well be relevant for embodying the gasparian charism in today's church and world. I write, of course, in the context of a Western society; those in other parts of the world will have to seek answers appropriate to their own situation.

Regarding those who are "far off" and who are so often relegated to marginal consideration by church and society, there is no end to identifiable outsiders. Gasparian missions to the urban and rural poor; to the migrant and immigrant strangers in our midst; to racial and sexual minorities, to the incarcerated, to centers of violence, all strike me as worthy ways to incarnate the Founder's own embrace of those who dwell outside the gate. There are, of course, notable examples of where this is already being done in venues both old and new. Would that such

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ministries characterize St. Gaspar's followers overall.

As for those "thought most unworthy and undeserving of God's love and forgiveness," I have wondered if a gasparian mission to priest-outsiders caught up in the clerical abuse scandals would not be an appropriate gesture on the part of people committed to mercy and reconciliation in the name of Christ's blood. The language of zero tolerance evokes for me the kind of indiscriminate and exasperated response of ecclesiastical insiders to problems they have clearly lacked the wisdom to address on a truly evangelical basis. Whatever their personal guilt, it seems to me that priests who have been driven outside the gate by ecclesiastics are themselves victims of the institutionalized pathologies of a church incapable of healing what Eugene

Kennedy has called its "sexual wound." In contrast to a girardian mechanism of scapegoating which serves to perpetuate a culture of victimhood in the church and society, the resources inherent in gasparian spirituality could provide some form of response more in keeping with the Victim whose blood has placed all victims' claims in a new context. As Croatian theologian Miroslav Wolf has put it with the poignancy of someone himself victimized by the upheavals in the Balkan states: "At the heart of the cross is Christ's stance of not letting the other remain an enemy and of creating space in himself for the

offender to come in” (*Exclusion and Embrace*, 126). Would that St. Gaspar’s followers find a way to open up such a space too.

### **Approaches for “Bearing the Reproach”**

**T**he question of “bearing the reproach” of the outsider by going outside the gate reminds me of an incident that caused me considerable bemusement. It was the July 1, 2000, coincidence of the Jubilee Year celebrations at the Vatican for precious blood communities and Rome’s first-ever gay pride parade. The papal asperity directed toward the latter reached new levels and included the eventual suspension of the sole Italian priest courageous enough to take part. As you might imagine, I was left wondering at the irony of precious blood people safely enclosed within the camp while invective was being hurled at those outside the walls who bear the reproach of the church’s institutionalized homophobia. The question is at least worth pondering whether the feast of the precious blood was being celebrated that day elsewhere as well in the disguised form of those excluded and despised by religious insiders—as it was on the day it was first shed—and whether the inability of anyone present at St. Peter’s to follow Jesus there (especially the gay and lesbian persons in the Piazza) represented a lost opportunity for millennial witness. Would that a new gasparian mission to those reproached by the ecclesiastical institution become a sign of solidarity toward all persons redeemed by the blood of Christ.

All of this obviously depends on a willingness to leave behind “stable, comfortable and familiar surroundings” impelled, as St. Gaspar so often said, by the love of Christ. I want to make here a special case for precious blood people venturing outside the camp of religious security and certainty to engage the “far off” world of ecumenical and interfaith endeavor.

It is time for us to be present in other Christian churches, in synagogues, mosques and temples in order to advance the Kingdom of God’s ethos of inclusion. In the face of ecclesiastical roadblocks that more and more render Christians of other churches and adherents of other faiths outsiders in varying states of deficiency and error, gasparian

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spirituality would seem by contrast to call for a radical embrace of “the other.”

Ecclesiastical documents and canonical strictures whose dominant tone is exclusion strike me as an affront to the central symbol of a spirituality that speaks instead of the blood kinship of all human persons. All agree that few matters are of such pressing concern in a post-9/11 world as efforts on behalf of mutual religious understanding. But this requires more than the sporadic gesture of good will toward other believers; it requires one to leave old Jerusalems behind and enter into the life, worship and communities of other religious traditions. I find that my identity as a “missionary” is more and more shaped by the instability, discomfort and unfamiliarity of surroundings outside the camp of my own religious heritage. Would that the missionary charism bequeathed by Gaspar del Bufalo find itself regularly enriched by such encounters.

### **Confronting a Complicity with Clericalism**

**F**inally, there is the question of assuming “the condition of the outsider, including a certain distance from ecclesiastical structures and situations that are demonstrably foreign to the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Speaking as a priest, I would like to suggest here a careful examen with respect to complicity in the evils of clericalism on the part of St. Gaspar’s devotees. One of the pitfalls ordination confers is insider status and embeddedness in ecclesiastical settings with their clerical trappings, including special garb and titles, dependable stipends, housing and benefits, and domestic service.

I am well aware that Gaspar himself would flinch at the thought of doffing his cassock. But I recall seeing a drawing of him once in secular dress when he went out to meet a notorious leader of the

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brigands on his home territory; by going outside the camp toward someone far off, the Founder was willing to put aside the signs of his ecclesiastical status, realizing how these could impede his ministry. Would that his followers be prepared to eschew whatever might jeopardize their vocation as disciples of One who came to serve and not to be served, and who warned would-be ministers of the gospel about pharisaic leaven.

I hope these thoughts, written shortly before the fiftieth anniversary of St. Gaspar's canonization, might stimulate his admirers to reflect more deeply on the contours and challenges of a spirituality and mission that takes his ecclesial charism seriously in a vastly different church and world.



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# Liberation Through Truth: An Urgent Cry for Reconciliation

By Barry Fischer, CPPS

In recent months I have been on five continents visiting our missionaries. The need for reconciliation in our world is apparent everywhere. In Vietnam, where we struggle to get a foothold, the signs and memories of wars that wracked this country for decades are apparent. In Colombia, South America, plagued by drug wars and terrorism, a Bishop pleaded with me, "Please send your Missionaries here; our country is in dire need of your charism!" In Europe, the waves of immigration from the East and from Africa are changing the face of the continent. When I visited Spain, the people were still trying to deal with the shock of the terrorists' bombings in the subway. And in Peru, the results of the commission of reconciliation and truth stand as a shocking testimony to the violence during the years of the Shining Path Revolution.

In this world, wracked by the violence of war and terrorism, of injustices and oppression, the blood of Abel cries out to heaven in a deafening chorus. In the midst of it all, we hear the Risen Lord's wish and gift for his apostles and for all peoples: "*My peace I give you!*" His Risen Body still bore the wounds of the crucifixion, reminding us of the price He paid to win us that peace.

In this general context the Church is speaking more and more of reconciliation as central to her mission. We, as men and women living the spirituality of the Precious Blood, need to discover our own role and contribution to society and to the church as "ambassadors of reconciliation":

*If anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation. The old order has passed away; now all is new! All this has been done by God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. (II Corinthians 5:17-18)*



## From Brokenness to Harmony

**I** still struggle to arrive at a definition of *reconciliation*. There are many false understandings about what reconciliation means. Especially in those countries which lived under cruel and oppressive dictatorships, some would propose that reconciliation consists in forgetting the past and turning over a new leaf in order to get on with life, without addressing the issues of injustice done to thousands of people whose lives and future were destroyed. Others would declare peace by decree, signing accords to stop violence but again without addressing the underlying issues which provoked the conflicts in the first place. Still others, governments included, think that peace and reconciliation are obtained simply by eliminating the foe by force. What, then, does reconciliation mean? Paul's definition of reconciliation is well-known to precious blood people:

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ. It is he who is our peace, and who made the two of us one by breaking down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart. In his own flesh he abolished the law with its commands and precepts, to create in himself one new person from us who had been two and to make peace, reconciling both of us to God in one body through his cross, which put that enmity to death. (Ephesians 2, 13-16)*

To understand reconciliation, we also need to look to the book of Genesis. The Creation story is an attempt to understand and make sense out of human reality as we experience it. Sin destroyed that beautiful harmony which existed in God's creation at the beginning of time. Now Christ is the new Adam, the new Creature, who once again lives in the proper relationship with God. It is in living in harmony with God that Christ completes His mission of reconciling all humanity and setting us once again on the right track. Jesus teaches us the truth about ourselves. He teaches us who we are and what we are called to be. In following Him and living according to His Spirit, we are able to attain the fullness of life. Our broken lives can be restored.

One way then to understand reconciliation and its dynamics is to think of it as bringing people and things into their proper relationships. Sin, whether it is personal, social, or institutionalized has wreaked havoc on humanity, distorting, obstructing, and destroying the proper relationships that God intends for our world.

We might think of reconciliation on several levels: personal, in which we are put into the proper relationship with ourselves and with God; communal, in which we reestablish the proper relationship with one another; social, in which we develop the proper relationships with

other social groups, societies, races, peoples; and environmental, by seeking a more respectful and proper relationship with our mother earth. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes, "It pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him and by means of him, to reconcile everything in his person, both on earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of the cross (1:19-20)." Indeed the symbol of the cross speaks of this reconciliation. The vertical post rises from the ground to the heavens in a sign of humankind once again being in relationship with God as sons and daughters. The horizontal beam which holds up Christ's outstretched arms speaks to us symbolically of a reconciled humanity, in which we become one with others, recognizing our condition as brothers and sisters, children of the same God. In Christ who shed his Blood on the cross, the original harmony between God and humans and between peoples is restored. Our relationships have been redeemed. It is only through a process of reconciliation that we can achieve, in the familiar phrase of St. Maria De Mattias, that "new order of things which the Great Son of God has come to achieve through the shedding of His Precious Blood."

### **Unmasking the Lie: The Truth about Ourselves**

**W**e are called to be "ambassadors of reconciliation" in our world today, but we will only be able to give peace if we have attained in our own lives that deep peace and reconciliation in the Blood of Christ. It was only after Peter recognized his sinfulness and accepted Jesus' love for Him despite all his weaknesses and shortcomings that Peter was commissioned to "feed the sheep." An important part of this process of personal reconciliation resides in accepting the Truth about ourselves. There is profound wisdom in Jesus' words when he gives us the two great Commandments: "Love God and love your neighbor as yourself." In order to be ambassadors of peace and reconciliation, we must first find it ourselves, for we will speak from the abundance of our hearts.

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Fr. Robert Schreiter writes that an important step in achieving reconciliation is to "unmask the lies." Many of us have fallen into the traps set by Satan. We have accepted his lies as truths. We believe along with most of humanity today that the truth of our identity is found

in success and in the accumulation of material things. Other voices tell us that we have to prove our worth. We have to be relevant, popular, powerful, and spectacular.

These lies have even crept into religious life and can poison our hearts and our relationships. Jesus has come to unmask the lies! He comes to speak the truth about God and about our human condition. He opens our eyes and helps us to discover the truth about ourselves, just as he did to Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan Woman, to Zaccheus. Jesus was able to penetrate that outer layer, the superficial, the mask of these people and with his

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penetrating gaze could look upon them and discover the likeness of God within them. Through their encounter with Jesus, they could take off their masks and discover the truth about themselves. Jesus teaches us that the truth of our identity is found in God's infinite love for us. When we can recognize and embrace this basic truth about ourselves, we experience a deep healing and freedom.

Years ago when I was rector of St. Gaspar's school in Santiago, Chile, I came to the defense of one of our high school students whom the teachers had decided to expel from the school due to his misconduct. I reflected on St. Gaspar and his mission to the marginalized and outcasts of society in his times. I remembered how he would venture into the mountains without police protection to go into the hideouts of these vicious bandits to announce to them God's love, his only "weapon" being the Crucifix. I could not, as a son of St. Gaspar, expel this young lad from our school. There had to be another way to rescue him. In a questionnaire I sent out to each teacher I asked what each had done to help this boy overcome his problem. Not one teacher admitted to ever trying to help him.

I then asked a certain teacher to take on Marlo as his special mission, to get close to him and to become his friend, to penetrate his world and to discover what was underlying his troubled life. The teacher managed to become friends with Marlo and gradually the lie was unmasked. Marlo, restless and hyperkinetic from early childhood, had been told repeatedly that he was bad. He was a negative influence on others. He was trouble. And after a while, Marlo began to believe that lie. He had a very low self-image. So he had to live up to that

image in his attitude and in his conduct towards others. Slowly, the teacher-friend began to get another message across to Marlo: “Marlo, you are okay. You are a good person. “You can do better. God loves you, Marlo.” Of course, at first Marlo found this hard to believe. But he finally did accept that basic truth about himself. Satan’s lie had been unmasked and the truth of his identity was revealed to him. And that truth was rooted in God’s infinite love for him, even with his

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shortcomings. Three years later, Marlo graduated from our school a very different person. Sixteen years later this young man visited me in Guatemala for the sole purpose of saying “Thank You” for what I had done for him. By reaching out to him, he had discovered the truth about himself, a

truth which freed him from the lies, which healed the wounds and which opened him up to new growth, giving him a new lease on life.

Marlo’s story is not foreign to our lives. We go through life believing so many lies about ourselves and others. We live in a world of negative voices that say to us: “You are no good. You are inferior. You are ugly. You are worthless. You are nobody.” And we begin to believe that we are unlovable and that we deserve to be pushed aside, forgotten, reputed and abandoned.

All of us bear wounds of one nature or another that we often carry since childhood. Because we are sinners we can wound one another and we often wound the very people we love. Sometimes we have poor images of ourselves and the basic truth about ourselves becomes distorted and this in turn distorts our way of viewing and of relating to others. Part of our call to personal reconciliation is to be reconciled with our past, to accept it as part of our salvation history, of God’s love story with us. We cannot change the past, we cannot change what kind of childhood we had or the circumstances that have marked us on our life’s journey. But we must recognize the truth that God was always there, even in the darkest moments. My history, your history, is salvation history, if we will accept it and embrace it.

When we come to grips with our own wounds and let them be healed in the Precious Blood of Christ, we are more open to accepting others who also carry their wounds which influence their way of interrelating with others.

## At the Foot of the Cross

Sometimes our faults and shortcomings embitter us. We become frustrated that in spite of all our best efforts at improvement we fail again and again. And we can get many negative feelings about ourselves. In my younger years I was a very “explosive” character. I would let things simmer within me, all the while smiling, but woe to anyone near me the day the volcano exploded! As was the case with the eruption of Vesuvius, not many people would survive in the flow of my wrath! In the wake of these “eruptions of rage” that left the valley scattered with corpses, I would feel terrible. My own self-image would plummet.

Then one day I remembered the words of St. Gaspar, who many times would recommend to his Missionaries to “rest in the open heart of the Crucified” and to contemplate “the great Book of the Cross” in order to discover there the wisdom of God. I decided to heed Gaspar’s advice. I went to chapel and sat there for a long time with head bowed, ashamed, angry at myself and feeling rejected by God for my temper tantrums and accompanying lack of charity toward my brothers and sisters.

In the silence I would contemplate the Crucified one and recall the image of the suffering servant: “It was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured, while we thought of him as stricken, as one smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed (Isaiah 53, 4-5).” As I meditated and rested in the opened side of the Crucified One, I let the Precious Blood that He shed heal my wounds. I found solace and peace and renewed strength to keep on struggling to improve. Over the years, I have returned many times to “the foot of the Cross” to feel the love embrace of God welcoming me “home.” It is what we experience and celebrate in the sacrament of reconciliation.

At the foot of the cross I discovered for myself what John Paul II addressed to prisoners in Brazil on his first missionary journey to Latin America in 1979. “The Precious Blood speaks to us of the greatest joy of all,” he said, “that of knowing that we are loved by God.” I discovered the truth that the Precious Blood conveys. What peace and

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joy that truth brings us! Humility is about recognizing truth. To embrace this basic truth about ourselves, to accept God's love for us in spite of our sinfulness and shortcomings, is truly a liberating experience. God loves us with an unconditional and total love. It is not bound to our merits. Each of us is invited to accept this truth and only when we do can we become witnesses of God's love and reconciliation to others. As Peter wrote, "Realize that you were delivered from the futile way of life your fathers handed on to you, not by any diminishable sum of silver or gold, but by Christ's blood beyond all price: the blood of a spotless, unblemished lamb (I Peter 1, 18-19)."

Yes, we are called to be "ambassadors of reconciliation" in our broken world. But our task begins within ourselves as we are called to "be reconciled in the Blood" shed as a pledge of God's infinite love for us and which heals us, freeing us from the lies which entrap us so that we might rise to our Call to live fully as sons and daughters of God. "We implore you, in Christ's name: be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5,21)!"

Once we come to accept the free gift of God's love in our lives, then our wounds that have been healed can become a source of mission for us. As the Risen Lord, we extend our hands to others, hands bearing our glorified wounds, as we say "Peace to you!"

On the other hand, not to face the wounds we all bear, whatever the nature of those wounds, can mean that we continue to act out of those wounds in a negative way, blocking and making almost impossible true reconciliation with others.

### Angels of Peace

**S**t. Gaspar was engaged in a ministry of reconciliation and renewal. It was a ministry born at the foot of the cross as he contemplated God's immense love for him and for all of humankind and the price His Son paid to bring about reconciliation. At the foot of the Cross Gaspar's life was filled with the Precious Blood and inflamed with Christ's love. It was there that Gaspar found fire for mission. It

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was in the celebration of the Eucharist that recalls all that God has done for us in Christ that he was strengthened for that mission of reconciliation. From there he would go out to preach in word and deed that reconciliation to others, calling them to be reconciled in the truth about themselves.

Our world is filled with lies and many live under their influence. Others hide under masks of false securities. As peoples of the Precious Blood we are sent forth to be ambassadors of Christ's love, helping others to discover that deep truth at the core of their being, a truth that is capable of freeing them for growth and new life, that they are precious in God's eyes and that they are loved with a boundless and gratuitous love. This is the most basic reconciliation in the truth from which mission is born.

In the small square near our church in Sonnino, the hillside town known as the center of brigands and saved by St. Gaspar's intervention from destruction, there is a plaque which commemorates the preaching of St. Gaspar. He is called an "angel of peace." As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his canonization may we be inflamed by that same missionary zeal of Gaspar and become "angels of peace", messengers of reconciliation. Having found that deep peace within us, which is the Risen Lord's gift to us, might we share that peace with all those with whom we journey.



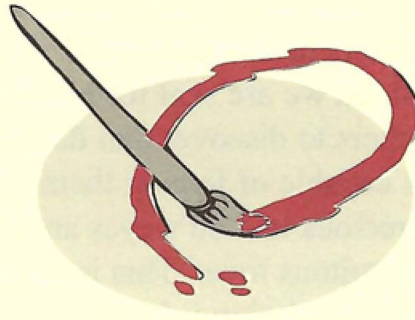
### For Reflection

- ☛ What are the lies that I need to unmask which have entrapped me?
- ☛ Stand before God without masks and recognize your brokenness. Let God work his miracle of reconciliation in you.
- ☛ Have I experienced my wounds as a source of mission?
- ☛ Where do I feel called to be "an ambassador of reconciliation" in my daily life?



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## The Artist's Way: Art as an Expression of Truth

**By James Sloan, CPPS**

**T**he title of this essay might indicate that the writer is an artist or a philosopher, but I do not consider myself either. However, from the time I was seven or eight years old my mother began taking me to the Art Institute of Chicago, beginning a pattern of museum visits that continues to this day. I credit my mother for opening my eyes to what artists have to say. All of these years while searching for a deeper understanding of life, and sometimes finding it in works of art, it has become more clear that it is truth that I have been seeking.

One such awareness occurred in May 2003 as I sat in the Pantheon in Rome gazing at the great columns and capitals placed there in the second century when the structure was built. There was a Mass in progress at the far end of the room and visitors were not able to proceed in that direction. So, seeing a vacant bench, I sat and before long began contemplating the forms of the columns, their mass, their proportions, their Corinthian capitals. They struck me as perfection itself, as does the great dome of the Pantheon. No architect before or since has built a truer dome. Twelve centuries later the Florentine, Brunelleschi, having studied the Pantheon, designed and built his dome over the cathedral of Florence. A century after that Michelangelo, who grew up in the shadow of Brunelleschi's dome, designed his great dome over St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. All three are perfect. Nothing could be meaningfully added or subtracted from any of them.

Santiago Calatrava, the contemporary Spanish engineer-architect of art museums, railroad stations, and bridges, says he likes the Gothic



cathedrals “for their sincerity, for the way they plainly show their structure.” As you take in the interiors of the early French Gothic cathedrals, the structure truly is plain to behold. The weight of the roof and upper walls is borne on the cascade of ribs flowing from the ceiling vaulting down through the columns to the floor and the foundations beneath. The walls are so pierced by vast expanses of stained glass windows that one might wonder how they stand. They do so only because of flying buttresses placed on the exterior of the building. Calatrava’s words “sincerity” and “plainly showing their structure” seem apt.

### **Pilgrims not Tourists**

**C**hartres, Rheims, Bourges, Notre Dame of Paris. People cannot get enough of them. They are astonishing and pure seven centuries after they were built. Each was built as the House of God, though many tourists and other visitors seem unaware of that as they crowd their great spaces, as though visiting museums and nothing more.

I remember one Saturday evening some years ago when my traveling companion and I entered Notre Dame just before Evening Prayer. Ushers rattling their keys were unceremoniously herding all the unwilling tourists out of the cathedral. The two of us were swimming against the tide, confronted by ushers who seemed to think any foreigner must be a tourist only. It took some convincing for us two priests in casual clothing to be allowed in to pray. When the last of the tourist throng had been led out it almost seemed that the great cathedral heaved a sigh of relief. Stillness and quiet returned. There were perhaps a hundred gathered in the sanctuary for prayer. Evening prayer in that sacred space proved a deeply spiritual experience, with excellent chant and great clouds of incense ascending high into the vaulting carrying our petitions with them.

While Santiago Calatrava singled out the Gothic cathedrals, I believe the same could be said for many of the Romanesque abbey churches and cathedrals of Europe that were built in the previous two centuries. There is nothing false in them either; their structure plainly shows.

Perhaps that is why Precious Blood people are so drawn to the abbey church of San Felice in Giano, Italy, which along with its monastery was given to St. Gaspar. It is Romanesque (12<sup>th</sup> century), a church very simple in its structure, very lucid. At one time that simplicity was hidden beneath plaster overlays of Baroque ornamentation. All that has been removed and the true structure stands

out.

I wonder, as well, if visitors to the sixth century Roman basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe in Ravenna, Italy, or the seemingly miraculous 6<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine Hagia Sophia in Istanbul sense that they are in the presence of truth? I don't see how anyone could miss it-though they might not recognize just what it is about these buildings that so attracts and uplifts them. Could it be that the true-ness of these great spaces reflects the truth of God himself? That and more I would venture.

I find myself smiling as I reflect on the great 13<sup>th</sup> century French cathedrals, for I am thinking of a very grand building atop San Francisco's Nob Hill. Grace Cathedral is the cathedral of the Episcopal diocese of California. And it has a grand interior. Built not long after the 1906 earthquake, which destroyed most of San Francisco, it was prudently made entirely of reinforced concrete, not stone, which was used in the Gothic cathedrals. At first glance it "looks" Gothic. Inside it even "feels" Gothic. And yet one knows it is not "sincere for the way it plainly shows its structure." The reinforced concrete structure is largely hidden from view as one is encouraged to think of it as stone. On the principal front doors are good copies of Ghiberti's 15<sup>th</sup> century "Gates of Paradise" panels from the bronze doors of Florence cathedral's baptistery. But they are not the real thing. They might even bring to mind the Brooklyn Bridge, or the Eiffel Tower one encounters in Las Vegas, Nevada.

St. Thomas Aquinas defined art as *recta ratio factabilium*, a thing rightly made. And that does not mean a copy of a thing rightly made. Rather it bears the signature, the fingerprint, the soul print of the artist who made it.

### **Soul Prints: Paintings that Tell the Truth**

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I have been speaking of architecture but equally exciting do painters such as Giotto, "the founder of modern painting" who in 1205-6 filled the tiny Arena Chapel in Padua with scenes from the Life of Christ and Mary, tell the truth. Giotto, like any painter, had his

predecessors from whom he learned much. But he is credited with introducing human psychology into his figures. They are recognizable people like us, moving around in believable space. The expressions on their faces, their gestures ring true. When Anna gazes into the eyes of her husband Joachim, you can feel the sparks.

Likewise when Giotto portrays the Crucifixion of Jesus in this fresco cycle, angels swoop in to gather the blood of Jesus in golden chalices, their faces contorted in agony over what they are witnessing. When you look at their faces, indeed when you look at any of Giotto's faces, you feel that you are looking at true emotion.

Gaspar found the truth presented most clearly in the crucifix. "Listen to God's voice at the foot of the crucifix (#588)." "May the crucifix be our book; therein do we read to learn how to act (#2368)." A contemporary of Gaspar, the great Spanish artist, Francisco Goya, summed up the horrors of the Napoleonic wars in many etchings and paintings, most especially in his masterpiece *The Third of May, 1808*. The image of the crucified one is unmistakable in his central figure, though this time he stands with arms outstretched before a firing squad made up of faceless soldiers. Christ is being crucified all over again, it seems to say, in this war, and in every war. Next to the central figure are two groups, one a pile of bodies lying in pools of their own blood, the other a terrified group of citizens moving up in line to take their turn before the executioners. But the light in the scene is clearly focused on the central figure—or rather, the light is from the central figure. He seems to glow as much from within as from a lantern placed near his feet. He is dressed in a white shirt that will soon be red.

In 1985, Noel Counihan returned to the crucifixion theme to speak out on what was then happening in El Salvador. He entitled his painting *Homage to Goya (Requiem for El Salvador)*. This time there is one figure only, also in white, standing against a background of gray and black. His arms are painfully outstretched, like Jesus, and there is such terror in his eyes. Who knows what those eyes have witnessed—and are seeing now?

For the past several years we in the Precious Blood communities have been speaking of the "cry of the blood," and many of us have been pondering where it might be heard in contemporary life. We are not alone in hearing the cry of the blood. The painter, John Pitman Weber, who creates "art of social conscience," entitled one of his works *Yell*. Against a background of tropical foliage (Africa? The Caribbean?) one sees two broad horizontal yellow bands filled with faceless, terrorized, dark-skinned people running for their lives (from an explosion? bullets?). A strong, bright red vertical element in the painting makes the scene into a kind of cross, and just about where the head of the crucified

Christ might be, there is the face, in a field of red, of a man or a woman yelling. In this painting we can hear the cry of the blood.

## Historical Truths in Sacred Spaces

Historical truths of each era are visible in the art produced in that era. Opening up to these truths, and what they mean, gives one a feeling of connectedness to all that has gone before. For example, a person can enter the vast sacred space of Hagia Sophia in present day Istanbul and let the architecture alone speak. It has plenty to say. But there is another history that thunders through these vaults and great spaces.

*Hagia Sophia ...  
exudes history and truth,  
though that truth is often  
tangled and painful.*

Fires destroyed the original Hagia Sophia, built by Constantinus in the year 360, in 404 and 414 and 532. The present building dates from the year 537. For over 900 years it remained the greatest church in Christendom. But in 1453 Constantinople fell into Muslim hands and within a week Hagia

Sophia was converted into a mosque. With all Christian images removed or plastered over, it remained a mosque for another 482 years, until 1935 when it was secularized and declared a museum.

For almost 70 years now the building is listed as only a museum. This did not prevent Pope Paul VI from falling to his knees in prayer when he visited Hagia Sophia. I imagine he could not help doing so. The building exudes history and truth, though that truth is often tangled and painful. In the year 1054 the envoys of Pope Leo IX excommunicated the entire Eastern Church from the great altar of Hagia Sophia. The patriarch of Constantinople reciprocated, excommunicating the Roman Church. That split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches remains to this day. As I stood on the spot where it happened I felt shivers down my spine—and a sense of great loss. That cataclysmic event nearly a thousand years ago touches my own truth as a Roman Catholic who mourns the separation of Christian people, my brothers and sisters in the faith.

## Touching our own Truth

“Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver,” St. Thomas Aquinas tells us. I believe that we all have our own sense of what is true, based in

large measure on what we have experienced in life, and for those who are susceptible to art, whether it be architecture, painting, sculpture, music, literature, dance, we are touched—sometimes deeply—by the truth we encounter in it. Its significance touches something deep within us and we feel more whole, and definitely more grateful.

As I conclude these reflections I find myself perched on a bench thirty feet from breakers crashing ashore on San Francisco Bay. Looming in the near distance—”so close that you could almost touch it”—is the Golden Gate Bridge, well over a mile long, its far end anchored in the green Marin Headlands. The headlands are pristine, saved from housing developments by wise legislative action decades ago. What one sees today is what one would have seen 70 years ago when this engineering wonder was constructed. The bridge is true, honest, sincere, perfectly functional, as well as being a thing of great beauty; nothing could be added, nothing taken away without detracting from its integrity.

It has much in common, I think, with the Gothic cathedrals, Hagia Sophia, and Sant’ Apollinare in Classe, in Ravenna, even with the Pantheon in Rome.

Lost in my thoughts, I was unaware that seated on a nearby bench, a young park ranger was enjoying his sandwich, lost in thoughts of his own, gazing out over, but not seeming to see the marvelous scene before him. As I rose to leave I said to him, “What a place to have lunch, huh?!”

“Not so bad,” he said.

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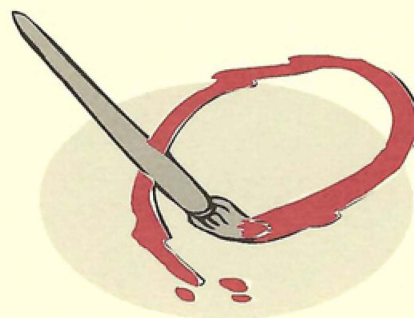


## For Reflection

- ☛ What does it take for a film, a book, a painting, a sculpture, or the architecture of a church to deeply move you? Would you relate that to the truth you find there?
- ☛ What do you do to further your own search for truth? Do you see this as a personal responsibility?
- ☛ Can you name times and places where you have felt yourself deeply touched by works of art? What are they?
- ☛ What would you say about the truthfulness of the art you find in your parish church, or your home, or neighborhood—or perhaps on your refrigerator door?
- ☛ Have you ever traveled abroad or in the United States to spend time in great churches or shrines? What did you go there seeking? What did you find?



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## Saint Gaspar del Bufalo: Naming and Claiming But Never Taming The Truth

By Joseph Nassal, CPPS

*Every time we walk down the street,  
We are preceded by hosts of angels saying,  
"Make way, make way, make way for the image of God."  
Talmud*

**I**t is an ancient question that confronts most of us at various stages and turns on our life journey. Who am I? What is my true identity? Beyond all the things I do, the skills I have, the jobs I hold, the relationships I treasure, who am I?

Most of us think we know who we are. Through the years we have developed a certain identity, acquired certain tastes, developed certain talents and skills, and nurtured certain relationships with those we call our friends. Many of us have been helped in the process of self-discovery by instruments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Enneagram that help us embrace our true self. The older we get, the more comfortable we are in our identity. Knowledge of self grows through experiences that either resonates with our inner self or rings hollow and untrue. Over the years, we learn to adapt to certain external changes in order to be true to the portrait we have of ourselves.

When we do face a so-called identity crisis, we go deep within ourselves and cling to those core beliefs that have shaped our response to others and to the world. We return to the center to discover again that the answer to the question, “Who am I?” is found in the wonderful wisdom from the Talmud: I am made in the image of God. I am a child of God. I am the beloved of God.

This basic truth that each of us is of divine origin sparked the fire in the heart of St. Gaspar del Bufalo and kindled his desire to bring all peoples near to the heart of Christ which he called the “place of refuge” and “the haven of tranquility.” Here in the heart of Christ God forged Gaspar into a prophet of peace, a champion of compassion, a poetic preacher of truth, and a founder with wisdom and understanding. The love for all that burned in Gaspar’s heart was “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).”

This essay will reflect the prophetic nature of St. Gaspar’s vision and mission as he sought to retrieve this core truth of who we are as God’s beloved. This haunting memory of holiness—our original goodness rather than our original sin—“is the objective for everyone,” Gaspar wrote (Letter 1899); “however, it is necessary that it be inculcated gently into souls.” Stirring the embers of our own challenge to be a prophetic people today, this truth about our call to holiness becomes the basis for our ministry of reconciliation and renewal.

### **The Untamed Truth**

**G**aspar understood that only when I discover my true self, that sacred space deep within that reminds me that I am God’s beloved, will I speak and live and tell the truth. I will no longer have to hide behind all the masks I wear that I use to protect my false self. The masks that keep me from telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, because of my fear that if I told the whole truth I would not be accepted and loved.

Jesus taught that only when we tell the truth and live the truth are we free. While we profess to believe that the truth will set us free, most of us are still imprisoned by fears, expectations, and regrets. The longer we allow these lies to linger, the longer a sense of liberation will elude us.

Janis Joplin put this connection between truth and liberation another way: “Freedom is just another word for *nothing left to lose*.” Because most of us are afraid of what we will lose if we tell the truth—family, friends, community, job, and even our lives—we are content to live with the consequences of not telling the truth. We are rather tame when it



comes to telling the truth. We don't like to make waves, create a fuss, cause a commotion, or hurt another's feelings. We want to be liked and appreciated and affirmed.

As an ordained member of the Roman Catholic Church, I am painfully aware of this penchant for keeping one's mouth shut and not telling the truth. Robert Bly put his poetic finger on the pulse of this truth many years ago: "The Church wants tame men. She calls them priests." The late songwriter and storyteller Harry Chapin put it this way: "A tame and toothless tabby cannot produce a lion's roar."

*"The Church wants tame men.  
She calls them priests."*

St. Gaspar del Bufalo produced a lion's roar because he spoke and lived the truth. The most famous example, of course, was his refusal to take the oath of allegiance to the emperor Napoleon for which he was sent into exile and imprisoned. This was Gaspar's moment of truth, one of those times "in the lives of all people of conscience," according to Sue Frankel-Streit, a Catholic Worker who has spent time in prison for protesting the first Gulf War, "when the truth in one's heart is in such deep opposition to the falsehood of the world that one must put everything aside and act upon the truth."

Gaspar was only 24 and ordained two years when he stood up to the emperor, but his youthfulness did not deter him from trying to convince other priests to resist the oppressive government. "Gaspar knew very well the risk that he would be facing in assuming the posture of persuading his companions to resist," Father Luici Contegiacomo, CPPS writes in *St. Gaspar's Prison Experiences 1810-1813*. "But, his conviction to adhere to truth and righteousness, the thought of conducting himself for the honor of God and the Church's cause, the example given to him by Albertini—all helped him in rising above any threat."

The example of his mentor, Father Francis Albertini, whose devotion to the Precious Blood stirred Gaspar's soul and kindled his passionate embrace of the spirituality for which he founded the congregation, reveals an important component in the composition of a truth-teller. We need those people in our lives that serve as spiritual companions and guides, wise and holy souls we trust to tell us the truth. Our ability and willingness to hear and tell the truth depends on trust. It is said that

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when someone asked Albert Einstein's wife if she understood the theory of relativity she said, "No, but I know my husband and you can trust him." The more we know about another, the easier it is to trust that person to tell us the truth and to entrust the other with the truth of our lives.

But if our experience with the person has proven that he or she is less than honest, then the harder it is to trust. It is difficult to trust another if we have been deceived or lied to or taken advantage of by another. Such experiences can lead us to not only trust the person who has deceived us but also to be more wary of all people and less trusting of each person, even those we thought we could trust. When the deception is so thick because a single lie has produced another lie to cover the first lie, then the trail of truth is hard to find. When we confront such a tangled web of deceit, we ask, "Where is the truth?"

When we don't know where we are going or feel as if we've lost the way; or when we have been betrayed by someone we thought we knew and so trusted, the invitation is to focus our energy and our prayer on the truth. As Gaspar advised, "Place yourself in a state of silence. Do nothing but only listen to the voice of God (Letter 1451)." Discernment is the key. Of course discerning which is the voice of God (true self) and which are the voices that reflect the false self is the most difficult task of prayer. "Heed the inspirations that God supplies you with in prayer," Gaspar wrote (Letter 1735), "and call them to mind at the time of your examination of conscience. And learn to distinguish what is from God and what is not."

### A Sense of Integrity

**B**ut how do we know that what we have heard in the silence of our prayer, in our own experiences, and in the counsel of holy guides is the truth? According to Gaspar, we learn discernment in a specific place: the cross of Christ. "Make this decision at the foot of the Crucifix (3068)." Standing before the cross in any given situation or

*Prophets do not  
peer into the future  
and tell what they see;  
prophets look at the present  
and tell the truth.*

relationship when we ask, "Where is the truth?" we are really asking, "Where is Christ in all of this?"

At the cross, we discover our true identity and recover a sense of integrity. Truth-tellers spend their lives uncovering and recovering this sense of integrity. We claim and maintain

a sense of integrity as people of the precious blood, as ministers of reconciliation, by telling the truth. This is the aspect of our call that reflects the prophetic nature of religious life.

Prophets do not peer into the future and tell what they see; prophets look at the present and tell the truth. In his book, *Living a Life That Matters*, Rabbi Harold Kushner quotes his mentor, Abraham Joshua Heschel, regarding the nature of prophecy and discerning and speaking truth: "To be a prophet is more than an invitation. It is a sense of yielding to an overwhelming force against one's will." Devoting a chapter in the book to what he calls "a quest for integrity," Rabbi Kushner focuses on the prophet Jeremiah as an example of how to discern the true from the false while deepening and maintaining this sense of integrity. When Jeremiah returns home following his confrontation with Hananiah in Chapter 28, he asks himself, "How can I be sure that I am the true prophet and he is the false one? Why can't I speak words in God's name that will cause them to applaud rather than revile me?"

The implicit answer, Kushner writes, is twofold. First, "If the words you speak are hard for you to utter and hard for others to hear, and second, if you get no pleasure from speaking them but you feel you must, then you can believe that they come from God."

But, Kushner warns, "if your words make you popular and win you easy applause, or if people don't like hearing them but you get a certain pleasure from speaking them ('I'm only telling you this for your own good'), then you may have reason to suspect that those are your own thoughts disguising themselves as the Word of God (*Living a Life That Matters*, p. 96)."

I suppose that many of us from time to time fall into the trap of being false prophets. But fear of falling into this trap will keep us silent forever. Speaking the truth involves a world of hurt: it hurts to speak the truth and it hurts to hear the truth. But the bottom line, according to Rabbi Kushner, is "the authentic voice of God would demand that we be more compassionate and less cruel, that we show more reverence for innocent lives." In this world of hurt, compassion is key in speaking and living the truth.

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## The Naked Truth

Only by *praying attention* to what is true and what is false within me, can I dare open my mouth to speak. This was certainly the case for the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures. Amos, prophet of social justice, is a good example. He told the truth and sometimes it not only hurt, it was also heavy. “The land is not able to bear all his words,” the priest of Bethel reports (Amos 7, 10).” The truth was so heavy it crushed those who heard it. So when the truth gets too heavy, you tell the truth-teller to go elsewhere. “Flee to the land of Judah,” the priest tells Amos. “Earn your bread there, and prophesy there.”

*And prophets don't have to dress up the truth because in the end they know that more often than not when the truth is spoken it will dress us down.*

Amos seems offended by the implication he is a prophet. “I am no prophet nor a prophet’s son,” he tells the priest. “I am a herdsman.” Amos was satisfied making a living as a shepherd. He also must have had a part-time job as a “dresser of sycamore trees.” I’m not sure what that means. Does he help sycamore trees try on new clothes: “Oh, you look wonderful in that leafy number! Though I must say your trunk is getting one too many rings around the middle! It will be tough to find fall fashions that fit you!” But perhaps this occupation of being a “dresser” prepared Amos to be a prophet because prophets must speak the truth—the naked truth. Amos, the dresser of sycamore trees, told the naked truth. He may have dressed some trees but he never dressed up the truth. Prophets never do.

Amos can’t help but speak the truth. In Chapter Seven as he is speaking with Amaziah, the priest who wants to run him out of town, he receives another message from God. One would think there would be a filtering or screening process the prophet might use before he speaks the truth. But unlike the hosts of talk radio who use a five-second delay so that if the caller says something profane it can be bleeped or edited out before it hits the airwaves, Amos doesn’t have such a switch on his soul. The prophet doesn’t attempt to dress up the truth as he dresses down the priest: “Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parceled out...you shall die in an unclean land (7, 17).”

This prophecy of Israel’s exile is harsh and right to the point. But that’s what prophets do: they get to the point. They don’t beat around the burning bush. Prophets don’t dress up lies and parade it down main

street masquerading as the truth. And prophets don't have to dress up the truth because in the end they know that more often than not when the truth is spoken it will dress us down.

### **Gaspar: Call of the Prophet**

**S**aint Gaspar lived to speak the truth as he heard it in his intimate encounters with God in prayer. Though he was faithful to the church, Gaspar was not afraid to tell the truth even if the institution found it hard to hear. In one famous example, he confronted the authorities regarding their "Sonnino solution." In response to the gangs causing chaos in Sonnino and the surrounding countryside, the solution was to raze the towns and villages. According to Mario Spinelli in his book, *No Turning Back*, "while Sonnino is being demolished to the ground under the blows of the pickaxes, along with the dreams and hopes of its people, Gaspar could not keep silent any longer."

The saint wrote the pope and his position "could not but make life difficult for Pius VII," according to Spinelli. "He was the pope who meekly put up with the abuse of Napoleon," but "he adhered to Gaspar's line and repudiated the party of violence, repression and of the law of an eye-for-an-eye." The pope listened to Gaspar's plea to confront the problem of the gang violence at its source: "by eliminating ignorance, underdevelopment, and the ethical and social aberrations of the province."

Gaspar gathered his group "to convert the hearts and minds of a distrustful and disoriented people; to offer both the Christian outlook and the possibility of a social recovery based on work, on honesty, on peaceful community living, and on respect for the law." Armed only with the cross, the Word of God, and the passion for the spirituality that reflects the reconciliation won for us in the blood of Christ, Gaspar sparked a social revolution. In the short span of six months, five mission houses were founded "in the heart of 'enemy territory.'"

*The pope listened to Gaspar's plea to confront the problem of the gang violence at its source: "by eliminating ignorance, underdevelopment, and the ethical and social aberrations of the province."*

But his revolution was not only to those who were victims of the violence caused by the gangs but also to the gang members themselves. "He looked them in the eye," Spinelli writes. "He felt compassion for them because, behind those sullen looks...there was so much weariness, desperation and marginalization, the same as he had sensed in the prisoners in the whole of the Papal States."

Gaspar's prison experiences must have shaped his life and deepened his commitment to the poor, the outcast, those on the margins of society and church. "The prisons, the hospitals, these are the seed ground of all holiness," he wrote (Letter 1879). This is seen clearly in his willingness to serve as a mediator "between the brigands and the public forces, guaranteeing the surer of the former providing the latter spared their lives."

But the risk of standing in this breach between the government and those charged as the guilty is a difficult and dangerous place. As Spinelli writes, frequently law enforcement officials "went back on their given word and shot the criminals who handed themselves over and also butchered their bodies under the horrified but helpless gaze of Gaspar." This betrayal by the government, according to Spinelli, was not only "an odious and evident injustice" that precluded "the possibility that other brigands would hand themselves over" but it also "discredited and reduced or voided" the work of the Congregation and its founder.

### **Losing and Finding One's Voice**

**A**s Gaspar discovered, failure not because of the lack of one's fire or zeal or vision, is often the fate of the truth-teller. When an institution is built on the lie of an "eye for an eye," one is not surprised by the blindness that results.

We thought we knew who we were but then Jesus comes along and says, "I know you've been taught to hate your enemies, but this isn't your true identity. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. I know you've been told that if someone curses you that you should curse back. But this isn't who you are so instead of cursing them, bless them. I know you've been told that when someone hits you, you are to hit back. After all, you've been taught that this is a basic instinct within you. But it's not true. Your basic instinct is to love even those who hate you, mistreat you, hurt you, take from you."

*Where does one learn,  
"how to look the truth in the eye,  
and for once, not blink?"*

This knowledge of our true selves begins in the recognition that we are sons and daughters of the Most High. We are

children of God. Therefore we are to be “compassionate as our God is compassionate.” When we recognize who we truly are, we have to unlearn what we thought were some basic truths about ourselves and how we relate to others; basic truths about judging and condemning, about lending and forgiving, about giving and taking.

Recognizing and embracing my true identity as a child of God is an ongoing journey as we strip away our own expectations of self and the expectations others hold for us. So where does the truth-teller find the faith, the courage, and the compassion to confront this blindness? Where does one learn, in the words of Barbara Cawthorne Crafton in *Bread and Wine*, “how to look the truth in the eye, and for once, not blink?”

As already noted, Gaspar’s prison experiences deepened his conviction as a truth-teller that he later expressed in his Circular Letters after founding the Institute. In his Second Circular Letter (1827), Gaspar quotes one of his mentors and models, Paul of the Cross: “The apostolic life is based upon the interior life of the Spirit.” A prophetic preacher like Gaspar who is so good with words is grounded in the Word. Otherwise the words become a pun instead of a prophecy, a play on words instead of a prayer that lives and breathes and moves one to reflect on the narrative of one’s life.

On one of my first writing assignments as a college freshman the professor wrote on the top of the page, “Many words, mere palaver.” When I looked up what “palaver” meant, I received a lesson in the link between truth and action. I can write and speak many words, but it is simply “idle talk” unless it is grounded in truth and lived in the witness of my life.

Though a strong believer in contemplative prayer—of praying without words—I also enjoy playing with words, relishing the thrill of turning a phrase on its head or finding a new slant on a familiar word. But after twenty years of preaching as a deacon and priest, I found myself losing my voice. The words sounded stale, not fresh. So I spent my sabbatical in the fall of 2001 and the spring of 2002 trying to keep my mouth shut and my heart open.

Feeling scattered, one of my companions on this journey of silence and solitude was the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke who captured the truth of this sabbatical as a time “to gather you up again in a vessel that makes you glad.” This is what I had been looking for and praying for and longing for during my sabbatical: to be glad again. I wanted to be glad in the service of God, community, and the church. But to find this gladness of soul that would come with a new lease on religious life, I had to go deep inside my bag of tricks. This was the focus of my extended retreat at the hermitage at Big Sur: I emptied the shadow bag

of tricks—all those masks of my false self that I use to cover up my true self—all over the floor of my cell.

I sensed God was inviting me to gather the scattered remnants of my life and place them “in a vessel that makes you glad.” A cup,

*I sensed God was inviting me to gather  
the scattered remnants of my life and place them  
“in a vessel that makes you glad.”*

perhaps, or a chalice, that gathers all the remnants of one’s life and lifts it up with words: “This is my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant, that will be shed for you and for all for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in memory of me.”

In the poem by Rilke, the storm that shatters and scatters everything in an attempt to bring a new order out of what has grown old and cold and stale, does so by bringing back the past: “I wander in your winds and bring back everything I find.” This was my experience during the time of retreat. I reflected on certain events and experiences in my life that I had not thought about in years. I traced wounds that I thought were healed long ago and relished wonders I thought I’d never be able to enjoy again.

Gaspar went to prison because he spoke the truth; I found myself in the prison of silence because I was not living up to—or down to—the truth of my life.

### **Coming to Terms with Truth**

**R**od McIvor, who edits a small journal called *Heron Dance*, tells of one of his first jobs selling encyclopedias door-to-door in a remote area of Canada. One early evening near dusk, he “knocked on the door of a small house on the outskirts of a mill town. A man about sixty answered the door.” The man invited him in and they sat in the tiny living room. McIvor writes it was “like entering a different world; a cello concerto played softly in the background.” The man said he wasn’t interested in buying encyclopedias because he had less than three months to live. “He seemed strangely relaxed and happy,” McIvor reports. They talked for more than an hour. “He was spending his last months listening to the music he loved and re-reading a couple books that had meant a lot to him, and occasionally inviting people in to share his solitude.”

At one point the man asked Rod about his life and why he was selling encyclopedias so far from home, what he was learning and what



his life meant to him. That's the thing about people who know they are going to die: they ask the right questions, the questions that get right to the point. The dying don't have time to beat around the bush because they know the bush is on fire and beating around it could put the fire out. The only difference between them and what Moses saw is that his burning bush was on fire but not consumed. For most of us, the bush is burning up. Time is winding down. There is no time for trivial pursuits. No time for lies. If only we could learn the lessons death seeks to teach us while we are still alive.

How ironic that most of us learn to live one day at a time only when we know we're running out of time. "Over the years," McIvor writes, "I have thought often about that man—a man content with himself, who had found peace. Calm, welcoming, openhearted and open minded. Still wanting to learn. Loving the moment."

The prophetic challenge in the life of St. Gaspar del Bufalo is to live with a spirit of calm and compassion, of fiery forgiveness and passionate presence, of being open minded and open hearted even toward those who would banish or blame us. And through it all, to live with a sense of integrity and justice and love because we know who we are and we know the truth.

In that poem by Rilke that I referenced earlier, the poet writes:

*The blind man needed you as a cup.*

*The servant concealed you.*

*The homeless one held you out as I passed.*

*You see, I like to look for things.*

During the last few years when celebrating Eucharist, I prefer glass chalices to gold or silver because they reveal the precious blood. There is something here about concealing and revealing. What kind of chalice am I?

It is dangerous to be a crystal chalice because it means we are delicate, easily chipped and even shattered. And yet, when held up to a light—even when shattered—we see how the crystal catches the light and shines. When the crystal chalice filled with wine is lifted up, see the reflection of our own blindness and the need to reveal the real presence of love. The crystal conceals nothing, not even those we passed along the way to get to the table, forgetting to reserve a place for those who

*The dying  
don't have time  
to beat around  
the bush because  
they know the bush  
is on fire and  
beating around it  
could  
put the fire out.*

have no place. Raise the glass and toast the new creation: “This is my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.”

To paraphrase the famous atheist Albert Camus: “What the world expects of precious blood people is that they should speak, loud and clear...they should get away from abstraction and confront the blood-stained face history has taken on today.”

Yes, God looks for things. Here the truth of our prophetic call is revealed: whether we are silver and gold, crystal or clay, God looks for us to reveal the redeeming, reconciling, and ever-renewing presence of love.



### For Reflection

- ☛ At this point on your life’s journey, how would you answer the question, “Who am I?”
- ☛ What is your truth? How would you name it and claim it?
- ☛ Our willingness to speak and live the truth depends on trust. Who are the people you trust with your truth? Where are those safe places where you feel free enough to be your true self?
- ☛ Reflect on some prophetic moments in your life-times when you spoke the truth. What were the consequences?



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*The world still waits  
for the truth that will set us free—  
my truth, your truth, our truth—  
the truth that was seeded in the earth  
when each of us arrived here  
formed in the image of God.  
Cultivating that truth...  
is the authentic vocation  
of every human being.*

**Parker Palmer**  
***Let Your Life Speak***