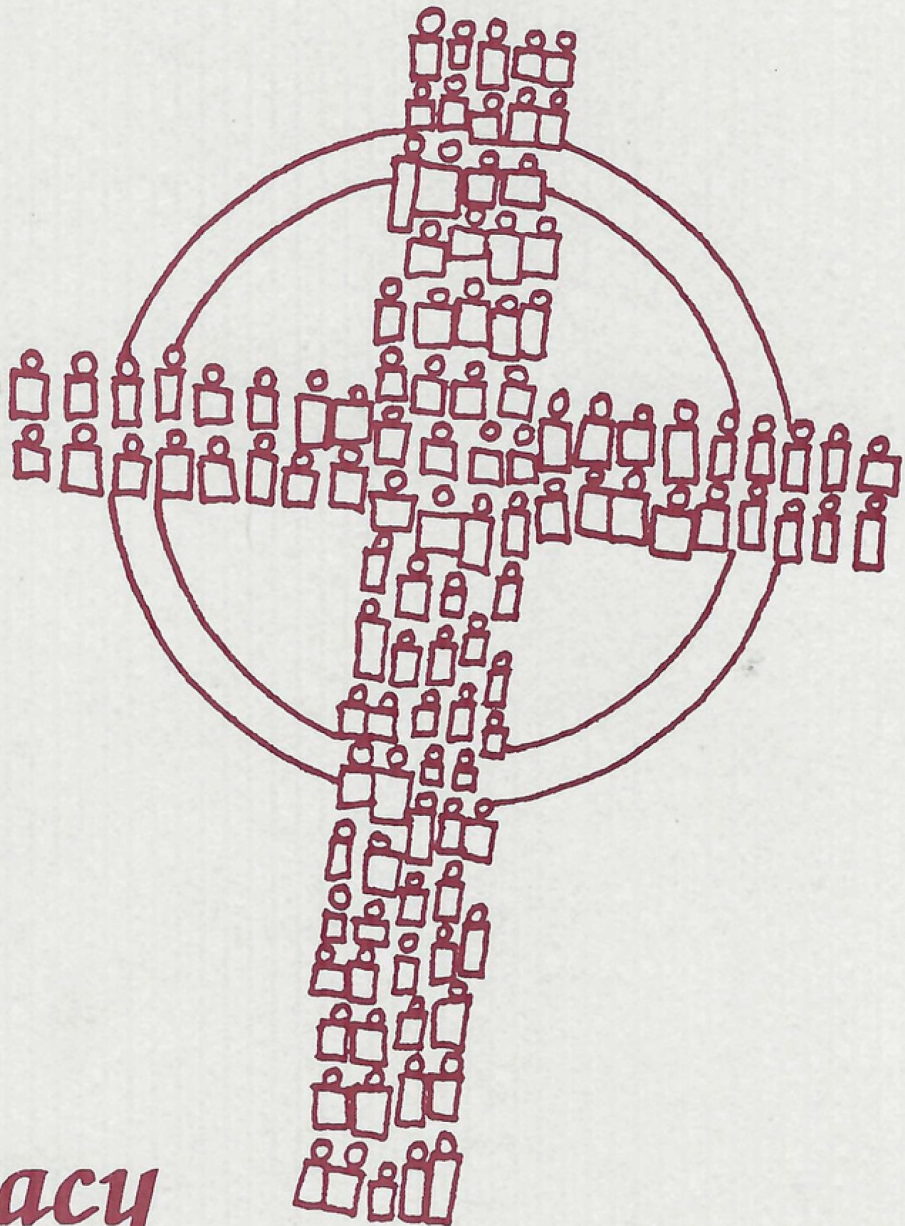


THE **WINE**
CELLAR

February 1994, Volume 1, Number 1



Intimacy

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

St. Gaspar del Bufalo

THE
WINE
CELLAR

An anthology of Precious Blood spirituality

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Companions of the Soul

In the story of Passover from the book of Exodus, there is this line: “The blood will mark the houses where you are.” The sign of blood captured a community on the move who ate in haste because they were about to begin a long journey. The sign of blood spoke of a community that cared for one another since if one family was too small to partake of the whole Passover lamb, they were invited to “join the nearest household” to celebrate the first of what would become a “memorial feast.” The sign of blood evoked a community that trusted in a God who would lead them across the desert to the promised land of their dreams.

The blood that marks our houses is the Precious Blood of the Lamb who was slain for our salvation. In these houses, we are the Companions of the Lamb of God who seek to live a new exodus story. The Blood that marks our homes reflects the same truths of the old story: we are a community on the move with a missionary identity; we are a community that cares, offering hospitality to stranger and friend; we are a community that seeks the heart of God who will lead us in this sojourn to our promised land of becoming companions of the soul.

This new anthology, THE WINE CELLAR, seeks to explore the heart and soul of Precious Blood spirituality. It receives its name from the founder of the Congregation of the Precious Blood, St. Gaspar del Bufalo, who once wrote, “The heart of Jesus is the wine cellar of the Blood of Christ.” In this holy place, this cellar we call the soul, intimacy becomes possible and transformation becomes more than a dream. Here, in this cellar of our common life, we taste the vintage wine of our liberation.

We hope this anthology will offer members, companions, candi-

dates, and friends of congregations who claim the name and charism of the Blood of Christ a digest of articles, poems, prayers, reflections, and stories on the most recent insights into Precious Blood spirituality and practical implications of living as people of the New Covenant.

This first issue reflects the theme of *Intimacy*. The contributors offer us nourishment, refreshment, and challenge for our sojourn to the heart and soul of our community. Their words land on the porches of our houses stained with Blood. As we take their words to heart and allow their images to settle in our souls, may we rediscover our identity as Companions of the Lamb called to intimacy in the community of the cross.



Singing a New Community

I want to sing
of poets and prophets,
clowns and kings;
of sages and saints,
wisdom and wings.

I want to stay
in caves covered in clover,
listen to mountains pray,
ponds moan, meadows groan,
and fields play.

I want to make music
only souls can hear
in places of stillness
we confidently draw near.

With lyrics so rare
we gather to learn
who we are
and so much more.

I want to play new music
on an old lyre
and find an answer
by the window or the fire.
Here new dreams are conceived
and consumed in a crematorium
for a new creation.

I want to sing a new community
not build one.
I want songs to be the stones
and when all the songs are sung,
we write some more.

Joe Nassal, CPPS



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Outside the Gates

By Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S.

One of the most important passages in the Scriptures for understanding the meaning of Precious Blood spirituality today is found near the end of the Letter to the Hebrews:

The bodies of the animals whose blood the high priest brings into the sanctuary as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate, to consecrate the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the reproach that he bore. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one that is to come.

[13:11-14 NAB]

At first reading, this passage may seem obscure to people today. But moving back into the mentality of those early followers of Jesus helps reveal its particular power. It is especially relevant to the theme of intimacy and community.

Inside the Camp, Outside the Gate

This passage sets up a particular tension between being inside and being outside, between being in the very center of things and being discarded or thrown away. It begins by noting that the high priest brings into the sanctuary the blood of animals as a sin offering to God. This is meant to echo earlier passages in the Letter to the Hebrews, comparing the Day of Atonement to the sacrificial death of Jesus. The Day of Atonement was the holiest day in the Jewish Calendar. On that day, and that day only, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies, the heart of the sanctuary, where the presence of God was most keenly present in our world. There the high priest made an offering of blood to atone for the sins committed by the people during the past year. Blood was offered, because the blood of every living creature belonged to God alone. God's own spirit or breath was in the blood, making the creature to live. By offering that blood back to God, the high priest enacted a drama about the life of the community. An offering of blood (life) countered the sin (death) that had taken place during the past year. Through this ritual, the community got a chance to start over again, to wipe its slate clean. Sin had brought about the alienation from God; the blood ritual of the Day of Atonement reestablished intimacy with God.

*To be inside
the camp was
to belong to God.*

The sanctuary was placed in the middle of the camp. The camp of the Israelites in the desert (and later, the city of Jerusalem) represented a place of safety in a hostile desert environment. Here God had gathered a special people, established a covenant with them that made them into "somebodies," rather than "nobodies." To be inside the camp was to belong to God, to have value in the eyes of God and in the eyes of others gathered there into community.

Outside the camp or the city was the wilderness. It was a dangerous place because, in the ancient Mediterranean world, if you didn't belong somewhere you were a no-body, considered less than human. To kill a

no-body was not considered an act of murder, since only those who belonged were somebodies. To be outside the gate, then, was to be in a zone of desolation.

The text goes on to say that the bodies of the sacrificial animals were burned outside the camp. This image would have been immediately recognized by the first readers of the Letter to Hebrews. Outside the camp was the garbage dump where the refuse of the community was pitched and burned. To that place was taken those things that were no longer of use to the community inside the camp. Just as the dumps and “land fills” on the peripheries of our towns and cities today, this place outside the camp stood for the very opposite of the organized and civilized life within the camp: inside was order, security, belonging, intimacy; outside was chaos, danger, alienation, and loss.

The image of the garbage dump would have had further poignancy for first century readers because crucifixions were often held in garbage dumps. The Romans reserved crucifixion as a punishment for rabble rousers and those who threatened the public order that Rome imposed on its captive states. It was intended as an excruciatingly painful and ignominious way to die. Death usually took several days and came about by asphyxiation: the weight of the body pressed against the victim’s diaphragm, making it difficult to breathe. The victim would have to push himself up with his legs in order to breathe. After several days, the victim would be too weak to do this, and so would slowly suffocate. That is why in John 19:31 the legs of the victims were broken to hasten their death. Jesus, already weakened by the abuse and torture he had undergone, had already died when the soldiers came around to dispatch the others.

Crucifixion was not only a painful way to die; it was also deliberately intended to be a shameful death as well. Victims were typically crucified naked, to shame their bodies. Such exposure was intended to be the exact opposite of dignity and intimacy. And frequently the crucifixion was carried out in the garbage dump, to emphasize that those condemned to this kind of death were nothing but human garbage, the dregs of the earth. Typically, after death on the cross, the bodies were taken down and thrown into the garbage. They were not even accorded a decent burial. Throwing the body into the dump was

the final act of indignity. It is not unlike the horrible images from our own century, when innocent people have been herded into pits and ditches to be shot like animals, or the bodies of the “disappeared” in Latin America appearing alongside roads.

A Reversal of Values: Where Does God Dwell?

It is against this background that we read the startling words in verses 12 and 13: “Therefore, Jesus suffered outside the gate, to consecrate the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the reproach he bore.”

Suddenly, the Day of Atonement, the most intimate communication between God and humanity, is not taking place in a carefully prepared and guarded sanctuary that is entered only once a year. Now that consecration of the people, the most intimate connection with God, is taking place in the windswept, foul-smelling expanse of the garbage dump. Indeed, according to any human reckoning, there is no intimacy here at all -- only a degradation and a shame for all to seek and to mock. What is happening here?

The stark statement in the Letter to the Hebrews points to a profound reversal of how we ordinarily understand the world to be. It was driven home to me a number of years ago. A promising young theologian whom I had advised on his doctoral dissertation abandoned his promising career as a voice for his people in the Philippines to go to work on Smokey Mountain, the garbage dump on the outskirts of Manila. It is indeed a mountain of waste, garbage, and human refuse. Like garbage dumps everywhere, the rotting of organic waste creates a methane gas that periodically combusts, creating fires and a thick, acrid smoke that hangs over the site. Hence the nickname, “Smokey Mountain,” the home to about twenty thousand residents of Manila. They built their homes from the scraps of wood, tin, and cardboard that had been dumped there. They scavenged for thrown-away food and any items that might be resold.

This young priest had committed himself to work among the

inhabitants of Smokey Mountain. When I asked him what kept him going in such a demanding ministry, he said simply, “Christ was crucified outside the gates. Here is where we must come to meet him.”

These words brought alive for me the meaning of this passage from Hebrews like nothing else ever could. What Hebrews is telling us here is that God has chosen to dwell most intimately in the very place where there seems no possibility of belonging and intimacy. In the place of the carefully arranged sanctuary, we now see a cross. John’s Gospel plays upon the double meaning given the cross here, of both instrument of shame and execution, and throne of glory. In John 12:32 Jesus engages in a play on the meanings of words: “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself.” The “lifted up” means both being lifted on to the cross to die (in this sense, it might be understood as being “strung up” or “lynched”), and ascending the throne of glory.

To see the cross as the place that God has chosen to dwell represents a reversal of most of our values. The all-powerful God now says that true power can only be found in the helplessness and the shame of the victim on the cross. In a space that offers no privacy or intimacy God can be most intensely experienced. In all that counts as the cast-offs of our society, there God is gathering a new chosen people. At the foot of the cross, those new chosen people are consecrated in Christ’s blood.

And, as Hebrews reminds us, we cannot peer out toward the cross from the safe confines of the camp. To experience the living God, we must go out of the gate, to meet Christ in the reproach that he suffers on the cross.

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A Message about Precious Blood Spirituality

It is hard not to be moved by this powerful image from the Letter to the Hebrews. The contrasts between the safety of the camp and the exposure on the cross, the well-ordered society and the decaying disarray of the dump, the grandeur of the sanctuary and the desolation of the cross -- the picture is almost overwhelming. But ultimately it is but another modulation of Precious Blood spirituality. There on Golgotha ("the place of the skull"), an early Mediterranean Smokey Mountain, we encounter once again a place where the forces of life and the forces of death meet, signified in the shedding of Christ's blood. It is about the very essence of our lives, stripped of any decoration or delicate disguise. It is about a vulnerability that gnaws away at the most carefully defended postures we may assume. It reminds us that all the human power we can accumulate will end up falling between our fingers like so much dust. And it does not let us forget that which allows us to exist at all is a gift to us: the gift of life. And that which allows us to grow and prosper at all is the gift of trust. It is not that we have loved God; rather, it is because God has loved us first (cf. I John 4:10) that we can come to love and trust both God and others.

Psychologists tell us that trust is fundamental to any further human development. Without a sense of trust, intimacy becomes impossible. For without trust, the vulnerability that is so central to being intimate becomes too risky. People close in on themselves to gain protection. But that protection does not bring safety; instead, it creates a great loneliness.

Throughout the Scriptures, the message of the blood is the message of the fragile boundary between life and death. God's own life is in the blood that animates every living being. But it is a life that never dwells in unchallenged security. If we dare to think about it, we are always but a step away from our own dissolution. To live a human life with such a realization requires an act of faith: we must come to abide in trust. To fail to do so only calls forth the great loneliness.

Seen from this perspective, the image of Christ crucified outside the

gates, consecrating the people there in his own blood takes on a new and special meaning. The cross in the garbage dump does not negate the city and its sanctuary; it only puts it in truer perspective. "We have no lasting city," Hebrews reminds us. No city we can build for ourselves will provide the security we seek. But we humans were not destined to live in garbage dumps either. Recall the picture of the poor child in Appalachia that the Glenmary Missionaries have used so effectively: "God made me. And God doesn't make junk."

It is in the tension between the camp and the dump, the sanctuary and the cross, that we live out our lives. We struggle to create safe and trustworthy surroundings in which to raise our children, but these can never completely shield them from the brute realities of life. We struggle to erect sanctuaries as safe havens to experience the divine, but are always also confronted with the stark, naked reality of the cross.

In our heart of hearts, we know we need both. Few of us are called to dwell perpetually outside the gates (although some are), but never to leave the camp will cause us to suffocate spiritually in our own sanctuaries. We end up filling our sanctuaries with ourselves with no room for God. We must go out to meet Christ to experience the full range of how God has drawn close to us.

The enduring message of Precious Blood spirituality, then, is about living on the boundary between life and death. We embrace the life that God has given us. It is a gift freely given by God, but its acceptance on our part means that we must come to see our world as God sees it. We cannot flee the contradictions and the uncomfortable moments -- that, after all, is what the garbage dump outside the gates is all about: the things with which the camp has not adequately dealt. And it is only in the vulnerability that the cross so starkly signifies that we come to understand how God sees us and our world: a world precious to God that has been deeply wounded in so many ways, yet called repeatedly to

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new life. The shattered fragments of lives -- the regrets, the disappointments, the failures, the tragedies, the losses -- are lifted up and drawn into the wounds of Christ, who brings all things together in himself. To be consecrated in Christ's blood means that those who had been consigned to the rubbish heap of society are redeemed. They are given new life. They are given a chance to trust and hope once again.

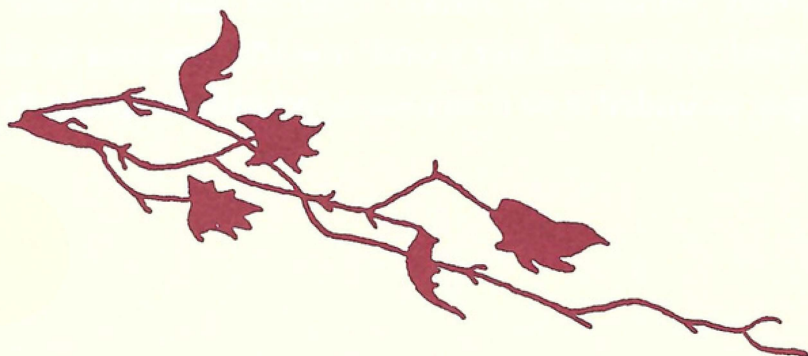
Ministry Outside the Gates Today

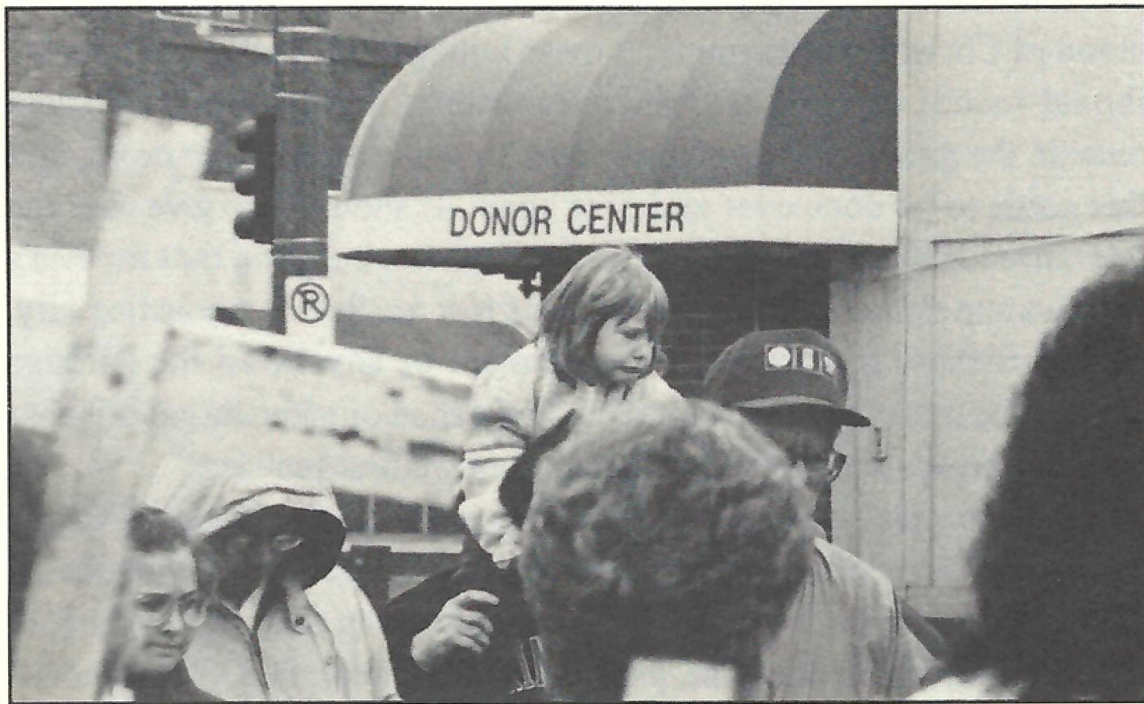
What might all of this mean concretely for our ministry today? How might a Precious Blood spirituality, nurtured at the foot of the cross outside the gates, give us both a vision of community and of ministry?

One might begin by thinking about who is being cast into the garbage heap of our society today: who are the disposable people, the cast-offs, the ones who no longer count? Among them:

- the homeless in our cities and towns who, try as they may, cannot quite manage to get back on their feet;
- men in their fifties who suddenly find themselves without a job and have no reasonable prospect of being employed at a comparable level again;
- women and children who have been abused, who fear intimacy and cannot bring themselves to trust;
- elderly persons who may be receiving good medical care but must live in care centers that offer no privacy and little dignity;
- people who find it impossible to adapt to the changes around them, and just go through the motions of living.

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We can add to the list as these general categories begin to take on faces and names. A ministry outside the gates is about affirming that God does not make junk; it is our sinfulness and the sinfulness of society that makes rubbish out of those created in the image of God. A spirituality of the blood of Christ is about redeeming persons and situations in the power of God's restorative love, that those who were far off are brought near (Ephesians 2:13), that all that has been scattered and fragmented is brought together in Christ through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20). New covenants, new bonds of intimacy are being formed upon the scrap-heap of human history. Put another way, the ministry outside the gates is a ministry of reconciliation, in which God-given humanity is rediscovered as God's loving presence in broken lives.

Wounds are not only created in the larger society in which we live. People have been damaged within the sphere of the Church where, expecting a new covenant, they have found old betrayals looming once again. Women rebuffed and excluded from sharing their gifts, laity shunted aside by clergy, victims of clergy sexual abuse, clergy who feel betrayed by the church that once called them forth into ministry -- many have been wounded by and within the Church. Anxieties, too, about the future can compound the reluctance to reach out to be healed and to gain a new sense of trust.

Even a community that builds its spirituality on the cross and the blood of Christ is not immune to these failings. But such a community should realize too that the sanctuary cannot exist without the cross outside the gates. The sanctuary must be redeemed by the cross, and this needs to be done over and over again. It should also give us some tolerance for the failing of ourselves and others, knowing that for every city there must be a garbage heap. But just as there is no lasting city, neither is there a permanent consignment of anyone to the garbage dump. The message of the blood of Christ shed outside the gates is that redemption is always nearer at hand than we first realized.

A community that lives under this sign of the blood of Christ knows the price of intimacy and trust, how difficult it is to embrace them and to sustain them. But a community under this sign, at the foot of the cross outside the gates, lives with a great hope that God is indeed greater than all we achieve (our camp) and all that we fail at (our garbage heap). It is not we who have loved God; it was God who loved us first. The prayer that closes those reflections on the camp and life outside the gates is appropriate for us here as we look into that future:

May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus our Lord, furnish you with all that is good, that you may do his will. May he carry out in you what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

[Hebrews 13:20-21]

A God who did not leave Jesus desolate outside the gates, but came out into the garbage heap to dwell among those who had been consigned to that forsaken place, and chose that time and place to become a moment and a place of grace for all times -- such a God will certainly redeem our camp and the world outside the gates.



Community

as our

First Apostolate

By Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S.

While in Poland recently for a visitation of our Precious Blood community, I asked our young men why they were attracted to the congregation. I was surprised to find that each stressed “community life” as a key drawing card. They were searching for community! We probably wouldn’t find this so strongly expressed in most segments of our congregation, but the fact that I was even asked to write an article by this title shows that there is indeed a growing interest in taking another look at community life in the light of our present situation and need. This came out strongly at last year’s Cincinnati Provincial Assembly when almost all the groups expressed in the discussions that community life was the first or second priority.

What does all this mean for us? What kind of community life are we speaking about today? What kind of commitment does community life call us to? These are some of the areas I will explore in this article with the hope that it will at least give us something to consider as we examine this very important aspect of our lives as Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

What is the Nature of our Community Life?

It seems quite clear that both Gaspar and Maria de Mattias looked upon community life as a basic ingredient of the congregations they founded. Our CPPS Normative Texts speak of our “living together in community in the bond of charity (C-1).” The Constitutions of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ are completely structured around the concept of community, dividing the different chapters accordingly: Community of Consecrated Love; Community of Adoring, Redeeming Love; Community of Faithful Love.

In our fragmented society today we are rediscovering this vital dimension of the congregations to which we are committed. After years of rugged individualism we are once again beginning to recognize our need for community and are rediscovering it as a place where we can live meaningful relationships, where we can grow as persons through the enriching interrelationship with our brothers and sisters, and in which we can be challenged by one another to growth in sisterly and brotherly love. My emphasis in these reflections is that we are *apostolic communities* and that in an apostolic community we are in mission. Gaspar’s concept of Mission House certainly seemed to speak of this “apostolic nature” of our community life. The Adorers in their Constitutions state that “as an apostolic community we try continually to become a Eucharistic faith communion of persons existing for mission in the Church and Society (#9).”

So the first affirmation is simply this: we are not monks! Our community life, our prayer, our spirituality, and all that we are about

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will be influenced by the fact that we are communities in and for mission. To do otherwise is to try to fit ourselves into a mold which is not ours by nature.

In the Bond of Charity

Both Gaspar and Maria de Mattias perceived charity to be the bonding force of their communities. It is evident in our Constitutions. The new Code of Canon Law, when describing Societies of Apostolic Life, states that “leading a life as brothers and sisters in common according to a particular manner of life, (they) strive for the perfection of charity through the observance of the Constitutions (Canon 731,#1).” This reflects the tone of Vatican II in *Perfectae Caritatis* in which community is viewed as a true family united in the name of the Lord...and as an energy for the apostolate (15a). Community life is seen as a sort of fourth evangelical counsel. From this bond of charity springs a great apostolic dynamic.

How do we live out these elements in our lives in an apostolic community? What is the *witness* we give in community life? I suggest there are some aspects of our common life which might be emphasized in our community which become part of our *prophetic witness* in our world today. I view these aspects as essential ingredients that comprise our “first apostolate.”

Community as a Haven of Dialogue

Community is a place of honest communication in an atmosphere of mutual confidence and respect. The Adorers state it well in their Constitutions: “Such love implies accepting one another with our difference, honest communication, gentleness, and reverence (#7).”

Sharing Our Dreams: The dreams of our founder and foundresses are now in our fragile hands. We are called to remain faithful to their dreams and visions and to embody them today in the cultures and social contexts in which we minister. Community dialogue is about

keeping those dreams alive in one another and in the community. At times we will need to wake each other up and set each other afire with the energies that those dreams and visions can spark. We can be rejuvenated! We are never too old! St. Gaspar's prison experience in Piacenza when he was near death is a good image which captures this experience. Albertini chose that moment to reveal to Gaspar the vision that a holy religious nun had experienced concerning a young man inflamed by the blood of Christ who would found a group of missionaries. Sharing that dream seemed to rally Gaspar back to life and he gradually regained his health.

When Jesus walked on the road to Emmaus, he "explained the Scriptures" to the downtrodden and depressed disciples who thought that it was all over. In sharing the Word with them and interpreting in its light the events of recent days, Jesus once again rekindled their

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dreams. They ran to Jerusalem to share what they had experienced with the rest of the group. At times we have too many prophets of doom among us and too many "doubting Thomases" and skeptics who are unable to see or to dream new possibilities for community. In one form or another we become at times like Joseph's brothers who wanted to "kill the dreamer (Genesis 37)."

Community is a place where we can share our deepest dreams which give shape and meaning to our identity. In community dialogue our dreams are clarified, strengthened, and interpreted. In community dialogue, we affirm and accept God's gift given to the community through the prophets among us and we test the vision. Through this honest sharing, the dream of one or a few become the driving, motivating, and life-giving dream of a community. This kind of community dialogue cannot happen just once a year in an Assembly. It should be part of our everyday life in common as sisters and brothers. As congregations which endeavor to embody the dreams and visions of our

founding fathers and mothers, we learn to read the signs of the times in our community dialogue and discover in these dreams the call to embody our charism and spirituality as an ongoing dynamic.

This is a dialogue which is shared with our incorporated members, our candidates for incorporation, our companions and associates. Community leadership is called to further and to encourage this type of community dialogue and to encourage “young men and women to see visions and old men and women to dream dreams!”

Apostolic Dialogue: Often times our dialogue in community centers around scheduling and programming concerns. We must go deeper. Our life in common must afford us a place to share our community projects, our successes, and our failures. It is a place where we question one another and where we discern together. It is a place to reflect on our understanding and experience of our charism and our Precious Blood spirituality. Apostolic dialogue will at times take the form of fraternal correction in a spirit of loving concern for one another. Community life becomes a place where we can recognize in humility and truth our faults and fragility, our mistakes and our struggles, and our efforts to overcome them. Our life in common strives to create an atmosphere in which sisters and brothers are called to *healing*, away from the road of evil and death, to the road which leads to a *fuller life*. Again, the Adorers express this aspect well in their Constitutions: “Together we seek a clearer apostolic vision through sharing information, insights, and discernment. By our understanding and encouragement we support each other in facing the challenges of ministry (#9).” This is a far cry from just dividing up our ministerial responsibilities and then each doing his or her own thing.

Apostolic dialogue calls us to create an atmosphere of genuine concern in which we share with one another our ministries. In a competitive world we wish to be *prophetic communities*, by celebrating the gifts and talents of each other, by stimulating one another to further growth, and to be enriched by the special gifts each one of us brings to community and to ministry. This apostolic dialogue is at the heart of genuine team ministry.

Community is the place where we help one another discern and

minister as *People of the Blood*. We answer the question, “What does Precious Blood spirituality call me to in my apostolic work?” Leadership becomes important in order to help all of our members, young and old, to discover how their apostolate and their very lives are connected to the corporate mission of the whole. Leadership also challenges us to discover how to live out our congregational charism in whatever apostolate or in whatever community we are living, even if we are living alone.

Community as a Place of Hospitality: One of the characteristic traits of our community around the world is a warm sense of hospitality. We are usually good hosts and make our guests feel at home. This is important, but let’s reflect for a moment about another kind of hospitality, one that is deeper, one that can be described as “breaking and sharing of bread in the Eucharist of our common life.” This is the kind of “everyday hospitality” we share with one another. It is about sharing in our relationships in community, of opening our hearts and our affection in the totality of life. This kind of hospitality isn’t always easy as it is more difficult to be hospitable to someone we have known for along time or whom we see every day. How can we be continually open and hospitable to one another without putting a tag on him or her or taking each other for granted? How hospitable are we to one another at the end of a long day, welcoming our brothers and sisters when they return home from ministry? Do we create an environment in which we invite one another to tell each other’s stories? Do we listen to each other’s stories with respect and reverence? Our spirituality invites us to be Eucharistic Communities willing to reveal ourselves to others in the breaking of the bread in our daily lives.

The Witness of our Common Life

The Adorers state in their Constitutions: “We will never forget that our love for one another in community is itself a primary apostolic witness (#9).” What I am suggesting isn’t a novel idea. It is as old as the Word of God we proclaim in our ministries. It is about the

quality of the testimony we give with the lives we live in community.

Sometimes we tend to emphasize our activities in ministry so much that we forget the importance of the testimony we give. If we want to be serious about our call to be evangelizers, then we must get serious about the quality of our testimony as real Christian communities, living out in our common life the idea of community proposed in Acts 2:42-47. We are called to be *sacraments for the world*, reflecting in our lives and words and ways of relating to one another the “presence of Christ” and “Gospel values” we announce and teach to others. Our lives together will give authenticity to what we do and say in our apostolic lives of service.

We are a true faith community in which we share with one another our faith journey. We are aware that we do not walk alone. We share our lives, struggles, happiness, anxieties, with our brothers and sisters along the road. We are a people alive with the fires of compassion and solidarity impelled to walk with other wounded people and to discover together the redeeming power of the blood of Christ. We are a community in which we are strengthened for mission and in which we sharpen our understanding of our call through discernment and prayer together. We are encouraged and challenged by each other to be faithful and courageous in our response. We are a community in which we recognize each others’ gifts and talents, celebrate and affirm them, and discover together how best to put them to the service of our community’s construction project of God’s Reign.

We wish to be *prophets of a new humanity*, witnesses and

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builders in the world of the project God has for all. As such we are also *sacraments of reconciliation*, giving radical testimony that the Reign and the community God desires is possible. We give witness to this even though we are individuals with our own unique personalities and character traits, with our different options and postures, our varied histories, our diverse ecclesial models and theological stances, when we can sit around the Eucharistic Table and look into each other's eyes and know that we are indeed brothers and sisters. Then we can say as Jesus did: "This is my body and my blood given freely for you!" We pledge fidelity and concern for one another. We promise to be for the other in his or her need and to forge that unity and communion.

All that I have said supposes that we believe in our *vocation to be community for mission* and that others are mediations through whom and in whom God is revealed to us. We need his or her presence and word in order to experience God and to discover God's will for us. Our brother and sister is not simply someone to tolerate or put up with, or even worse, to avoid. We recognize and feel our responsibility for the growth of one another and we gratefully recognize the unique gift which each brings to community and to ministry. We stimulate each other to achieve our maximum potential for the building of the Reign of God! If we feel that our time is too "precious" to be with our brother or

sister, even when we use our apostolate as the excuse, it means that we do not have time to listen to and be with God.

To live the new commandment of reciprocal love is the condition for being community and for experiencing the presence of God among us. It is also a great challenge. We will need strong moments of community life in order to be strengthened in our ministries. We will have to learn to promote good interpersonal relationships and friendship through celebrations, feasts, parties, and prayer in a personal and communal encounter with the Lord of our convocation. We will promote those necessary moments if we are truly committed to community.

We celebrate our life in common, especially when we gather around the Eucharistic Table. For it is there that we share our dreams; it is there that we celebrate our successes and failures; it is there that we experience reconciliation and fortification in community. To drink from the Chalice is to renew our alliance with Jesus and one another. We renew our commitment to be present for one another as Jesus is for us. We express our total commitment, even to the point of death, for God's Work as the maximum expression of our love as apostolic ministers. It is in the Eucharist that we renew our pledge of fidelity, our pledge to be bread and drink for each other and for our world.

Living the common life as I have sketched here is an ongoing process which needs effort on the part of all. We will need to pray much and ask the Lord to give us all a special dose of patience and a large capacity to forgive: two virtues especially needed as we strive to be "ever more credible witnesses of God's tender love, of which the blood of Jesus is the vibrant sign and unending covenant pledge (ASC Constitutions, #2)." The tensions, difficulties, misunderstandings, and lack of unity which we often experience in community form a part of God's project of communion. The road to true communion necessarily passes through the participation in the passion and death of Christ. The Paschal Mystery continues to be at the heart of the dynamics of building community. It is only in dying that our communities will be rebirthed to new life.



Rituals

By Alan Hartway, CPPS

We are the grapes
 growing on the vine of love,
then crushed in the wine cellar,
now cascading
 down the walls of the cup
dancing on the way to becoming one.

In repetition,
 becoming
 and transformation
 that soul emerges.
To care for this soul
we must begin
 with a ritual in bed between lovers
 having one another's dreams
 of inviting some one to dinner.

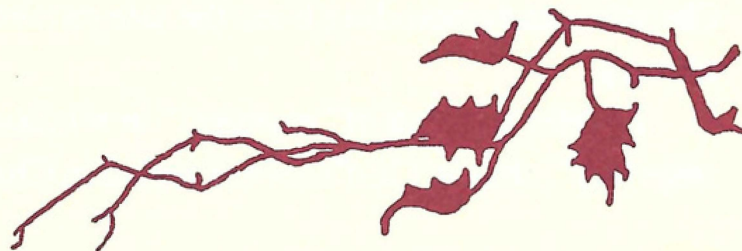
Rituals are the way we welcome chaos to the dinner table
with the knives of gesture and the opening of ovens.

They begin
 in the garden.
For the ceremony of the table begins
 in the garden
when things are chosen,
destined and doomed.
Go outside among the living,
find fresh fruits and vegetables
and sacrifice them with your own bare hands.

Cut them free,
 move them.
Bring them into the kitchen.
Let them teach you to transform them.

Let yourself be seduced
at the kitchen sink
by the silken touch of a silver bright salmon
 slippery under the running water
 almost not grasped
and behold in soul
an unusual awareness.
Be yourself startled,
hooked
and caught at the throat.
Only then can you possibly have its permission.

But know this:
we do not cook alone,
we are surrounded on every side
 in this act of alchemy
 raising soul in the kitchen
 by old rhythms
 without even needing to measure
like the soul of Abraham at the oaks of Mamre
rushing out, heart hastening,
and exactly so
we care for
visitors,
companions
and soul.



Maria De Mattias:

Mystical Intimacy in Community

By Angelita Myerscough, A.S.C.

In all the letters of Maria De Mattias that have been preserved, so far as I am aware, she never used the term “intimacy” nor “mystical”, certainly not in reference to life in community. Yet, we can accurately speak of the “mystical community” of Maria De Mattias, both in the sense of our own lived reality, and in the sense of what she desired to become the reality in the communities of Adorers of the Blood of Christ which God initiated through her efforts.

Though “intimacy” may have a thousand nuanced meanings, its essence is the experience of closeness among persons, sharing deeply, living faithfully, no matter the cost.

For many people, “mystical” (like the words to which it is related, i.e., mystery, mystic and mysticism) evokes images of something hidden or difficult to grasp, ecstasies or visions, or states of changed consciousness. For the majority of Christians, it probably means a deep and prolonged experience of contemplative union with God, which is the classical concept of mysticism that has dominated religious and Christian understanding from the late patristic period down to our own century.

I prefer to think of “mystical” in relation to the Pauline concept of “mystery”, that is, God’s love revealed in Christ Jesus. Paul’s mysticism

means being “in Christ.” It is summed up in Galatians 2:20: “I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me.” Contemporary spiritual giants, like Thomas Merton and Karl Rahner, write of mysticism in such Pauline terms, and would agree with Louis Bouyer’s statement that genuine mysticism consists “quite simply in total self-abandonment in naked faith, through an efficacious love of the Cross that is one with the very love of the crucified God.” (1)

By “mystical intimacy in community” I mean close relationships experienced and nurtured in a community, such as a religious community or a family, which are sourced in strong faith in the reality of God’s presence in and among them, and deepened in their shared love for the Lord and others. This is the quality of community that Maria De Matias strived for in the sixty or so new foundations she established between her arrival in Acuto in 1834 and her death in 1866. We know this from an abundance of written sources, most important among them are the nearly 1500 known extant letters she wrote, including a large number to her spiritual director, Fr. Giovanni Merlini, CPPS, and to her early sister companions. We have also some five hundred letters written by early Adorers to Maria, and the four hundred letters of Merlini to the foundress. Besides, there is the sworn testimony of persons who knew Maria as given in the process for her beatification; her Rule of Life composed in 1838, and the Constitution printed in 1857; and many other original contemporary documents.

We need to recognize that written words can never convey the same message as we might have experienced if we had lived in community with Maria among the early Adorers. We need to bear in mind, too, that Maria grew both in her own intimacy with her sisters and in her mysticism, as did her early companions. Also we need to note that Maria from the beginning was in the position of leadership, and that her presence with her primary local community in Acuto was not

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constant, due to her need to be out on the mountain trails visiting her Sisters in what for those times were far-flung foundations.

Intimacy in the Blood of Jesus

The best place to begin in understanding Maria's idea of mystical intimacy in community is a paragraph in the first Constitution of the Adorers:

The frequency of communion is left to the judgment of the confessor, who should be ready to grant it as often as possible, even daily, since it is of such great help in the religious in living united to that Lord who is our All. *United with Jesus, the sisters are more easily united among themselves with the bond of mutual love*, and they will enjoy that peace and harmony which are not only the fruit of this sacrament but the most proper and useful preparation for receiving it. (2)

Aside from the surprising call for frequent Communion at a time when this was most unusual, this passage immediately associates the love bonding the Sisters in community with the relational presence of the Lord Jesus, which is the source of that love.

For Maria, Eucharist always evoked the mystery of the Blood, which was at the core of her special charism. The Blood that Jesus shed "with such infinite love" drove her apostolic zeal. Spirituality centered in the Blood was the focus of the ministry of the Sisters and of their devotional life in community. It was the source of their intimacy in community, as it was also the pattern and motivation of their efforts at evangelization, whether in schools, retreats, conferences for the people, the Associations for women and girls, as well as the host of pious practices that they promoted, which seemed in those times to touch the hearts and lives of the simple folks among whom Maria's Sisters ministered.

It was precisely to increase the number of Spirit-driven women engaged with her in the work for the "dear neighbor redeemed in the

Blood of Jesus” that Maria founded a congregation and established communities. However, communities were not created simply to have more apostolic workers, but that these communities themselves might be a source of prophetic light and love. The Sisters were encouraged by Maria to see one another in the crimson light of the Blood. Maria reminded Sr. Luisa Lauretti that “the Sisters, too, are souls redeemed in the Blood of Jesus.” (3) Pleading for love among the Sisters, the foundress wrote to Sr. Elisabetta Cataldi at Carpineto: “If we are not in communion among ourselves, what good will we do for others?” (4)

In conversations with her Sisters and in her letters to them, Maria frequently reminded them not only of the love that God revealed in Jesus through his giving his lifeblood for us two thousand years ago. She also emphasized that Jesus is with us *now* in the mystery of his Blood in Eucharist and in our hearts. In a letter of 1839 Maria recounted to her director Giovanni Merlini how she responded when Sisters asked her about fasting and eating. I tell them, she said, “that we must love Jesus, love Jesus very much, *keep him always in our hearts, in our mind and on our tongue* and pray...work...and then eat, be joyful and happy in God.” (5) The immediate presence of Jesus’ Blood for us, Maria expressed thus: “Yes, he gave it all [his Blood] and he does not cease to give it. Like a fountain, or rather like a life-giving river accessible to all, it flows on and out to all the children of Adam.” (6)

To the community at Vallerotonda Maria wrote “two lines in great haste” with this message: “Our great concern should be to love Jesus. For us this is everything: Jesus in our heart, Jesus in our mind, Jesus in our soul, Jesus on our tongue, Jesus in our work.” (7) On February 13, 1866, the foundress wrote to Sister M. Oliva Spinetti at Citerna. In the midst of homey details about monthly income, payment for a pig, and the cost of medicines, she said, “Take courage: Jesus is with you,” and continued in a simple but pregnant way of summing up of what it means to be an Adorer: “To work with Jesus to save souls and to suffer with Jesus and for Jesus. For us this is the better part.”



Suffering Affords Insight into Intimacy

The autumn of 1849 through spring of 1850 was one of the most painful periods of Maria De Mattias' life. In response to an urgent call from Giovanni Merlini she had gone from Acuto to Rome, catching a ride with the only available carriage, without first obtaining the explicit permission of Bishop Pietro Paolo Trucchi, Bishop of Anagni, who considered himself the foundress' superior. He was piqued and very angry about this. At the same time the confessor appointed for the Adorer's community in Acuto one Don Luigi Cavalli, who was a psychologically very disturbed priest. He became the center of a storm of criticism against Maria among the people, the clergy and even among some of Maria's most trusted companions. Don Luigi made it his business to convey by letter his malignant accusations against Maria to an already irritated bishop, who exhibited his passive aggressivity against Maria by refusing to send her even a single line in response to her letters of explanation. It seems the bishop was also commenting that Maria was out of her mind, and ordered the Sisters in Acuto, Scurgola, and other places no longer to recognize her as superior. (8)

Meanwhile Maria was north in Umbria, meeting the requests of other bishops for new communities of Adorers, and she was gathering women who desired to join her congregation. The winter snows impeded her prompt return to Acuto. In the midst of this situation, doubly painful for Maria because of her strong sense of obedience to the Church in its hierarchy, she wrote some of her most beautiful letters to young Sister Berenice Fanfani, whom she had hastily asked to serve as superior for the Acuto community in her absence. Maria's sense of mystical intimacy in community glistens between the lines when she writes:

I am hurting from not having a line from you to give me news about everything and everyone. I love you, and I am always thinking about you all, who are so dear to me in Jesus. Share with all of them my affection for them.... I have wept with tears of pure affection for them and for all those who are in

the other communities. How I desire to have them all united with me in teaching girls the ways of the Lord.... Let us stir up our faith, my dear....(9)

In a classic passage of a letter to Sister Berenice Fanfani written from S. Anatolia amid the ice and snows of the Umbrian mountains and amid the painful coldness of rejection and alienation by her bishop, Maria reiterated her brief motto, which sums up her own mysticism and that she desired for her Sisters:

“Always, always with Jesus: God always in view, Jesus in practice, our life in sacrifice.” (10) Expanding on that motto she continued: “With Jesus let us think, with Jesus let us speak, with Jesus labor, with Jesus rest, with Jesus weep, with Jesus be silent, with Jesus pray, with Jesus live, with Jesus die. May Jesus live in our mind. May Jesus live on our tongue. May Jesus live in our heart. May Jesus live in our soul. May Jesus live at every moment. May Jesus live in every place. May Jesus live in all hearts. Yes, let us say always: May Jesus live!”

Such faith-awareness of God’s presence through Jesus in and among her daughters, and in Maria’s own heart, was at the core of the mystical intimacy in community among the early Adorers. It was an awareness of God’s presence that sprang from and issued in a strong and vibrant love inspired by their attraction to the mystery of Jesus’ Blood. That love was the bond that united them.

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Intimacy with the Lord

Maria's own intimacy with the Lord Jesus in her own heart and mind impelled her to enter intimately into the lives of her Sisters as one of them. Such intimacy with her Sister companions blended into her intimacy with the Lord. She desired to be also true to the intimacy among all the Sisters in all her communities of Adorers scattered up and down and across the mountains of central Italy, and eventually also in the community in London and the community of German Adorers in Gurtweil, Baden. Though she could not be with them all, all the time, to share personally in their daily life in community, Maria tried to be present from time to time by lengthy visits, and through her letters. (11)

"I try to encourage my companions," she reported to Giovanni Merlini. "I urge them to union among themselves, to love, to mutual understanding to total surrender to whatever God wants." (12)

Throughout the corpus of these letters to her Sisters, there is abundant evidence that Maria knew them very personally and that she was deeply concerned for their well-being. Her primary desire was quite obviously for their growth in loving union with the Lord, living out this love in work for the people "redeemed in the divine Blood", and in living lovingly with their companions in community. Yet Maria was quite solicitous for their human needs. She wanted them to have enough rest, healthy living conditions and healthy food even if they were very poor. Frequently she reassured them about their family members with whom she had been in touch. When she was with them in community and one of them seemed to be having a difficult day, she might start a song fest or find something humorous to help break the tension with a good laugh.

Maria was sensitive to their human discouragement and to their difficulties in their interpersonal relationships. And when they were ill, she did all she could do to provide good care or at least to let them know her concern. Passages like this are not uncommon in her letters: "I am deeply distressed because I feel so bad about the illness of Sister Carolina Scansini. Oh if only we could have her with us here in Acuto."

Along with compassionate concern Maria sometimes gave a bit of sisterly advice. “I heard with distress about your fall,” she wrote to Sister Margherita Bernardini who was up at Filettino high up in the mountains. “Blessed be God, but my dear, do be careful and let someone who is used to walking on those streets give you a bit of support, and commend yourself to St. Joseph with faith.” (14)

Maria often expressed her affection for her Sisters with real tenderness. For example, she wrote to Sr. Luisa Abri who had served as secretary for the foundress for awhile: “I was happy with your letter. When you want to write, write freely...directly...because this shows me more that you love me as I love you, with all my heart, and for this reason I speak frankly. Believe me, I do so much desire to see you belong wholly to the Lord.” (14) Maria’s expressions of human love often moved spontaneously into a mystical faith dimension of being “in Christ.” For example: “I cannot express how much love I bear you in the Lord.” (15) Or this, to Sr. Cecilia Romani: “Raise your heart to God with acts of love and often go to plunge yourself in the adorable wounds of the Redeemer: there we shall meet in union of love. May the wounds of Jesus crucified be the center of our affection.” (16)

Obstacles to Intimacy in Community

Certainly the journey of Maria and her Sisters toward mystical intimacy in community was not easy. Unschooled women of the mid-nineteenth century, Maria and her companions had on the human plane only what their intuitions and experience taught them. Without benefit of so many psychological insights and understandings that we can draw on today to help us toward intimacy in community through listening, sharing, telling our stories, confrontation, conflict resolution, group process and the like, nevertheless Maria and her Sisters strove to work through the many natural obstacles of intimacy in community.

Certainly there were personality conflicts and age differences. Family backgrounds were far from similar. Gossip and blame, which are universal human failings, are especially characteristic of small town

folk, which was where the early Adorers worked and where many of them had originated. Some of the early Adorers had difficult characters, like Sr. Celestina Barlesi. Then there was the mentally unbalanced Giovanna Vivaldi, who on at least one occasion physically assaulted the foundress. Also the patterns of religious community discipline in that period pre-dating even Vatican I, were far from fine-tuned to foster intimacy among community members. Nevertheless, with the clear conviction of their God-given call to a life of love in community, and their faith-vision that “united with Jesus” they would be “more easily united among themselves with the bond of mutual charity,” Maria and her Sisters journeyed toward the quality of life together that could truly be termed “mystical intimacy.”

“I am working very hard to persuade them that it is not right to judge one another wrongly,” Maria explained to Merlini. “Since I have been working with these women I have found that this is a constant cause for disturbance, I mean, this not wanting to excuse the failings of the others. And many times what they say are things that are just not true. It is not malice, but ignorance...but it takes a lot of effort...to help them come to real love for others.” (17)

Words were important for Maria, and she used them often and well. Still, she probably helped her Sisters more by her own modelling of intimate love in community than by anything she ever said or wrote. They could not easily miss the tender love she showed toward each of them. Sr. Jacinta Palombi remembered something particular about the delicacy of Maria’s love and recounted it in her sworn testimony for Maria’s beatification cause:

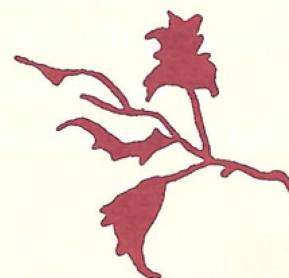
When it happened sometimes that a Sister started to criticize someone else during a conversation, the [foundress] would be quiet.... Then, when she entered into the conversation, she would speak of the good qualities of the person who had been criticized. What I admired especially in situations like that was the way she somehow, but gently, managed to do this without offending the person who had made the negative criticism in the first place. (18)

For Maria De Mattias, the difficulties she encountered in her efforts to overcome her own tendency to impatience with the others, and the distress she felt because her Sisters were only “in via” toward the loving and intimate faith-oriented union in Jesus that she so much desired, all these were part of “the cross.” She embraced these crosses in forming community that she knew were part of her call as a Christian and especially as an Adorer of the divine Blood. Indeed, Maria was so deeply convinced of the “preciousness” of the cross in whatever form that she could not but embrace willingly also the crosses involved in the journey toward love for God and neighbor that is the heart of life in community.

In one of her very spontaneous letters to Sister Elisabetta Cataldi she brings together in a few short sentences her desires for community and her realization that building community involves accepting the cross.

Let us fix our eyes often on Jesus on the Cross, and open our heart to his message. For love’s sake, my daughter, let us love the cross very much, for in it we find our life, our true love, our strength in the greatest difficulties. I recommend to you silence, gracious goodness, and relating well with your dear companions. This is the greatest consolation that I could possibly have, to feel that among my daughters there is only one heart and one spirit. Toward this are directed all my hopes, my tears and my prayer. (19)

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Mystical Union Through Prayer

Maria's prayer often took her to depths of experiential encounter with her Beloved in the classical sense of mystical union. Certainly in that prayer each and all of her Sisters had their place. For them also, as well as for the Church and the world and the people among whom the Adorers ministered, Maria offered the Blood of Jesus, calling on its power to help them overcome their human weakness and give them strength to love God and neighbor, including the neighbors who were the Sisters with whom they lived in community.

In the funeral oration that Fr. Giovanni Merlini prepared for Maria, this meticulously precise man of God never inclined to exaggerate-

tion, who had been her spiritual director for over forty years, stated emphatically that the foundress appointed Sisters to local communities “to help them be at peace and to be happy religious, whatever their office, whoever their companions, whatever the privations they might have to endure.” He added that Maria “suffered with her Sisters who suffered, and made her own the difficulties of all.” (20)

In all her efforts in building community, Maria De Mattias confided in the Virgin Mary. Early on, at the very beginnings of gathering her first companions in Acuto, Maria had entrusted all of them and their works to the Virgin and chosen her as the “real superior” of the community. (21) The trust in “Mary most holy” that Maria De Mattias had learned from her family in Vallecorsa and from her lifelong reflection on Mary’s relationship to the mystery of Jesus’ blood both in his becoming incarnate and in his redemptive mission, had often brought the foundress to reflect on the mystical intimacy of the Holy Family. It had also led her to ponder Mary’s place in the Paschal Mystery, from Calvary to the Pentecostal experience, from which had come those communities of early Christians which Luke describes in Acts in almost idyllic terms of mystical intimacy: “The believers were of one heart and one mind.” (22) This Lucan phrase expressed the ideal of community -- one heart and one mind -- which Maria De Mattias repeated so often and toward which she directed so much effort, counting always on the powerful intercession of the Virgin.

Despite their efforts and prayer, certainly neither Maria herself nor her early Sisters reached perfect mystical intimacy in community. But the ideal and desire for such a quality of life together remained an integral element of the life of the congregation in the decades that followed Maria’s death. This ideal was reflected in the several revisions of the original Rule of Life and the Constitution of 1857. Even the 1934 edition, though strongly marked with prescriptions of the 1918 Code of Canon Law, reminded the Sisters of the mystical intimacy of Jesus’ own original apostolic community with the Twelve. Referring to “Rest, Repast, and Recreation” the text stated: “The Sisters shall sanctify these acts by a frequent renewal of the good intention *in union with Jesus*, who also rested, ate, drank, and conversed with His apostles.” (23)

We find the same spirit of mystical intimacy in community in the

current Constitution of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, as revised since Vatican Council II and approved definitively by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, following reaffirmation of the text by the Adorers' General Assembly in 1991. In the chapter on "Our Life in Apostolic Community" several paragraphs express practical indications on building community, personal and community growth, and community for mission, which, if followed out in communities, can surely favor growth in intimacy among Sisters living together in local groups. The opening paragraph expresses the ideal of mystical intimacy that Maria De Mattias so strongly desired:

Christ Jesus, who has brought us together as Adorers of his saving blood, is the radiant center of our life in community. We believe that he lives among us and is active in our midst. Made one in him by Baptism and Eucharist, and by our religious consecration and charism, we are called to grow together toward unity in life and love, as Father, Son and Spirit are one.

The final sentence of this opening paragraph relates this mystical intimacy in community to the apostolic thrust that is an essential characteristic of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ: "As the quality of our presence to one another becomes more loving, our community life itself will be a prophetic sign of what the whole Church is called to become: a communion in love in which people of every tribe and tongue and nation are united." (24)



Notes

1. Mysterion, p. 322, as cited by J.A. Wiseman, "Mysticism", in The New Dictionary of Spirituality, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn., 1993, p. 682.
2. Part Two, Chapter 4, Article 3.
3. Letter of April 18, 1863.
4. Letter of May 10, 1852.
5. Letter written in April, 1839.
6. Preface of 1857 Constitution.
7. Letter of June 18, 1860.
8. Letter of Maria to Merlini, January 18, 1850.
9. Letter of December 18, 1849.
10. Letter of January 22, 1850.
11. Cf. a beautiful letter of Maria to the Sisters at Gurtweil, November 19, 1860.
12. Letter of May 7, 1845.
13. Letter to Sister Nazarena Branca, February 19, 1864.
14. Letter of February 19, 1864.
15. Letter of March 21, 1858.
16. Letter to Luisa Abri then at Paliano, February 16, 1864.
17. Letter to Sister Oliva Spinetti, November 20, 1862.
18. Letter of February 28, 1856.
19. Letter to Giovanni Merlini, February 21, 1864.
20. Summarium of the Roman Anagni Process of the Venerable Servant of God, Maria De Mattias. Volume I, p. 336.
21. Letter of May 10, 1852.
22. Included in Giovanni Merlini, Lettere a Maria De Mattias, Vol. II, Ediz. Sanguis, Rome, 1974. P. 688. Merlini wrote out a funeral oration for Maria which was never actually given.
23. Manuscript of Rev. Antonio Necci, Maria's close collaborator in Acuto. Included in Summarium II of Maria's Process, "Nuovae Animadversiones," pp. 182 and 186.
24. Paragraph number 205.
25. Paragraph number 6.



Common Origins in the Charism of Francis Albertini

By John Colacino, C.P.P.S.

In this premiere issue of the *Wine Cellar* dedicated to the theme of “intimacy in the community of the cross” it seems appropriate to explore the deeply laid roots which unite many of the congregations committed to the blood of Christ in title, spirit, and mission. At the Second International Congress of Precious Blood Congregations held in August, 1993 at St. Louis there were occasional attempts, especially in some of the workshops, to identify the point of convergence that bonded the several communities present. Sr. Giuseppina Fragasso, Superior General of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, made the final one before the assembled participants at the Congress closing. She did so by naming Bishop Francis Albertini and his foundation, the Confraternity of the Precious Blood, as the source of the vast movement of devotion and spirituality that arose in the last century centered on the blood of Christ. This present contribution is an elaboration of her comments. It is offered with the hope of creating heightened consciousness around this issue’s theme by indicating the profound reasons we have for promoting a more intense intimacy among those ecclesial bodies who make special claim to communion in the blood of Christ.

The Figure of Francis Albertini

Born and educated in Rome, Francis Albertini (1770-1819) nurtured a life-long desire to be a priest, something he realized on May 25, 1793. Prior to his ordination, he earned a doctoral degree in theology from the Dominican faculty at S. Maria Sopra Minerva where he demonstrated a special interest in the relationship between theology and spirituality, an academic interest later translated into a ministry that highly regarded spiritual direction. His direction of others, as well as his personal spirituality, stressed the fundamental importance of the virtue of humility. His principal extant work, *The Introduction to the Humble Life*, is a scholarly and practical compendium devoted to the subject. Albertini's other interests included concern for the poor and uninstructed who congregated around the Roman basilica of St. Nicholas in Carcere where he was appointed canon in 1800. In all of this, he showed himself an exemplary figure renowned for his imitation of the human and priestly qualities of St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622).

Sometime around 1808, during a moment of intense prayer, Francis received what has been described as a "strong impetus to awaken in souls devotion to the most Precious Blood of Jesus." This grace would lead Albertini to establish at St. Nicholas the Confraternity of the Precious Blood and to compose some of the traditional prayers associated with the devotion such as the Seven Offerings and the Chaplet of the Precious Blood. At about the same time, Albertini had a decisive encounter with the young cleric, Gaspar Del Bufalo, that would eventually confirm the latter's own commitment to the blood of Christ and his resolve to dedicate himself to the preaching ministry. As

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In July of 1810, Albertini was exiled from the Papal States for refusing to swear the oath of fidelity to Napoleon whose troops occupied the city of Rome. Leaving home and family behind, he and several other resisters, including Del Bufalo, were deported to northern Italy for what would amount to a four-year detention in several locales under varying degrees of severity and restraint. Francis and Gaspar were lodged together for part of this time, during which Albertini's influence on Gaspar was deepened considerably.

Among other things, Francis developed a spiritual program for his disciple to follow, tutored him in moral and ascetical theology, and furthered his distinctive focus on the blood of Christ. The pair also engaged in many conversations which shaped their future plans for the Confraternity of the Precious Blood. They envisioned, for instance, its expansion to include an institute of preachers and a congregation of women dedicated to the education of young women: the seeds, in other words, of what would be known as the Missionaries and Adorers of the Blood of Christ. This comprehensive project would be collectively referred to by its founding figures as "the Work."

Once the ordeal of exile was over, Albertini returned to Rome and resumed his duties as canon of St. Nicholas in Carcere. He also continued his guidance and encouragement of Gaspar regarding the Work they had discussed at length. Albertini's careful preparation enabled Del Bufalo to establish on August 15, 1815 the Congregation of Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood at the former Abbey of St. Felix in Giano in the Umbrian hills of Italy.

Several years later, on April 18, 1819, Francis Albertini was consecrated bishop of the three small dioceses of Terracina, Sezze, and Piperno near Rome. He immediately made plans for those under his pastoral care to benefit from the Missionaries' preaching ministry. He arranged for missions to be preached in these areas by Gaspar and his confreres, missions in which the newly-appointed bishop planned to participate himself. Tragically, Bishop Albertini took sick early in this campaign, and died on November 24, barely seven months after the start of his episcopal ministry.

Bereft of his director's counsel and support, the legacy of Francis Albertini was inherited by Gaspar Del Bufalo whom he called his "first-born son." Under Gaspar's stewardship, the original inspiration received by Albertini years earlier continued to develop. Moreover, what was bequeathed to Gaspar would eventually be shared among many direct and collateral descendants of Albertini, to whom Gaspar would always refer as the "common father" and "beloved founder" of all those destined to collaborate in the Work.

The Confraternity of the Precious Blood

Francis Albertini never limited himself to awakening in individuals alone his desired commitment to the blood of Christ. As noted, the original inspiration he received led him to envision several associations that would embody and stimulate such devotion corporately. The first, the root from which a single vine would sprout with several branches each bearing its own distinctive fruit, was the Confraternity of the Precious Blood.

This communal expression of Albertini's "strong impetus" was inaugurated on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1808 in the same basilica where he was canon, at a side altar distinguished by an imposing crucifix and a purported relic of the Precious Blood, the same altar where he would one day be consecrated a bishop. Invited to preach for the occasion was Francis' young protegee, Gaspar Del Bufalo, canon of the neighboring Basilica of St. Mark.

This newly-founded assembly consisted of a core group of 15 laymen and 15 laywomen who provided leadership in fulfilling its mission, a mission described in the Confraternity's original Constitution as "the weighty task of performing many devout works designed to serve the spiritual good of the numerous population of the neighborhood and surrounding area, especially the poor peasants and day laborers who abound in the vast parish [of St. Nicholas]...to the greater glory of God and the greater advantage of one's neighbor."

From these words, it is evident the firstfruits of Albertini's inspiration had both a spiritual purpose, focused on veneration of the

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Precious Blood, and an apostolic one, directed toward the welfare of the indigent people who came to this area of Rome from outlying districts to sell their produce, a group of marginalized people neglected by the social and ecclesiastical institutions of the time. In this way, Albertini's foundation fulfilled the historic role of the (largely lay) confraternities, namely to promote the Christian life by efforts directed to worship or to works of charity. Their modern correlative, "associations of the faithful," have a similar scope in that they "strive with a common effort to foster a more perfect life, or to promote public worship or Christian teaching. They may also devote themselves to other works of the apostolate, such as initiatives for evangelization, works of piety or charity, and those which animate the temporal order with the Christian spirit." (*Code of Canon Law*, Canon 298)

As we have seen, the Confraternity, soon elevated to an Archconfraternity, also had an intimate connection to the other associations directly inspired by Albertini: the Missionaries, and later, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ founded by Blessed Maria De Mattias in 1834 -- the latter's foundational document, the so-called *Fundamental Articles*, having been drawn up by Albertini and Del Bufalo during their exile. Hence, from the beginning of Gaspar's congregation, the ties between it and Albertini's association were extensive, indeed so close that Gaspar's first companions were known as "priest missionaries of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood." Gaspar referred to himself as "director general of the missions of the venerable Archcon-

fraternity”, a position to which he was officially elected by that same assembly in 1817. The Adorers were likewise known for some time after their foundation as being “of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood”.

There is no doubt then that these three embodiments of Albertini’s inspiration -- the archconfraternity, Missionaries, and Adorers of the Precious Blood -- are deeply interrelated and owe their origin to the “common father” and “beloved founder” of the Work. The same can be said, though less directly, of an estimated 15 other surviving religious institutes whose beginnings can in some way be traced to Albertini’s inspiration. (For example, Mother Anna Brunner, foundress of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, received the incentive for her community from a visit to the Basilica of St. Nicholas and the Archconfraternity.)

For a variety of mostly practical reasons, a division of the original institutes to which Albertini’s inspiration gave rise came about. By the year 1833, the Missionaries had dropped the official designation referring to themselves as part of the Archconfraternity. The approval in 1841 of a distance rule for the Missionaries ultimately led, in 1851, to their canonical separation from the Archconfraternity. At that time, the Missionaries, now under the leadership of John Merlini, established a new association called the “Pious Union of the Most Precious Blood” through which they hoped to further their founder’s aims among Christ’s faithful. But even then the Missionaries were considered responsible for promoting the original Archconfraternity. The year 1869, however, saw a definitive break between the two entities, a parting that contributed to the almost total desuetude of the Archconfraternity which persists to this day. A similar process of disassociation occurred with the Adorers, though it should be noted how in their early expansion outside Italy they were able to gain recognition and acceptance precisely from their connection to Albertini’s foundation.

In our own day, the “Pious Union” initiated by Merlini -- now known as the “Union of the Blood of Christ” -- has undergone considerable change, its format and statutes having been updated in view of the conciliar reform. These changes were approved by the Pontifical Council for the Laity on May 24, 1988. The Union, which encourages regional diversity and adaptation, may rightfully be

considered the legitimate heir of the Archconfraternity, faithful to Gaspar's desire "always to maintain what Albertini had instituted."

Some Implications

As shown throughout this article, the inspiration bestowed on Francis Albertini evolved historically and ecclesially from its initial expression in a lay form; this led eventually to other concretizations in a priestly form and several religious forms. The gift bestowed on Albertini in prayer could thus be called the "original charism" which later manifested itself in the lives and mission of other key figures who in turn possessed unique charisms of their own. Admittedly, the later forms can trace their descendance from the original more or less directly. Still, the historical details outlined here indicate the good reason why Albertini can be referred to as "the

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common father" of the charism's several manifestations. For the Work which Gaspar, Maria, and others were called to shape and direct -- and here they are unequivocally the founders of their respective congregations -- was essentially one, springing from an original inspiration given to the Archconfraternity's founder.

This implies some crucial things for the ongoing vitality of the charism in the Church and world today.

The first is the need to retrieve the charism's origin which, as we have seen, lies within a lay association from which its priestly and evangelical forms emerged. Such a recovery is made the more urgent by two phenomena of postconciliar experience: declining membership in religious institutes, and the increasing involvement of the lay faithful in all sectors of ecclesial life and activity. A careful review of the charism's origin -- the "constant return to the sources of the whole of Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of [religious] institutes" (*Perfectae*

Caritatis 2) -- would serve as a response to these developments ensuring the charism's thorough renewal and future survival.

This process of retrieval is not suggested, however, merely out of practical concerns which, by themselves, are an inadequate motive for engaging the charism so radically. On the contrary, a return to the origin is proposed here primarily for theological and spiritual reasons. For the charism's differentiation by state of life (lay, priestly, religious) and by gender reflects the unity-in-diversity which traverses the whole of Christian revelation and experience. In other words, when the charism is seen in relation to the mysteries of trinitarian and ecclesial communion, it seems to possess a singular capacity to reflect Christian truth and life. Fidelity to the charism's deeply inclusive nature thus poses a challenge to its recipients, a challenge to model a fruitful interrelationship between the states of life and between men and women -- the charism's various forms belonging equally, though distinctly, to the one ecclesial reality designated by the comprehensive term "albertinian charism."

Implementing such an effort might also imply a reassessment of the canonical status of the charism's ecclesial forms in light of their recovered interrelationship. What calls for additional reflection, in line with ecclesiological and canonical developments scarcely conceivable when the charism made its first appearance, is the juridical form the charism might have taken if current possibilities and understandings were available to the founding figures. This further attempt to contemporize the charism by means of a thorough radicalization would help ensure that the charism's institutional expressions are fully congruent with its ecclesiality. A possible direction here might lead to a renewal of the charism through some form of organic unity-in-diversity that would respect the charism's full extension.

Current Developments

In point of fact, initiatives throughout the world are presently underway to renew especially the lay form of the albertinian charism. Some of these are consciously part of the Union of the

Blood of Christ while others are not, though they all have some affinity with Albertini's vision and its earliest manifestation. These initiatives attest, moreover, to efforts designed to promote interrelationship between lay groups and the priestly and religious forms of the charism. The latter too are actively pursuing collaboration among themselves as witnessed by the work of the Precious Blood Leadership Conference and the Precious Blood Task Force.

Regarding lay forms of the charism, several approaches or levels of commitment, are discernible which determine the scope of collaboration between the Missionaries, Adorers, other congregations committed to the blood of Christ, and their lay associates. At one end of the spectrum, laity are invited to share in the spirituality of these congregations through primarily devotional means, along the lines of a "prayer group" model. A second level aims at a more thorough formation, both spiritual and apostolic, which envisions significant involvement on the lay affiliates' parts in the mission of the priestly and religious forms of the charism; such groups are intent on a program of Christian formation that includes regular meeting, study, prayer, support, and ministry. The third level of commitment asks lay members of Christ's faithful to be integrally involved in the life and mission of the sponsoring congregations, sharing in their spirituality and mission directly; a sense of mutual belonging is fostered at this level through any number of concrete means. The Companions Program among the Missionaries of the Blood of Christ in the United States is a particular effort to create an integral community among distinct forms of the albertinian charism.

As efforts in this regard are contemplated, and initial steps taken, it seems they can serve to verify something once said by the current Bishop of Rome, namely, that the charism and spirituality in question lies "at the heart of the Christian life." As such it is deeply planted in the mystery of faith and Christian existence, for its source is the same as that of the Church itself: the blood mixed with water flowing from the side of Christ, the sign and motive for ecclesial communion and mission: the source of our intimacy in the community founded in the blood of the cross.

