

An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality



THE WINE CELLAR

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The New Creation

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

— Gaspar del Bufalo —

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An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality

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FROM THE WINE CELLAR

by Joseph Nassal, C.P.P.S.

Behold the New Creation

“Behold I make all things new.”

Revelation 21, 5

One of the better spiritual memoirs in recent years is called *Leaving Church* by Barbara Brown Taylor. She is an Episcopal priest who served for many years on the staff of a large church in Atlanta and then received the call to be pastor of the Grace-Calvary Church in Clarksville, GA. She served as pastor for several years but in 1997 left that church to teach preaching at Piedmont College and Columbia Theological Seminary.

While her memoir reflects her reasons for leaving the church, she also writes about what kindled her faith in the first place. “The parts of the Christian story that had drawn me into the Church were not the *believing* parts but the *beholding* parts,” she writes, “Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God,’ ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock.’ Christian faith seemed to depend on beholding things that were clearly beyond belief.” One of her motivations to leave the parish and pursue her ministry of teaching was, she writes, “I wanted out of the belief business and back into the beholding business. I wanted to recover the kind of faith that has nothing to do with being sure and everything to do with trusting God.”

“Behold” is one of those archaic words, like “hark” or “hither” or “forsooth.” We just don’t say to someone, “Behold.” We say, “Look,” or “Check it out.” The word, “Behold” takes us beyond the mundane and routine into the realms of mystery and awe. I saw an ad recently where Samsung has a new mobile phone with touch screen so advanced it is a cell phone, camera, internet browser, and a GPS navigation system all in the palm of one’s hand and they call this little technological marvel, “Behold.” That seems like an appropriate name since it would take a leap of faith for me to begin to know how to use one of those devices.

When so many in our churches and faith communities are hearing the word, “Behave,” the spirituality of the blood of Christ says, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21, 5). Even if we are not misbehaving this issue of *The Wine Cellar* asks if we are beholding the wondrous and redeeming presence of the Lamb of

God in our midst? If we are only looking to behave by following the minimum daily requirements of discipleship, we will likely miss the opportunities to participate in the new creation unfolding within us and around us.

If we are only looking to behave by following the minimum daily requirements of discipleship, we will likely miss the opportunities to participate in the new creation unfolding within us and around us.

As our contributors to *The Wine Cellar* remind us, the kind of beholding reflected in Revelations 21, 5 and underscored by St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, 11-17 where he outlines a ministry of reconciliation, does not come without risk. Beholding that takes us beyond mere believing means we lose a former way of life and embark on a new adventure that is risky with few immediate results or instant rewards. That is why most of us prefer simply to “behave” instead of “behold.”

Or simply yield to the safety, familiarity, and comfort of old routines. The 14th century Persian Sufi poet and mystic Hafiz observed, “What do sad people have in common? It seems they have all built a shrine to the past. What is the beginning of happiness? It is to stop being so religious like that.”

Thomas Merton echoes the danger of living solely in the past or falling in love with tradition to the exclusion of being open to the new creation when he writes in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, “The gospel is handed down from generation to generation but it must reach each one of us brand new, or not at all. If it is merely ‘tradition’ and not news, it has not been preached or not heard—it is not Gospel.” Some call it “apologetics;” others simply see it as being “faithful to tradition,” but there seems to be many today more prone to protect tradition than preach the new creation which Robert Schreiter asserts “is one of the most basic themes of the Good News of Jesus Christ.”

As Merton reminds, “If there is no risk in revelation, if there is no fear in it, if there is no challenge in it, if it is not a word which creates whole new worlds, and new beings, if it does not call into existence a new creature, our new self, then religion is dead and God is dead.” This issue of *The Wine Cellar* unequivocally claims how the blood of Christ affirms God

is alive and well and that we are people of life, not death. Robert Schreiter begins this exploration of the new creation by naming its importance: "It means that no matter how bad or broken things become, there is always a possibility of a rebirth, a new life in Christ." Father Schreiter traces our understanding of the new creation through the Scriptures and the role it plays in precious blood spirituality.

Thomas Welk takes up the theme by reflecting on the creation stories in the Hebrew Scriptures that reveal how "humanity refused God's

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— Thomas Merton

invitation" to live in "a love-life relationship with God." This covenant of love between God and us "lost through the 'original sin/separation is restored in Jesus who "is the mediator of a new covenant" and who makes the new creation possible. But as Father Welk writes, "The new creation is yet to be fully realized"—which is why the challenge of those who claim

precious blood spirituality are called to continue the redeeming and reconciling of Jesus reflected most powerfully and prophetically in ministry with those on the margins of society.

Such work is needed now more than ever, Therese Wetta maintains, as "each of us is called to let the creative, life-giving breath of the Spirit enter into us" to be, in Gandhi's famous phrase, "the change we wish to see in the world." Sister Wetta, a member of the General Council of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in Rome, draws on a spirituality of leadership defined and endorsed by her community in 2008 as "a blueprint for being co-creators of a new creation."

In October 2000, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in the United States became a new creation when three provinces converged into one. Barbara Jean Franklin who served as the first president of the United States Region reflects on the struggles and successes of this process that began with "a common stirring in our hearts" and reveals "the essence of our charism as a reconciling presence" in the church and in the world.

Another servant leader of religious life in the United States, Mary Whited, the General Superior of the O'Fallon Precious Blood community and past-president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, reviews the "new chapter in the sacred story" of her community that is presently being written as the starting point for how religious

congregations “rooted in the Precious Blood” can write with our lives the story of the new creation by “trusting the Spirit, reconciling differences, and tending new life.” Sister Whited’s reflections are especially timely “in these unprecedented times” when “women religious strive to respond to recent Vatican initiatives that call for the visitation of U.S. congregations of apostolic women religious.”

The creative and compassionate contributions toward a new creation of one of these congregations, the Dayton Precious Blood Sisters, form the focus of Sister Donna Liette’s poetic and prayerful reflection. Rooted in the congregation’s mission statement and written in the form of a litany, Sister Liette shares sacred stories of how her community is “a life-giving, reconciling presence in our fractured world.”

Being a reconciling presence is a grace that comes from God, Alan Hartway writes, which “the human person receives by disposition of love, joy, tears, memory, and imagination.” Father Hartway explores the implications of Revelations and Second Corinthians, the writings of St. Gaspar, and contemplative prayer to increase our capacity “for the possibilities of new creation.”

At every Eucharist when we lift up the bread and wine and give voice to the words, “Behold the Lamb of God,” we hear the summons of a new creation. When we look upon the bread and wine which we invest with our very lives, we see the body and blood of Christ that nourishes us, gives us strength, forgives our sin, and beckons us to go beyond belief to live as beholders of God’s grace, truth, peace, and love. In the silence of our prayer, in the company of our friends, family, and community members, in our ministry that advances God’s realm and our play that refreshes our spirit, the blood of Christ takes us beyond belief to behold God’s great mercy, compassion, and care that call us to become a new creation.



*Rose petals let us scatter
And fill the cup with red wine
The firmaments let us shatter
And come up with a new design.*

— Hafiz

Becoming a New Creation

Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S.

*If anyone is in Christ,
there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
behold, everything has become new!*
2 Corinthians 5:17

The new creation is one of the most basic themes of the Good News of Jesus Christ. At its most fundamental level, it means that no matter how bad or broken things become, there is always a possibility of a rebirth, a new life in Christ. It is found already in the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry in his call to Israel to "repent" (literally, turn around), for the Reign of God is drawing near (Mark 1:15). His deeds of healing the sick, of raising the widow's son and Lazarus from the dead, and his feeding of the multitudes all point to a new world where there will be life in abundance. The Easter season is in one sense a fifty-day celebration of this truth, unfolded in many different ways: new life, a healing of wounds, new-found courage, forgiveness, safety and care.

The new creation is so important because it means that the past never completely can determine who we are and who we are meant to be. It means that it is always possible, with the help of God's grace, to make a new beginning. This article is intended to open up the understanding of the new creation as it appears in the Scriptures and its place in a spirituality of the blood of Christ. It begins by looking at what the Bible and Christian faith mean by "creation." Creation is not just another name for the world as it is. Rather it is a view of our world as seen from God's perspective. Then the "new" in new creation will be looked at: just what is "new" in the new creation? And finally, where does the new creation fit into a spirituality of the blood of Christ? It is certainly a central, important part of that

spirituality—both in what we mean by Precious Blood spirituality, and also what it means to live in the new creation.

Creation in the Bible

For Christians, “creation” does not simply indicate the world as we experience it and live in it. Creation, rather, has a more focused meaning. It is about God’s action that brings our world into being and its deep and continuing connection with God. God intended the world to exist, and God has a purpose for the world. As a result, the world does not just happen to be here; if we probe deeply enough, we can uncover some of those purposes of God for the world. Our world, therefore, is meant to be a meaningful place with each of us having a place within that rich texture of meaning and purpose. The world is not just a bunch of accidental events cobbled together. There is a deeper, underlying meaning that guides it.

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The first chapter of the Book of Genesis lays that out for us very clearly. This sense of meaning and purpose comes through when the story of creation is read solemnly during the Easter Vigil: there is a sense of order, of purpose, of progression from one thing to the next in the story itself. To understand that better, it is worthwhile to consider the conditions under which that first chapter of Genesis was composed.

Scholars believe that Genesis 1:1-2:3 was composed soon after the Hebrews returned from their exile in Babylon. They came back to a Jerusalem that was in ruins. Those ruins reminded them of their own lives—wrecked by having had to leave their homes, dislocated by having had to live as strangers in a strange land for nearly three generations. They would have to begin again, as it were, to make Jerusalem a home for themselves and for their God. People still experience something like this in many different settings today: people who have had to flee and now return to what is left of their homes after hurricanes, tornadoes, or brush fires; or have had to flee their homes in the midst of war, as so many in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Africa have done in recent times.

The version of the creation of the world we have in this passage (very different from the same story we have in Genesis 2:4-24) was probably

written by someone close to the priestly class who were charged with the rebuilding of the temple. The temple was for those returning from exile more than just a place to worship. To have a temple meant to have a place where God would dwell immediately in their midst, and so protect them from harm and help them in time of need. It would be like an anchor in the turbulent waters of their experience. What the story of creation in Genesis 1 reads like is an orderly procession. First, there is an acknowledgement of chaos—the “formless void” and “darkness” that covers the deep (Gen 1:2). Acknowledging chaos recognizes how those returned exiles must have felt their lives to be. God’s sheer pronouncement, “Let there be light!” (Gen 1:3), means that the rubble of their former lives begins to take form, just

What this account of creation tells us is that our world is meant to be a meaningful place, and that our lives are meant to be meaningful as well. The world is a mirror of God, intended to show forth God’s own purpose and love.

as darkness is separated from light. Then, step by step (the text speaks of it as day by day) God progressively constructs the world, culminating in the creation of the first man and woman (Gen 1:26-27) as the pinnacle or crowning moment in this act of bringing meaning into chaos and confusion. In this procession of creation, there is

also a litany that is pronounced after each action of creation: “And God saw that it was good.” This affirms that God knows what has been done, and judges it to be good—that is, as it was meant to be.

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We sometimes only understand this when we are confronted by a breakdown in our world and our lives. When someone dear to us dies suddenly from illness or accident, when someone is diagnosed with a terminal disease or suffers a debilitating stroke, when we lose our job or a marriage breaks up: it is at such moments that we question whether the world is really a meaningful place at all. As Christians we are invited in such situations to seek a deeper meaning that will reorient our lives for ourselves, in relation to those around us, and to God. Finding this deeper meaning is what Christians mean by the New Creation.

The “New” in “New Creation”

So what is “new” in the “new creation?” The new creation is certainly a central part of the Christian message—so much so that the Christian Scriptures themselves are usually called the “New Testament.” The Reign of God that Jesus announces in the Gospels means the coming of a new era, when the oppression of the present will be wiped away and be replaced by something else. At the Last Supper, Jesus offers his disciples a new covenant in his blood (Luke 22:20). And the New Testament itself closes with a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, a New Jerusalem descending from the heavens (Rev 21:10-27).

“New” is an overworked word in our society. “New” is used in advertising to say that a product is better than the old one. The message is that we ought to have the new and improved version, lest we be left behind in the forward progress of humanity. Not to have the new is not quite to belong or be up to date.

The “new” in the new creation in Christian faith is a more complex thing than that. On the one hand, “new” here does not mean utterly separate from what now is. If “new” meant totally different in the case of us as human beings, then the new person would be utterly distinct from the old person—there would be no common identity between the two. On the other hand, if “new” means restoring us to what we were before we had experienced devastating loss of a loved one or a way of life, then this “newness” would simply be denying that anything profound had happened to us. While in the first moments of pain, grief, and loss we might wish for those terrible events of the past to go away, we know deep down that those events have changed us. They are part of who we now are; so to treat those events as utterly trivial, when we have experienced them as life-threatening or life-changing, falls short of the mark as well.

The new creation, as the Bible understands it, is rather a profound transformation. Rather than make us different from what we had been, it adds some important new elements into the framework of who we already are.

Nor is the new creation some arbitrary point between being utterly different from before or being transported back to a time before the events changed our lives. The new creation, as the Bible understands it, is rather a profound transformation. Rather than make us different from what we had been, it adds some important new elements into the framework of who

we already are. What is sometimes most evident in the new creation is that there is a sense of new purpose or calling. St. Paul's own life is an example of this. After he experiences the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus, he does not experience this encounter as condemning him for having persecuted the followers of Jesus. While the Lord explicitly points to this ("Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"), he does not experience this as judgment and condemnation. Instead, he experiences it as a call to become an apostle of the Lord, an apostle to those beyond the fold of Israel. Paul is still a faithful Jew, but now he is something more than that. He cannot go back to being a faithful Jew as though nothing had happened on the Damascus road.

What happens in the new creation is that who we are is never abandoned, but it is changed and expanded in ways we could never do ourselves. Paul struggles to give expression to that in many ways. In the Letter to the Romans (8:18-25), he speaks of how difficult this experience is to bring into words. He compares it with a woman in childbirth, groaning in pain to bring forth new life. He says later that we simply do not have words for this, and must rely on the Spirit: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26). At another point, in the First Letter to the Corinthians (15:35-54), he struggles to explain the resurrection of the body to his readers. He ends up speaking of the imperishable character of the resurrection body simply by saying: "We shall all be changed." He compares it to the sowing of a seed that grows up into a harvest.

In the stories of his appearances after the resurrection, Jesus' own transfigured body gives us a more concrete image of this new creation. He is able to walk through a locked door, but then asks his disciples for something to eat. He is changed in appearance enough that the disciples do not at first recognize him, but he still bears the wounds of his crucifixion and death that are unmistakably his (Luke 24:36-43). The new creation is a paradox of old-but-new, the same-but-different. It is at once memory and hope: memory of what has been, and hope for what yet will be.

As Christians we believe that we cannot achieve the new creation by our own power. It is, rather, the work of God within us. This plays itself out in our own experience as well. When we mourn the loss of our loved ones, or come to terms with things that have changed our lives forever, that moment of finding something new usually comes to us as a surprise. It is not something we have calculated for ourselves. It is something that is mysteriously given to us.

The New Creation and Precious Blood Spirituality

The new creation is central to Precious Blood spirituality. It is presented to us most clearly in Luke's version of the Last Supper, where Jesus offers his disciples the cup of his own blood as the sign of a new and everlasting covenant (Luke 22:20). In the midst of what looked like a total breakdown of his mission and ministry, Jesus offers a new covenant, a new relationship that will go through and transcend the violence, the suffering, and the disappointment that lies ahead. That promise of a new covenant, sealed in Christ's blood, is the compelling image that gives us hope when everything around us seems hopeless. On that last evening with Jesus, his disciples could barely imagine what lay ahead for Jesus and for them. When they encounter Jesus again in that same upper room a few days later, they could not imagine how their disappointment and fear could be changed so much and so quickly.

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The new creation is a transformation of memory. As a result of experiencing God's grace in our lives, we are able to look back upon what has happened to us in a different way. The pain is rarely taken away entirely. We will still feel the ache of loss. But the loss no longer embitters us or shuts our souls to those around us. We remember and think about what happened differently because what happened is no longer the end of our story. The new insights we gain, the new relationships we have been able to forge, and the new possibilities we see before us will never be the same as our loss, but then they cannot be measured only by the depth of our loss. They take us in a different direction, a direction we may not have expected or would have never imagined for ourselves. Some of the stories that follow in this issue of *The Wine Cellar* will show this.

Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we invoke Jesus' promise of his offering us a new and everlasting covenant in his blood. That promise, that hope is renewed for us time and again. It can remind us of what we have lost. But more importantly, it reminds us that such loss does not mean the end. It can be the beginning of something new.



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For Reflection

- Think of a time when something happened to you (such as loss of a loved one, a profound disappointment, news that changed your life). How did you react? What did you feel at the time? What was it that helped you move on with your life?
- Can you think of a time in your life when hope for something different helped you hold yourself together when it seemed that things were falling apart? Did you start to live differently after that experience?



The new creation is so important because it means that the past never completely can determine who we are and who we are meant to be. It means that it is always possible, with the help of God's grace, to make a new beginning.

From Chaos To a New Creation

Thomas A. Welk, C.P.P.S.

When talking about a new creation, the logical question to ask is, “What happened to the old creation?” Or, a better question, “What happened to the former creation?”

The two creation accounts in the Hebrew writings (Genesis 1:1-31; 2:1-4a and Genesis 2:4b-23) emphasize the goodness of the creative activity of God. Prior to God beginning this process, “[T]he earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss” (Gen 1:2). Scripture scholars tell us that the account in Genesis 1 is based on the Babylonian creation story known as the *Enūma Elish*. The formless wasteland is a translation of the word combination *Tōhūwabōhū*. From this chaos God created cosmos. “God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good” (Gen 1:31).

God created only goodness. Obviously, throughout humanity’s history there has been ample evidence of some really bad things occurring. What happened? Why is there evil in the world? The Babylonians had a simple answer to this question: The bad guys (bad gods) were responsible for the bad things (*Tōhūwabōhū*). The Hebrews could not accept this since they held strongly to a monotheistic belief, i.e., there is only one God and this one God is a God of goodness who can only create goodness.

What a dilemma! How to resolve this conundrum? From the earth (*‘ādāmāh*) God created humanity (*‘ādām*) in the image of God, i.e., with the ability to know and love. The ability to love brings with it the ability to say yes or no to an invitation to enter into a love relationship. No one can force us to love another; the invitation is freely extended and must be freely accepted. Furthermore, a freely entered into love relationship with God will foster even greater life.

This was the plan of God with regard to the creation of humanity, created in God's image as male (*'iś*) and female (*'iśšāh*). God extended the invitation; humanity could either accept or reject this invitation to enter into a sustaining love life-relationship with God the Creator. According to Genesis, humanity refused God's invitation.

This profound abstract theological truth was expressed in vivid illustration by the Genesis theologians with the story of the fall. The serpent (a phallic symbol used in Canaanite fertility rites) is depicted in a polemical way by these Yahwist theologians as telling Eve (*hawwāh*—mother of all the living) that eating from the forbidden tree would not bring about death, but immortality. "The serpent said to the woman, 'You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad'" (Gen 3:5).

There it is: the basic sin of humanity. We don't need a love life-relationship with God. We can be gods unto ourselves. We can be the source of our own life. This lack of a relationship with God the Creator brought about death. Sin (derived from the German word *Sünde*—separation), therefore, must basically be understood as a rupturing of the relationship with God. The theology of Genesis 3 strongly reminds us that we are creatures whose source of life is always found in connection with the Creator of all. Being cut off from the source of the Creative life results in death.

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It did not take humanity long to turn God's new and beautiful creation into a creation that forfeited goodness. Separated from God, things go from bad to worse: brother kills brother (Cain and Abel story, Gen 4:1-16), and soon things get so bad that the Creator had to wipe it all out with a massive flood and basically start over.

Longing for Life: The Sacrifice of Christ

Humanity's longing for life is ancient. How can/will this ruptured relationship with the Creator be reversed? The Hebrew writings are filled with the longing for a Messiah who would establish a covenant (relationship) with God and thereby restore the fullness of life present at the original creation. When would this new creation be established? When would the "sin [i.e., the separation] of the world" be removed?

Sacrificial offerings were an integral part of Jewish religious practices. Blood was equated with life. God was the source of all life, and therefore blood must be returned to God. “Blood is life, and you shall not consume this seat of life with the flesh” (Deut 12:23). Blood as life was the basis for frequent sacrificial animal offerings. “Moses took half of the blood [from young bulls] and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. Then he took the other blood and sprinkled it on the people saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made in accordance with all these words of his’” (Ex 24:6, 8).

The covenant between God and humanity lost through the “original” sin/separation committed in Eden was to be restored through these sacrificial (from the Latin *sacer*—whole/holy, and *facere*—to make) offerings; a new bond was to be established with God the Creator. The brokenness of the human condition, culminating in death, could only be restored through union with God.

The core of Christian theology is that this longed-for restoration comes about through Jesus’ sacrificial offering of Himself.

Would these animal sacrifices be sufficient? Would they bring about a new creation? The core of Christian theology is that this longed-for restoration comes about through Jesus’ sacrificial offering of Himself. “Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting death, death on a cross!” (Phil 2:6-8)

It was Christ who offered the ultimate sacrifice in humanity’s name. As the author of Hebrews states, all other prior sacrifices pale in comparison. “He entered [the sanctuary], not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood and achieved eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer’s ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ bring us to the living God” (Heb 9:12-14).

Paul writes that Jesus “obediently gave himself up to death.” In the Garden of Eden humanity stood in defiant disobedience. Obedience is not to be understood as a command-and-submit proposition. In its original root meaning (Latin *ob*—before/present, and *audire*—to hear) obedience refers to standing with an open and receptive attitude/posture before another; a posture of acceptance. According to the theology of the Genesis account, in

the Garden of Eden humanity stood before God with a closed and defiant attitude; a posture of rejection.

Christ, representing the totality of humanity, stood before the Creator-God with an obedient, open attitude and, “Because of this God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name” (Phil 2:9). And so, “This is why [Jesus] is the mediator of a new covenant: since his death has taken place for the transgressions committed under the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15).

A New Covenant: Redeemed by the Blood

The new creation, the new covenant is now possible. Yet, we know only too well that it has not been fully established in the time and place where we find ourselves. The vision of Revelation 21 is still to be realized: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” The redeeming blood of Christ must still be brought to the many dark corners of our world. The new creation is yet to be fully realized.

Jesus, in our name, giving Himself totally and completely to His God-Creator, shed His blood to the last drop, the blood of the new covenant, given for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:28). It is through offering of Himself (His Blood) that Jesus brought about the reconciliation that will enable all of humanity to be reconciled with God and with one another.

Unfortunately, too much of our world still stands with a defiant posture; “disobedience” is rampant. Original “sin” is still being affirmed with many individual and collective sins. God’s evaluation of the original creation as “very good” is still woefully lacking for the present state of creation. In the words of St. Paul, “Yes, we know that all creation groans and is in agony even until now” (Rom 8:22).

The Cain and Abel story is repeated in countless places and times. Blood becomes not the seat of life, but the seat of death. It is not redeeming blood we often witness, but blood lost in violence, leading to death.

On the other hand, “We are redeemed by the Blood of Christ.” Redemption is a fascinating word, coming from the Latin *re*—back, and *emere*—to obtain, purchase or return. One interpretation of the word “redemption” often leads to an ugly ransom scenario, namely that Jesus had to give His Blood to the last drop to satisfy a blood-thirsty God who has imprisoned us because of our sinfulness.

In this misguided interpretation of redemption, Jesus becomes the ultimate whipping boy, enduring immense suffering to atone for our sinfulness. We are the ones who really should be punished. Isn’t

Jesus wonderful, enduring all this suffering in our behalf? This was the theological understanding Mel Gibson followed in his movie *The Passion of Christ*. The excessive whipping and bloodshed Jesus endured were portrayed as signs of how much He loved us. There is some bad theology at work in this type of scenario.

Redemption properly understood is the entire life-work of Jesus, beginning with day one and ending with His death on the cross. Luke depicts Jesus beginning his ministry by reading from Isaiah: “The spirit of the Lord is

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upon me; therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners” (4:18). His ministry was focused on enabling humanity to return to the God who is the creator and source of all life.

Yes, Jesus atoned for humanity’s sin. We need to remember that when the word “atone” is extended into the word “atonement” we come to its basic meaning: *at-one-ment*. The shedding and offering of His Blood to the Creator-God was redemptive, namely a bringing back, a “returning,” not a ransoming, as understood in our present day context.

To offer a ransom to someone implies that the person who is demanding the ransom is a pretty bad individual who has kidnapped someone. We must be careful that God is not portrayed to the world this way. It is not God who holds us captive; it is we who refuse God’s offer of friendship. This is beautifully illustrated by Jesus with the prodigal son story (Luke 15:11-32). Some have opined that this parable might better be entitled the “prodigal father” story, since the father is almost recklessly generous in welcoming and accepting back his wayward child.

Ministry with the Marginalized

Jesus spent most of His time ministering to those on the margins. The individuals who were on the margins of Jewish society found themselves there for many reasons: illnesses of various kinds, being a tax collector or a prostitute, eating the wrong food. The list is extensive. Being marginalized, they were not *at-one-ment*. It was to these Jesus considered Himself sent; it was these He had come to redeem, to bring back to the Creator.

Jesus also made it clear that unless we see ourselves as sinful, i.e., as separated from God, then redemption will be impossible for us. “I have come to call, not the self-righteous, but sinners” (Mt 9:13). How can Jesus

bring us back, bring us to a new creation, if we do not acknowledge a need to be brought back?

As members of religious congregations that focus on Precious Blood spirituality we are called to continue the redeeming work of Jesus. Where does “the call of the Blood” lead us?

Many in our world find themselves on the margins. Jesus was subjected to very harsh criticism from the in-crowd of His day: “What reason can the Teacher have for eating with tax collectors and those who disregard the law” (Mt 9:11). Well, Jesus had ample reason to eat with these sinners: they had been disconnected and needed to be connected to enable them to find life! Indeed, that is why He was sent; that was why He came into our world.

Building this new creation must start with ourselves. What needs to be reconciled within the depths of our lives?

Building this new creation must start with ourselves. What needs to be reconciled within the depths of our lives? As Catholics we associate this primarily with the formal celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Achieving this reconciliation can be accomplished through many other channels.

Working in a hospice program, I see reconciliation as one of the most basic challenges facing those who are near the end of their life’s journey in this world. Most often attaining this does not take place in the formal setting of a church or “confessional.” It takes place with an honest and sobering assessment of where division, conflict, separation have occurred. Most often, this taking stock of oneself does not happen in the course of a few minutes. Being there to support one another through this challenging discernment is following the call of Jesus to continue His work of redemptive reconciliation.

It has been heart-warming for me to follow the work being done by Precious Blood community members in the streets of Chicago. We know only too well how much reconciliation is needed in our cities. Were St. Gaspar alive today, he would probably be in the forefront of this ministry.

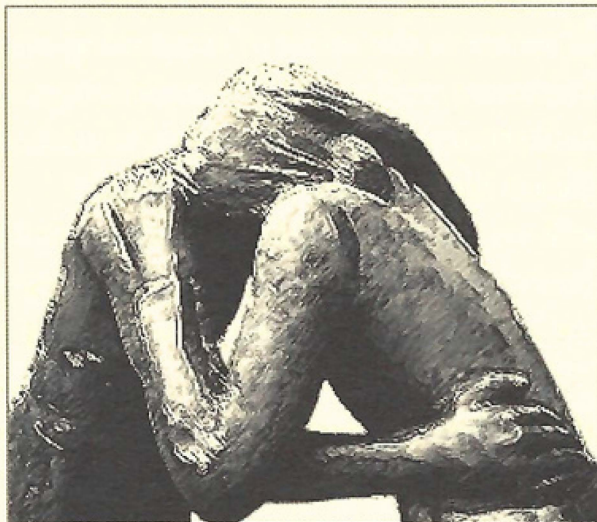
The above examples of where the call of the Blood might lead us today are only the beginning of what could be a very lengthy list. The Redeeming Blood of Jesus makes it possible for us to build “that new order” St. Maria De Mattias envisioned. It is why we, too, are sent. As we faithfully follow the call, we will be joining Jesus in building a new heaven and a new earth, a new creation.



Precious Blood Father Thomas A. Welk has a doctoral degree in pastoral counseling, with emphasis on end of life issues. A native of North Dakota, Father Tom came to Wichita in the fall of 1970 and joined the staff at Newman University. In the summer of 1981 he began working with a committee of interested community members to help start a hospice program in Wichita. When Hospice was legally incorporated in the summer of 1982, he served as a member of the first Board of Directors, and was actively involved in putting together a hospice service plan. He became a staff member of Hospice of Wichita (now known as Harry Hynes Memorial Hospice) in August 1983. He is presently the Director of Professional Education and Pastoral Care.

For Reflection

- ❑ What are the personal areas in my own life where there has been a confirmation of the “original sin,” the “original separation” depicted in the Genesis account?
- ❑ What are some of the areas in our world where there is collective sin, systemic separation from the oneness of the original creation that God saw as being “very good?”
- ❑ Jesus began the work of reconciliation by giving Himself completely to the Creator who had sent Him into our world. Where do I/we hear “the Call of the Blood?”



*Building this new creation
must start with ourselves.*

A Spirituality of Leadership for the New Creation

Therese Wetta, A.S.C.

We walk by faith, not by sight.
2 Corinthians 5:7

As I reflect and write this article we are in the liturgical seasons of Lent/Easter and the earthly season of spring. Nature is clothing herself in beautiful garments of white, pink, yellow, magenta and lavender that evoke hope and gratitude despite winter's reminder that new life comes through suffering and change. The Scriptures of Lent also invite us to leave behind our winter selfishness and open ourselves to transformation by fasting, praying and almsgiving.

In our world we are in the midst of continuing wars, pirates capturing ships and persons, trafficking of human beings, climate changes, an economic crisis and increasing poverty which, in turn, are spawning increased violence that is affecting our lives negatively.

In our Church we are in the midst of celebrating the Mystery of Mysteries—the redemption and reconciliation of all persons with our God, the new and eternal covenant and the presence of Risen Life within and among us. However, the awesomeness of God's unconditional love is blemished by reading and hearing harsh rhetoric, personal attacks and an alarming lack of civility and charity yielding more divisions within the Body of Christ.

In Italy where I presently live, we have experienced the devastation of a major earthquake which has brought premature death to many, anguish to their families, homelessness for thousands with the destruction of their homes, churches and even a small city, and a shared sadness at the loss of treasured art and cultural sites.

With so much chaos, how can we believe in a new creation when we see so much destruction, violence, discrimination, criticism and division in our midst? Only walking by faith:

- a faith that impels us to see beyond the appearances and experiences of turmoil and tragedy with a profound trust that God remains with us;
- a faith that embraces Jesus' message of a new Covenant of redemption and reconciliation for persons from every tribe, tongue, people and nation;
- a faith that accepts that God is still creating and we are invited to be co-creators of a new creation where everything that exists is to be respected; and
- a faith that understands that all of creation, humans included, is united in a vast cosmic system, the divine milieu.

And only by becoming, in the words of Gandhi, "the change we wish to see in the world."

The Call to Creative Leadership

I believe each person is a leader, each person has authority, power and the responsibility to use her/his gifts in co-creating a more loving, just and peaceful world. Each of us is called to let the creative, life-giving breath of the Spirit enter into us so that we are able to live reflectively and work with chaos, with change and with each other.

Perhaps you have read a frequently sent email entitled "The Daffodil Principle" which describes a woman who planted five acres of bulbs on a mountainside which each spring became an awesome blaze of colors and patterns. For 40 years she planted one bulb at a time to create a magnificent scene of beauty and inspiration. When we multiply tiny moments of time with small increments of daily effort, we also will find we can accomplish magnificent things. We can change the world!

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"Real authority in life comes from being attuned to the sighs and cries of others," Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S., writes. "Real authority comes when one seeks to understand what one cannot possibly comprehend." This is the

authority grounded in faith that sees beyond appearance and envisions all peoples living in peace, justice, unity and communion instead of poverty, violence, hate, war, discrimination and division.

Through Baptism each of us has been consecrated and called to be a disciple of Jesus, to become “an ever more credible witness of God’s tender love, of which the blood of Christ is vibrant sign and unending covenant pledge” (Adorers Life Charter 2). We are called to enter into the Paschal Mystery that generates and gives full meaning to life. On the practical level this means we must be contemplatives who are able to live with all persons in a communion of the cup of suffering and the cup of blessing because we are grounded in a personal and prayerful relationship with the Beloved.

St. Maria De Mattias and St. Gaspar did not live in a time when global consciousness was what it is today. But they did live in a time of chaos and violence. Both shared the conviction that Jesus shed his blood for each and for all. In the Preface to the 1857 Constitution, Maria wrote, “Like a fountain, or rather like a life-giving river accessible to all, it (the Precious Blood) flows on and out to all the children of Adam....” And then, with the zeal so characteristic of her and Gaspar, Maria continues, “From all this we see clearly how varied and extensive are those services and works of charity to which God calls us, and which on our part we must gladly accept and carry out faithfully...”

Serving in international leadership is certainly changing my understanding of the world, my vision of leadership and my relationship with God and others. This service was called forth by the Spirit in discernment, personal and communal. Walking this holy ground is deepening my conviction about my need and the need for each of us to integrate the spirituality of the Blood of Christ with servant leadership each and every day.

In 2008, after consultation and discernment, we Adorers defined and endorsed elements of the spirituality of A.S.C. leadership, elements unique to our spirituality of the Blood of Christ. I believe these elements have application for each of us who lives in our chaotic world and our Precious Blood family. They are a road map, a blueprint for being co-creators of a new creation.

An attitude of respect for the dignity of each person

This attitude calls us to enter into a healthy relationship with each other and encourages open communication and active listening. Today each of us in the Precious Blood family must live the conviction that each person is worth the Blood of Christ, that Jesus loved us so much that he lovingly

shed all his blood for each and every person. Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S., has said this conviction means “affirming that God does not make junk.” The Book of Genesis assures us that everything and everyone created by God is good. No person is inherently a bad person.

What does this mean practically? It means that we must respond to and treat each person with the respect and dignity that is due to them as persons created by God, redeemed with the Precious Blood and made living temples of the Spirit. We write and say these words often. They are our bedrock and the foundation of Catholic Social Teaching. The continuous challenge is to live this conviction when the circumstances are difficult.

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For example, when I am on the bus and a homeless person comes aboard and sits near me, am I able to sit quietly, even smile in recognition of this brother or sister rather than move away as many others do because of the odor and the dirtiness of body and clothes? When mentally ill and homeless Giuseppe enters our church during Mass and babbles with God or whomever, can I thank God for his presence that is a reminder of how many blessings I take for granted? When a member needs to vent, am I able to be patiently present with a listening heart and without judgment? When I travel to another country for visitation among our Sisters, do I adjust to their reality by eating their foods and accepting their customs? Sometimes a new creation is simple rather than grand.

During the last Precious Blood Congress, several speakers challenged us with *societal* ways of living this respect. When I hear derogatory jokes about other races, ethnic groups, occupations, and limitations—do I pass them on or do I have the courage to say that such jokes are disrespectful? Do I discriminate against persons because of sexual orientation, being in prison or having different beliefs and dress? What new creation is needed in my home and my circle of friends?

An attitude that fosters unity and communion

We are one global family composed of persons created in the image and likeness of God. Our challenge is to live as brothers and sisters and to act in ways that foster communion and unity. In his remarks to the Bishops of Nigeria at the conclusion of their *ad limina* visit in April 2009,

Pope Benedict XVI said, "There is no place in the Church for any kind of division." We are all part of the same history of salvation. It is the Gospel that unites multi-cultural communities.

St. Maria often spoke of charity, "charity toward God and toward our dear neighbor." She passionately desired, as did Gaspar, that charity characterize us so that we are credible witnesses of God's tender love. We know that good will and care are important in relating to each other. But it is the Gospel that enables Precious Blood family members, religious and lay, to serve in other nations and live in communion with members and peoples of each land. It is Christ who enables me to be among and with my A.S.C. sisters in their realities as sister and friend. It is the Gospel that motivates and sustains staff and volunteers of Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities, Peace Corps and other groups to live and work in unity and communion with the people they serve.

As persons redeemed by the Blood of Christ, we are impelled to live the new creation of communion through the ways we respond to daily

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situations of chaos. One person so impelled is A.S.C. Associate Dolores Mier. On her 80th birthday, Dolores learned of a family with three autistic children who were losing their home. Instead of receiving gifts, she became

a gift. With her daughter and others, financial help was given to assist the family in finding a home and an autism specialist to work with the children five days a week.

Today we live in a global and multi-cultural world. Daily this reality is also experienced in our neighborhoods and in the news. We are called to let go of our *isms*, alibis, prejudices and harsh language for the sake of communion and unity. What occurs in one region or country, what is said by one leader has ramifications in others as we in the United States have experienced more poignantly in recent years. Chaos, not unity, predominates.

Fortunately the tone of U.S. relationships with other nations is changing as expressed after the G-20 meeting by Jiri Dienstbier, the first Czechoslovak foreign minister after communism. "All this talk of an Axis of Evil is finally over and it is finally understood in Washington that American hegemony is over," he said. "For me, President Obama coming here (Czech Republic) is nothing short of a civilizational change in American foreign policy. God knows if he will succeed. But at least it is a beginning."

A potential new creation is unfolding and evolving.

An attitude of reconciliation

St. Paul tells us that God “has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. This makes us ambassadors for Christ.... We implore you, in Christ’s name: be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:17-20). From the chaos of being thrown to the ground and being led in blindness to Damascus, Paul accepted the new creation of Baptism, reconciliation with God, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the call to be an ambassador for Christ Jesus.

Reconciliation is a new creation because the love of Christ, poured out in shedding his blood on the cross, is our means of becoming “the very holiness of God.” Precious Blood Father Robert Schreiter, an expert on reconciliation, clearly articulates that “reconciliation is the work of God, who initiates and completes in us reconciliation through Christ.” God is at the heart of restoring the victim’s humanity via repentance and forgiveness and bringing about the new creation of reconciliation of victim and perpetrator to move into the future.

Reconciliation is not an “add on” to our lives and our ministries; it is the heart of the matter for us, the means of joining Paul, Gaspar and Maria in becoming new creations so that we might be ambassadors of reconciliation. My first step is to be open to God’s work of creating a new person of conciliatory love and nonviolence from my chaos of being judgmental, defensive, or lacking charity. Each of us is called to be this ambassador in our person wherever we are and whatever we do.

Communal expressions of being ambassadors of reconciliation are also being birthed. The Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation in Chicago is a ministry that seeks to be ambassadors in families, parishes, prisons and neighborhoods.

Learning skills and methods of peacemaking, nonviolent response and reconciliation is necessary to be effective instruments. The presence and ministry of our A.S.C. sisters in Bosnia and Herzegovina among and with some of the very persons who killed their family members during the most recent Balkan war is an inspiring call that gives witness how Precious Blood family members are to be persons of reconciliation.

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The extension of the A.S.C. Associate program to persons in prison is another means. I share one part of a story to show how God

works through ambassadors. Michael Hustad, the first incarcerated A.S.C. Associate, died in 2005 of cancer. In his letters to his A.S.C. mentor, Michael wrote, "I am coming to see myself in a different light and coming to accept that I am a good person and can do good things" (June 18, 1994). In another letter on May 30, 1995 Michael wrote, "I think differently, talk differently, act differently.... God was leading me out of my Egypt and into the Promised Land. What a wonderful feeling to be free of my own pharaoh!" The broken, wounded, and violent world in which we live demands nothing less than liberating nonviolence with reconciling love and needs it more urgently than ever.

An attitude of discernment

The story is told of a nurse on a pediatric ward who, before listening to the children's chests, would put the stethoscope into their ears and let them listen to their hearts. Their eyes would always light up with awe. Gently she tucked the stethoscope into four-year old David's ears and placed the disk over his heart. "Listen," she said, "What do you suppose that is?" He drew his eyebrows together and looked as if lost in the mystery of the strange tap - tap - tapping deep in his chest. Then his face broke out in a wondrous grin and he asked, "Is that Jesus knocking?"

Discernment is the lifeline of exercising leadership, a spiritual stethoscope that helps us listen to what God wants from and for us. Discernment is a consultation with the Holy Spirit, the breath of God that

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brought creation from chaos, life from death, courage from fear, boldness from timidity. This same Spirit also blesses us with these gifts if we, like Jesus, come to know what God

wants from us. On our part, this means to be intimate with Scripture, gather information, listen, spend time in prayer and reach a decision in full freedom of heart.

Maria and Gaspar were listeners of the Word but also doers of the Word. Maria wrote, "Always, always with Jesus. God always in view, Jesus in practice, our life in sacrifice" (MDM January 22, 1850). In another place, she wrote, "We must do the Will of God. Courage; place everything in God's hands" (MDM September 24, 1860). Although the description, "obedient rebel," was used for Maria, it certainly applies to both of them.

In our search to listen to the signs of the times and to live our charism in today's church and world, we Adorers are committed to walking a new way that includes further conversion, discernment, collaboration with laity and working with other groups to struggle against poverty and to build a more equal and just world. To that end we Adorers have joined VIVAT, a Catholic inspired international NGO of eight congregations. VIVAT focuses on furthering the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as a concrete means of bringing healing and reconciliation to the world, its peoples and ourselves.

In his talk at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC in 2007, Bono, the Irish Rock musician, noted that the MDGs are not about charity but about justice. He called them the "Beatitudes" of this century to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to achieve universal primary education and to improve gender equality and equal treatment of women, global partnerships for development, environmental sustainability, maternal health and to reduce child mortality.

As any foundress or founder of a congregation knows, risk taking is a vital element of discernment. This year the Adorers and the Sisters of the Precious Blood of Dayton celebrate their 175th anniversary. At the March 4th initiation of the jubilee year in

Acuto, the homilist stated, "In order for a path to become a trail or a road, it is not enough for one person to walk along it and open it up. The traces of one person's footsteps would immediately disappear if other people didn't recognize the signs and follow along the same footsteps, making the path easier to follow with their passing along the same path that was just blazed."

What footsteps does God want us to take now in 2009 and into the future? What new creation does God want?

The dream of one A.S.C. has become the Village of Hope with houses and medical services, house parents and volunteers to give love, hope, education and a quality of life to children who are HIV+ and whose parents died from AIDS.

An attitude that communicates passion, joy, and hope for our mission

Our corporate mission in the Church and the world is to collaborate with Christ in the work of redemption. Jesus invites us to a new way of being Christians and disciples in our world. In *Women at the Well*, Kathleen Fischer writes, "Jesus' vision calls for the elimination of structures

of domination and submission.” All who call themselves disciples of Jesus share in this prophetic and reconciling mission.

We know that Jesus had a heart for the poor and that Catholic Social Teaching calls us to have a preferential option for the poor. Bono seemed to paraphrase Maria and Gaspar when he said, “God is in the slums, in the cardboard boxes where the poor play house. God is in the silence of a mother who has infected her child with a virus that will end both their lives. God is in the cries heard under the rubble of war. God is in the debris of wasted opportunity and lives and God is with us if we are with them.”

Maria was a “woman in a hurry,” full of zeal and indefatigable in her desire that all persons would know how precious they are to God. “Let us work assiduously in the vineyard of Jesus,” she wrote. “In Paradise, we will have our rest” (MDM March 3, 1856). In another place, Maria encouraged members of her community: “Do not become discouraged when you meet with difficulties in doing good, especially when these come from the public” (MDM February 22, 1848). And again, “For the love of God, I plead that the poor children be the first to receive attention. I wish them to be instructed with great kindness in the things of God, in reading” (MDM December 6, 1854).

Thus, in Tanzania, a single mother with AIDS and her children daily receive milk and some food from the A.S.C.s who live nearby. The dream of one A.S.C. has become the Village of Hope with houses and medical services, house parents and volunteers to give love, hope, education and a quality of life to children who are HIV+ and whose parents died from AIDS.

New creation out of chaos is also occurring in other parts of the world where A.S.C.s minister. With vision and zeal, A.S.C.s in Korea

For chaos to evolve into a new creation, each of us must be a leader who lives in the pain, struggle and work of this in-between time.

opened one of their houses as a place of safety, peace and love for girls taken from chaotic dysfunctional and unsafe homes. In the Philippines an A.S.C. doctor, with other A.S.C.s and volunteers, daily relieves the chaos of disease and illness among those who live in garbage dumps.

In Brazil, Croatia, Italy and other countries, A.S.C.s live and work among recovering drug addicts and women fleeing domestic violence. In India, Mysore District, 75 Self-Help Groups of rural women are assisted through microeconomic projects.

For chaos to evolve into a new creation, each of us must be a leader who lives in the pain, struggle and work of this in-between time. This time is

not for the fainthearted but for courageous, compassionate and reconciling people intent on a more profound relationship with God, contemplative prayer, discernment and a response to these signs of the times in creative fidelity to our charism, spirituality and mission.

St. Maria De Mattias gave us the encouragement for living this new and risky way when she wrote to Bishop Annovazzi on November 13, 1838 “that we may have the consolation of seeing, in these present times, that beautiful order of things which the great Son of God came to establish in his blood.”

History, like God, is watching what we do.



Sister Therese Wetta is a member of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ who currently serves on the general council in Rome. A native Kansan, Therese enjoys nature, poetry and listening to music. Her ministries have included teaching in secondary schools and at Newman University, administration in two other Catholic Universities in Kansas, Catholic Charities USA, serving as provincial and a year on staff at Shantivanam. She has a strong commitment to reconciliation, collaboration, justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

For Reflection

- ❑ What words, what feelings engendered in reading call me to prayer? To further listening to what God is saying to me?
- ❑ Concretely, how can I be a co-creator and ambassador of reconciliation? How am I a participant in bringing about the new creation?
- ❑ Which of the five attitudes of the spirituality of leadership “spoke” most to me and why? As a leader and co-creator, how am I going to change my way of being and acting?

Toward That Beautiful Order

Barbara Jean Franklin, A.S.C.

Generations of Adorers of the Blood of Christ have rallied around St. Maria De Mattias' words, "...toward that beautiful order of things that the great Son of God came to establish in his blood." Each generation of Adorers has known the many ways that the "beautiful order" intended by God has been challenged by world and civil wars, by cultural differences and tensions within the congregation, by great poverty and many other hardships both within and outside the community.

At the same time each generation has caught glimpses of that "beautiful order" in the ways that Adorers have been able to respond to those touched by wars and civil and political unrest and have worked side by side with individuals and families caught in the struggles of day-to-day living. Adorers have engaged in collaborative ventures with Church and civil leaders in the education of children and adults, and in the establishment of hospitals and homes for the aged and other social services. We have cared for each other in community. Innumerable events have helped to form the character of the congregation. They have also helped shape who we are and how we are as community.

For Adorers in the United States, St. Maria's words took on a new dimension as three provinces merged into one in October 2000. Like the farmer who carefully prepares the soil—nourishing it and protecting it from erosion—and like the gardener who selects the seeds and carefully drops them into the soil, the Adorers carefully prepared for this convergence of three provinces into one. All of us were invited to participate in gatherings where we shared dreams and encouraged each other's visions. We prayed together and we prayed for this "new" which was being birthed among us. Slowly we came to know each other better and appreciate our differences as

well as many new-found similarities. We were, after all, each of us a daughter of St. Maria De Mattias, each of us was a companion plant within a larger garden. In our preparation, province “lines” were more easily crossed in ministry, new members were formed together to become United States Adorers, committees studied everything from finances to governance plans. Together, we worked to create something new among us. So, as October 9, 2000 dawned, we were ready to be the United States Province.

Creating Something New

The days, weeks, months and even years that followed taught us that putting the externals, the organizational elements, together was perhaps the easiest part. Prior to our convergence and as we began to form ourselves anew there was much give and take and many struggles to understand the differences among us. While we clung to the vision of a “new creation” which reflected “that beautiful order” that Jesus came to establish, getting our hearts reset to beat as a new creation was more the challenge. We came together because we felt a common stirring in our hearts, but restarting our hearts together was not so simple.

First we had to live into new structures. We realized that we had always been connected and the external structures, three provinces created in 1929, were only that: constructs. Yet these constructs had a way of dividing us and

overshadowing at times our essential unity within the larger congregation. No matter how well soil is prepared and how carefully seeds are sown, seeds only grow into something new through death. Our convergence marked the beginning, not the end, of individual and collective dying.

At the same time, across the province there was much evidence of the generosity that ultimately led to our convergence. As we began our common journey there was a newness created by our sharing of resources—sisters, finances, leadership—for mission. Yet, there was an underlying unease among us that needed to be embraced before we really could be a new creation.

Though in the course of its more than seventy year history each of the three separate provinces had known times of ambiguity, uncertainty and confusion, there were times we forgot that as we tried to forge something new and life-giving for ourselves, our Church, our world. Birth is painful and messy. As collectively and individually we walked a tightrope between

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our perception of blessing and curse, loss and gain, it was often tempting to terminate the “new” to which we were painfully giving birth.

We had put our singular pasts together, trusting that we would create a new shared past that would enrich our future. We learned that there is always a fine balance between honoring one’s own past and that of others and letting go of the extraneous and divisive elements that really don’t define who an individual or organization is before God. We had to appreciate anew that which always bound us together as Adorers.

A Reconciling Presence: Sharing the Stories

There is comfort in shared stories, in a common history. That is where we feel most at home. Our shared history as United States Adorers is only beginning to become part of a story we can all own. For that brief shared history to become part of a new creation, we have had to continually step beyond what was a future with no guarantees. Many times we have been reminded that “new” is not always life-giving. We have been

While it may never have been overtly stated, the essence of our charism as reconciling presence was at stake in our convergence.

challenged to consciously embrace that which truly holds us together and gives life meaning. A common charism and sense of mission have provided that meaning. Somehow we have always

known that we would be fruitful at a level beyond what our senses could fathom. New creation has depended on our trust in this.

While it may never have been overtly stated, the essence of our charism as reconciling presence was at stake in our convergence. Our ability to be reconcilers in the world was and is contingent upon our faithfulness in being reconcilers at home. The true measure of our identity as reconcilers is what happens at the supper table and over coffee. It stretches across the miles and calls into question our assumptions and prejudices.

In describing what he called “the American Proposition,” John Courtney Murray, SJ said, “One society out of diverse communities will always be a promise still to be fulfilled” (*We Hold These Truths*, 1960). The same may be true of the United States Province, now Region, of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ. But we are no longer that group of women who sometimes reluctantly, sometimes hopefully, became a new structure on October 9, 2000. We have lived—and died—into a new creation much more viable, much more gift to the Church and world than we ever dreamed we could be as three separate provinces.

New life is appearing among us and around us in surprising ways. Perhaps only now are we aware that we have been uncovering with our lives the values that underlie our structures and are the true essence of who we are as Adorers of the Blood of Christ. As T. S. Eliot wrote in *Little Gidding*:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

As we learn to articulate in both word and action that which drew us together and holds us together it is important for each Adorer to retrace her and our collective journey over the past decade: to gently hold the many deaths to self and to old assumptions and prejudices; to be grateful for the many ways those deaths have brought life not only to each of us but to our region and congregation; and to own the reality that there will be more opportunities to probe deeper into the mystery of how our new story as United States Adorers fits into God's story.

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Historians would tell us, and rightly so, that it is too soon to assess our success as a converged group. But I believe that there is a great history still to be accomplished and the Adorers have much to offer because our convergence has drawn us into our charism of reconciliation in new and deeper ways. The gift of convergence is not for our congregation. It was never intended to be. Yet we find among ourselves living the new creation for which St. Maria De Mattias spent her life, never ceasing from exploration of “that beautiful order of things that the great Son of God came to establish in his blood.”

What a great place to arrive “and know the place for the first time.”



Barbara Jean Franklin has been a member of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ for over 40 years. For 22 years she ministered as teacher and principal in elementary schools in Illinois and Missouri and served as an associate director in the Office for Catholic Education in the Diocese of Springfield in

Illinois. She served the United States Adorers as treasurer of the Ruma and Columbia Provinces and was on the Inter-province Leadership Team when the three provinces were being formed into one. She served on the first Leadership Team for the United States Region from 2000-2006. Currently she is Property Director at the Ruma Center.

For Reflection

- ❑ How do the external structures of my congregation support the values which draw us together as community? Do any structures need to be changed to better reflect and help us live our values?
- ❑ How is the charism of reconciliation lived out in my day-to-day encounters? Is there a difference in how I live this gift within community and as I engage in ministry? Should there be?
- ❑ Does the Adorers' convergence into one province/region have anything to offer in terms of interaction between our Precious Blood congregations?



*We came together because we felt
a common stirring in our hearts.*

The Ever-Changing Story of Religious Life

Mary Whited, C.P.P.S.

A new story is unfolding as *The Village of St. Mary's* begins to take shape. Two years ago, when we decided to remain on our motherhouse property, who would have guessed we would be creating a village? Yet it feels so right that we have chosen to partner with a developer to renovate our buildings and develop the land where we have lived and served for 136 years. Our story continues as new life comes to birth.

As we committed ourselves to this new venture, we hardly anticipated the many surprises that would come along the way. Given the unpredictable economic rollercoaster ride in recent months, November's groundbreaking was a giant step forward. Today carpenters hammer. Pipes and fixtures are being delivered. Electricians are wiring. Timelines and blueprints guide the many construction workers through the process of reconfiguring typical convent bedrooms into large apartments for senior living.

The creative insights and enthusiasm of our Sisters, developers, architects, contractors, lawyers, financial and legal advisers, and so many other dedicated persons are giving birth to *Villa Theresa*, the continuum-of-care community for seniors that will be a significant part of *The Village of St. Mary's*.

Such a huge endeavor requires untiring efforts, muddling through messiness, taking calculated risks, hard work, a few sleepless nights, and an unusual determination by so many persons committed to creating something new with unused space and land that has lain fallow. More than buildings and land, *The Village of St. Mary's* is becoming a complex network of relationships among people who share a common effort and who are

willing to bring their gifts and expertise together around a dream. We are creating a future as we build on the past.

Creating something new brings about change, and change is often difficult. Yet, the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood see this new venture as a way to live out our preference for the economically poor. And that is important to us. As historic buildings are renovated and we share our space with others, we will provide new life on the land entrusted to us. Such an endeavor requires a leap in faith, trust in the guidance of God's Spirit, a willingness to stay at the table when differences arise, and a lot of "give-and-take." We anticipate the day when the front doors of *Villa Theresa*, named after our foundress Mother Theresa Weber, will be opened and we will welcome in others who will also call the space their home. Thus, we begin a new chapter in the sacred story of our life as a Community.

In this article, I reflect on what I am learning as a result of involvement in this project. As I write this reflection, I am especially mindful of these elements that allow new stories to emerge for a religious community whose spirituality is rooted in the Precious Blood, namely, writing the story together, trusting the Spirit, reconciling differences, and tending new life. Let me explore each a bit further.

Writing the stories together

We are so much stronger together than we are alone. *The Village of St. Mary's* is evidence of this. Long ago the impetus for religious congregations and institutes of apostolic life took root in the desire to become communities.

When our founders and foundresses began our Precious Blood communities, they knew that their stories could only evolve by joining efforts with others.

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More than simply a way of supporting the mission, more than an effective way of doing ministry, and more than an efficient way of using resources, community became a radical expression of living the Gospel. Community itself expressed the mission entrusted to us.

From recalling our early beginnings, it is evident that it didn't take a large number of men or women to make something happen. It took only a few strongly dedicated people to put their lives together around a purpose. While it is true that each individual can make a difference, it is even truer

that the world changes as networks of relationships form among people who discover they share a common cause and vision of what is possible. Perhaps this may be why associates and partners are eager to join us—together there is strength in furthering Christ's mission.

Interdependence is the name of the game in a connected, global reality. This is why we, leaders of Precious Blood congregations, network around our spiritualities. This is why a family of the Precious Blood communities and our associates assemble for Congresses and anticipate the 2010 Precious Blood Convocation. This is why persons whose spiritualities are rooted in the Precious Blood combine our efforts in ministry, jointly address local and global concerns, create centers that help to deepen the meaning of Precious Blood spirituality, and share stories with each other of how we seek to live in the spirit of the Precious Blood. Together we write new stories.

Trusting the Spirit

New stories call for trusting the Spirit who inspires our dreaming. This past August, in my presentation to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, I spoke of a recurring dream I have had. In the dream, I make my way from room to room in old, familiar surroundings like our motherhouse that dates back to 1875 or St. Elizabeth Academy, the all-girls high school sponsored by our congregation since 1882. Suddenly I find myself in a maze of rooms I have never stepped foot in before. I am afraid to take another step. The surroundings are unfamiliar. I am tempted to retreat. When I glance back over my shoulder, I notice that the rooms from which I have come have disappeared. I suddenly realize I can't go back to what I know. The way forward requires taking a step. I sense a Mysterious Presence urging me to take that step. I relax, breathe deeply, and move forward. One step. And another. I have a sense of being led.

This dream clearly represents what it is like to be in leadership in the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious at this critical time. I believe that one task of a leader is to usher in new life in light of our story with God. And so, maintaining the status quo can only lead to stagnation. Leaders attend to the deeper questions for the welfare of our congregation and the unfolding of religious life now and into the future. We hold the present with an eye toward the future.

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Beyond my own personal story, I believe my dream is a metaphor of how men and women who have committed our lives to the service of God are being invited to trust the Spirit who seems to be writing new stories in the lives of our congregations and in a religious life that is both grounded in the past and moving into the future. Long gone are the days when we were secure and life was simple. Today we face complexities and uncertainties we did not anticipate when we said “yes” to the call to follow Jesus.

In this new space, it is easy to become fearful. We are tempted to return to what we know best. Yet, going back is not an option. Our spirituality grounds us to go forward and enables us to take the next step. We trust that we are being led into a new space where the lack of clarity may actually be a gift from God. The story unfolds as we trust the lead of God’s Spirit.

Genuine creativity assumes a willingness to enter the chaos where something new can be born. The new can be born as we touch into our dreams—those we have when we are awake and those we have while sleeping. As we move beyond what we know and step into something new, leisure and time for reflection will enable us to focus and will prepare us to take additional steps. We trust the Spirit who writes anew!

Reconciling Differences

In these unprecedented times, women religious strive to respond to recent Vatican initiatives that call for the visitation of U.S. congregations of apostolic women religious and a doctrinal assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Many feelings well up and swirl around the attempts of our LCWR presidency to find ways to respond to what has come as a surprise. Circles of quiet prayer ground and center us. Gathering together provides a safe context for discerning how best to respond to the events that continue to unfold.

In the presidency of LCWR, our recent visits with the Vatican office of the Doctrine of the Faith and the Congregation for Consecrated Life were more than casual. We sought to know the “why’s” and the “wherefore’s” and the “what if’s” that rankle in our minds and hearts. In these conversations, the three members of our presidency and our executive director listened deeply and non-defensively to concerns that were raised.

What could we learn? We spoke from our integrity and the legitimate power entrusted to us as leaders of our conference. With questions we probed the assumptions that underlie the concerns that have precipitated such investigations. We tried to highlight common ground. We brought

to the conversation collective wisdom, confidence, insights that have been gleaned from our members, and the experience of being vowed ecclesial women. Even more, we brought a deep caring for the leaders whom we represented. We did not set out to change the minds of those who initiated the investigations. In the end, we continue to engage in conversation for the long haul and to not lose heart. We are ecclesial women who love a church that is both institution and the people of God. If we do not claim both, we lose a prophetic edge as well as any hope of healing the rifts.

Leaders of congregations are in the process of conversing with those who will be conducting the visitations. We seek to stir new understandings of and insights into what it means to be ecclesial women religious at a time when multiple expressions of apostolic religious life are so evident. We trust

the maturity that has been growing within and among us. It is maturity reflected in our care for the poor, sensitivity to creation, awareness of the global common good, and the hope of engaging with conflict in reconciling ways. We trust the maturity that is evidenced in the ways we pray—together and alone.

We have come to see that a religious life is not a problem to be solved but rather a mystery to be lived—fully and wholeheartedly.

We have come to see that a religious life is not a problem to be solved but rather a mystery to be lived—fully and wholeheartedly.

Recognizing truth in opposite poles is relatively easy in theory. Yet we often experience tension as we try to put this into practice. To engage constructively with conflict requires exploring together the benefits and downsides of each pole rather than trying to convince the other about who has more of the truth. Reconciling differences is a matter of the heart, even more than a matter of the head. Closing the gaps requires a “heartfelt” response toward reconciliation and healing.

Our charism as Sisters of the Most Precious Blood is to be Christ’s reconciling presence in our church and world. Reconciliation colors how I see myself in the context of a church in which conflict seems to be escalating. I wonder, “What will it take to heal a painfully divided church?” I hold the weariness of women who can’t find their voices in a church they love and serve. I hold the frustrations of persons and groups who are disregarded or labeled because of different perspectives—liberal/conservative, right/left, people of God/institutional church, religious who live an “authentic” religious life and those who don’t. What will it take to embrace the differences? What will it take to span the gaps? At this present

moment it seems like reconciliation within the church is needed more, rather than less. That reconciliation will require more creative approaches that respect and embrace the differences. Reconciliation is a creative act.

Religious congregations whose spirituality is rooted in the Precious Blood are called to be instruments of reconciliation and healing. We have things to say to the church that will bring new life and promote healing. We speak our truth to power, but speak that truth with love. A desire for reconciliation urges us to stay with difficult and honest conversations and to speak from a power that does not dominate. After all, it was through the power of the cross and Jesus' utter powerlessness that the hold on sin was broken. Approaching dominating power from a different perspective takes us to a new place and paves the way for reconciliation to happen and new relationships to be established. When all is said and done, a new story may not be "all is well" but that we strive to be reconcilers in the midst of "all not being well". Such is the challenge for those entrusted with a mission of being Christ's reconciling presence.

Tending New Life

This past May in Cincinnati, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious opened a traveling exhibit, *Women and Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America*. The exhibit tells the amazing story of 220,000 women who have had a wide influence on life and culture in the United States since 1717 when nine Ursuline Sisters landed in New Orleans. During the next three years, the exhibit will travel around the country and be displayed at various sites, including the Smithsonian Institute and Ellis Island.

This exhibit was created out of a desire to tell the stories of women religious in the United States up to this point in time. Especially now, when the very meaning of our lives seems to be called into question, we continue to trust the Spirit of God and the processes that have been unfolding in us throughout the years. *Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America* is more than a history-on-display. It is a reality in each of us who seeks to follow in the footsteps of those women religious who paved the way before us birthing and tending new life.

Women are particularly sensitive to the connections between the flow of blood and birth of a child. And the spirituality of the Precious Blood is as much connected to new life as it is to suffering and death of Jesus. In the Christian tradition, Jesus' resurrection promised new life, not only for the disciples of Jesus and the early Christian communities, but for us and the world in which we live.

In many countries across the globe there is need of healing and reconciliation—Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Liberia, Israel and Palestinian territories, Sudan, Afghanistan, and the United States of America, to mention a few. Those of us who have committed our lives to the service of God often find ourselves walking an emotional and spiritual tightrope between profound worry about what is happening around us and an incredible hope that unity and peace can break through. Unprecedented ecological concerns, the rise of poverty and violence, and the frightening escalation of war reflect the inability of great religions—including our own—to awaken us sufficiently to the sacredness of creation and our interdependence as human beings.

Those of us who have committed our lives to the service of God often find ourselves walking an emotional and spiritual tightrope between profound worry about what is happening around us and an incredible hope that unity and peace can break through.

In such challenging times, the message of Christ's resurrection is that new life needs to be tended. These words of St. Paul indicate our responsibility to tend to the life that is emerging and the new story that is being written with our lives:

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Cor. 5: 17-18).



Sister Mary Whited, C.P.P.S. is currently the General Superior of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood from O'Fallon, Missouri. She is serving as Past-President of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. In addition to leadership and initial formation in her congregation, she has served in parish ministry, coordinated adult faith formation, and taught and administered in secondary education. She is a retreat director, spiritual director, and facilitator.

For Reflection

- ❑ What new story is evolving in my life?
- ❑ In what ways am I being challenged to trust the Spirit?
- ❑ How I am being invited to reconcile difference in situations in my life such as ministry, family, community life, etc.?
- ❑ Where is the new life that I need to tend?



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Christ's Cosmic Call

Suspended between heaven and earth
I gaze over hilltop and mountain
My outstretched arms give proof of my
Undying and unconditional Love,
That prompts my cosmic Redemptive Act
For my beloved ones—
As I drop my head, my dying eyes center on
Mary, my Mother, whom I give to John, my beloved—
My Precious Blood opens the heart of even the hardened
Sinner and forgives those who have turned from Me.
The drops of Blood trickle down my face, my chest, my legs
And force me to call out, "I thirst" for humankind's love.
A dissipated and chaotic world gyrates
And erupts at my God-forsaken lot,
As I call out for My Father to forgive the malefactors.
Temple veils are torn as my Blood spatters the sacred ground
Beneath my swollen, blood-cruled feet.
"Oh, God, it is finished," I cry out in answer
To the cosmic call to be its Savior!
With the soldier's lance piercing my Side, I give
Myself into your hands, O God,
As I commend to You my Spirit, renewed in and for
A New Creation that is steeped in My Blood and nourished
With and overwhelming Love that embrace the whole world.
I give you My final act of Love, Oh God,
My total surrender to Your Omnipotent Will.

Madeleine Kisner, ASC



Sister Madeleine Kisner is a U.S. Adorer of the Blood of Christ. She lives at the Center in Wichita, KS where she taught English for many years at Newman University.

A Litany of Life for a New Creation

Donna Liette, C.P.P.S.

*Urged by the redeeming love of Jesus the Christ
And rooted in Eucharistic Prayer,
We Sisters of the Precious Blood proclaim God's love
By being a life-giving reconciling presence
In our fractured world.*

Mission Statement
Sisters of the Precious Blood
Dayton, OH

In the prophet Isaiah we read, “Lo, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the things of the past are not to be remembered or come to mind. Instead there shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create” (65: 17-18).

Is not God’s mission our mission? God’s dream our dream? People of the Blood, redeemed, stained and sent, go about “groaning and in labor pains” until we see the completion of God’s dream.

And yet, every day, if we stay awake, we see glimpses of the new heaven and the new earth! We live in joyful expectation of seeing around the corner a new creation! We stay focused and mindful with open hands accepting the chaos of our lives, knowing light will come out of the darkness; there is life in the midst of death. We wait for grace, for transformation, for the birthing of new life!

BLOOD OF JESUS, THE NEW CREATION

Sixty-nine years ago, on New Year's Eve, my Mother was in labor pains, awaiting a new creation. Now every morning, I sit in my Mother's "Prayer Chair" as I greet the day in joyful anticipation or in painful groaning. Regardless of my space, it is a very sacred time for me—I feel close to my Mother who sat on this same chair for almost 15 years until her death in 2001 at the age of 100. You can imagine that it shows the wear and tear of life, but how precious. Here she prayed hour after hour, day after day. Each time that I visited her I could see her growing in her union with God, see everything old passing away and everything becoming new. Now she enjoys that which she longed to see and I wait on her chair.

BLOOD OF JESUS, SPRINGING TO LIFE IN A MOTHER'S WOMB

Forty years ago, God seemed to whisper a word of challenge to a group of Precious Blood Sisters living in Rensselaer, IN. Behind jail bars, a little 7-year-old boy named Tim asked us to be his "Mother" and we took the risk. Through the jail bars he reached out for love; his eyes calling for help, as young as he was he knew his life was headed for darkness and destruction. There in the convent he "grew in age, wisdom and grace" with the redeeming love of the Sisters and with assistance from Father Richard Riedel C.P.P.S. and Brother Tim Hemm C.P.P.S. who offered a fatherly/brotherly presence. Today, all things are new and he too feels stained and sent by the blood to total self-giving that others find hope and joy. As William Paul Young writes in *The Shack*, he "lives loved."

BLOOD OF JESUS, SOLIDARITY OF OUR WORLD

Several weeks ago a 29-year-old woman I'll call Zenobia, burdened with the disease of addiction, with numerous prison numbers, stood before the judge in the courtroom, bent over, head covered, humiliated, only to hear the judge say that the world would be better off with her locked up and out of sight.

Zenobia's Mother died of AIDS when she was 14 and her father died a few years later from complications from heroin usage. She was basically left to the streets. Homeless, parentless, childless, she begged me to preserve her one remaining treasure—a beautiful picture of her and her Mother taken when she was just a little girl. She was then handcuffed and taken to prison for a theft charge for which she claims her innocence. Today I got a letter from "Z" telling of a poem that she wrote for Sunday services entitled *Rescue me*.

Is there hope for “Z” in the Blood of Jesus? Yes! Four of us Precious Blood Sisters have “adopted” Zenobia and we offer to her fractured life our life-giving presence and the redeeming love of Jesus the Christ. We wait with joyful expectation, yes, groaning, but with hope that through our Eucharistic prayer Zenobia will be set free from her bondage and know a new creation.

BLOOD OF JESUS, HOPE OF PRISONERS

I was searching for a song on YouTube when I ran across a song by Dex Alexander entitled *New Creation*:

*Whisper the word that gave creation her form
I'm searching for a life that hasn't been there before
Speak life into the darkness
I'm reaching for your love
you've taken my old skin and made it new again
you have made me new, a new creation
Speak light into the darkness
new creation
all new,
a new Creation.*

This song speaks of the hope we carry for “Z”—hoping that in her darkness, as she surrenders to God’s redeeming love for her, she will know herself as one cherished, not abandoned, but bought at a great price!

Time and again as I visit women and men in prison, the gates clang behind me but, with every clang I hear the cry of the life-giving blood groaning to bring out of the tomb those who are “dead”—those without hope of ever being loved. Could my life-giving presence make a difference? I see the anguish in each person’s eyes, the hopelessness—they weep, I weep, God weeps—and we wait, searching for a life that hasn’t been there, waiting for old skin to be washed in the blood and made new.

Sometimes after a number of visits, I see a woman standing up, no longer the bent-over woman, no longer carrying the shame and guilt, no longer feeling alone, abandoned, abused and a throw-away. There is a gleam in her eyes and she holds her head up. She has touched God and God has touched her. She has become a new creation. I can hardly contain myself even within the prison walls—for God showed up right there, on time, in the prison and offered redeeming love—and she knew a life she had never known! “See everything has become new” (2 Corinthians 5: 17).

BLOOD OF JESUS, TRIUMPHAL SONG OF LIBERATION

For years, Sisters of the Precious Blood have gathered at the site of every homicide in our city to pray over the earth that has been stained by human blood. More and more members of our Dayton/Trotwood community are gathering in the circle with us as they too hear the cry of the blood as it soaks into our streets and alleys. Diverse in age, race, culture and religious beliefs, we stand together and proclaim hope even in the midst of violence and death. We look to what is to come. We hope to reassure the families and friends of the victims that in time all things will be new and all things will be reconciled through the Blood of Jesus. In the meantime we stand with them as a life-giving, reconciling silent presence.

BLOOD OF JESUS, PULSING IN THE BODIES OF OUR YOUTH

Walking with these sisters and brothers, challenges me every day to look at my own life. Can I forgive myself and accept God's redeeming love? Do I accept the personal, daily deaths as gifts to bring the chaos in my own life into a place of peace and new life? Can I allow God to remove my old skin of control, insensitivity, resentment and give me a new heart, new skin? I wait on God to touch me and remind me that I am redeemed, stained by the Precious Blood and the human blood of my brothers and sisters killed on our streets, sent to the those without a voice, those who feel they have no "home," those who are groaning for a new life.

BLOOD OF JESUS, CLEANSING US IN RECONCILIATION

Walking with these brothers and sisters, also challenges me to look at our religious, civic and church communities. What would be different if we allowed God to bring light into our areas of darkness, allowed God to take off our old skin, our old ways of being, allowed God to whisper a new word, to transform us and open us up to new possibilities, new places, and new ways of being with one another?

BLOOD OF JESUS, FLOWING IN THE VEINS OF EVERY RACE AND PEOPLE

Five of us Precious Blood Sisters were asked to live on the campus of a residential home for thirty-six single Mothers and their very young children. Many of these women have never felt safe or really loved. Their bodies have been abused, their hearts broken, their souls buried in shame and pain. They come to The Glen searching for a new way, for hope, and for acceptance. Slowly they find their way into a relationship with God and

they are transformed—you can gradually see them becoming a new creation. They experience this God who loves them unconditionally and they begin to shed their past. They hear the words of Jesus in their own hearts: “No one threw a stone; no one condemned you? Neither do I.”

They who were once far off from this God of love, now begin to trust and to surrender. Hearts soften, energy levels rise, laughter resounds through the halls and Mothers hold their children close and pray for this precious gift.

Whoever you are, where ever your ministry, you meet those with whom you walk in the darkness, those who are reaching for love, maybe not through jail bars, but maybe from the church pews, the classroom desk, the hospital bed, the house next door and even within your own house.

Can you hear the groaning?

Listen.

Sometimes, it is hard to see the heart changes and we miss the miracles. But when we do witness human transformation, we can only cry out:

BLOOD OF JESUS, THE NEW CREATION



Donna Liette, is a Dayton Sister of Precious the Precious Blood. She is the Spiritual Director for the staff and residents at The Glen at St. Joseph in Dayton OH. The Glen is a residential home for single Mothers and their very young children. Prior to this ministry, she directed a residential home for formerly incarcerated women. She is also a member of the Precious Blood Homicide Prayer Vigil Collaborative.

For Reflection

- ❑ What Scripture passages speak to you of one being made new by a touch, a glance, a word?
- ❑ Is there a groaning within you for the birthing of something new in your ministry, your community, your family, or your very self? How could you whisper the word that might give form to a new creation?
- ❑ Where in your spiritual journey have you experienced your old skin being made new again? Is it time for a skin make over?
- ❑ When have you had the awesome experience of seeing another be restored to a new creation and what was your response?

The New Creation: Cultivating a Capacity for Memory and Imagination

Alan Hartway, CPPS

I have discovered that in my life, I need forests. Perhaps from my northern Wisconsin origins in the Chequamegon National Forest, I acquired this need for the dense darkness of the canopy of trees and late night drives to shine for deer on County Road FF on the way to the Flambeau Flowage.

One of my favorite places has become the Olympic National Rainforest of Washington, west of Seattle. I used to drive there when visiting my sister. The enormous trees obscure the sky from the forest floor below, while another part litters the forest floor with ancient, fallen trees from the furious winds. The greenness borders on a kind of intoxication and overwhelm of lichens, mosses, and grasses so dense one wonders how the deer, elk, and even the bear are able to negotiate this wall of green. The annual rainfall is as much as fifteen feet—yes, feet—of rain. In long and slow drives (and I can actually drive slowly), one beholds the coming-into-being and passing-out-of-being of the natural world. Creation seems particularly present, as well death and destruction, all in a clutter and chaos that makes real what Heraclitus wrote, “Nature loves to hide.” While she is at once vibrantly present, she also paradoxically hides the process of her creative work. This seems true about our own lives; creation surges in and around us, while some part of the work remains obscured.

This forest environment tends to bring us to a contemplative state about these things almost naturally. We know that some poet has written words more eloquent than any we would propose to describe this and that some photographer has long since exactly captured the mood and spirit of the trees in ways beyond my own Kodak capacity. The silence of the deep

forest becomes the silence of our thoughts and hearts in the presence of such a wonder. Some of us may need the ocean and others the mountains and even some the vast horizons of the high plains to come to the same

The silence of the deep forest becomes the silence of our thoughts and hearts in the presence of such a wonder.

experience. But it is all the same. We find ourselves in the presence of creation in some deep way that stirs our inner most selves, renews us, and gives a surge to our hearts.

Making All Things New

But just exactly what is happening to us, why does it happen, and how might we repeat this experience and apply it to our lives? We come away renewed—and in some ways, even completely made new—from these experiences. This occurs between us and the natural world and between ourselves in the human community and even between us and the divine order of things.

Yet something in our cultural and social experience suggests something different to us all the time. We live in a world where our imagination has been deeply shaped by Einstein and Freud. The worlds of Augustine and Aquinas and the medieval mystics have passed away. The famous equation of Einstein suggests a single closed universe in which all that is the case is either in the form of energy or matter, $E = mc^2$. Freud likewise posits that the human person has only so much psychic energy, and so the tension created by civilization demands that the person constantly decide how to spend or reserve that energy. Again, the system is closed.

The Christian has the imaginative capacity for a new creation. This arises from our understanding of baptism, the beginning of our lives in Christ, and is carried out through all the sacraments—in which we are new creations.

In particular, I want to reflect on two verses. St Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5, 17: “So whoever is in Christ is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold new things have come.” This verse is in the larger passage where he is introducing the idea of reconciliation, and he uses the word “reconciliation” five of the fifteen times he uses it throughout his letters. For Paul our translation of “the old things have passed away” doesn’t quite address his thought. He is speaking about “*ta archaia*,” the first things, the foundational things, original principles, indeed the original creation. He is writing about a new creation. He means us.

The other passage to connect here is from Revelation 21, 5: “The one who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold I make all things new.’” This is the only time the One on the throne, the Father, actually speaks in the entire book of Revelations, so it is rather noteworthy. I would like to nuance the translation to express more clearly and accurately the aspect of the verb to be, “Behold, I am repeatedly, habitually, and progressively making all things new.”

These passages engage a debate about creation in the ancient world as much as in the modern world. The Greeks were either unsure of or deeply skeptical of such a prospect as creation in

the first place. From Anaximander, the pre-Socratic philosopher, a line of thinking begins that the world is fundamentally orderly and purposive. The tradition does not speak about beginnings in the sense of a creation *ex nihilo*.

The Greeks would have been disturbed by the concept of zero. This permeates most of the classical world. Most of us pretty much believe this today, many without needing to think about any creation that took place or the involvement of anything like a God. The “big bang” and Gaia theories hold sway in the modern imagination.

Plato in the *Timaeus* and *Theataetus* dialogues introduces a discussion of the possibility of creation but does not give a final pronouncement on the question. Their cosmology obscures or dances around the topic of creation. Hesiod in the *Theogony* describes something, albeit Chaos along with Eros, as already in place. Even in the Eddic north, the mythological landscape begins as Tolkien translates it:

*Of old was an age
When was emptiness,
There was sand nor sea
Nor surging waves;
Unwrought was Earth,
Unroofed was heaven—
An abyss yawning,
And no blade of grass.*

*The Christian has the
imaginative capacity
for a new creation.*

Genesis itself opens with a description of the moment of creation when the Spirit or wind/breath of God hovers over something, the Hebrew being obscure regarding just exactly what this is.

So when the Christians make their statements, they are saying something new and at once shattering of a certain world view. Paul’s

formulation in particular is in the rhetoric of exclamation in a particularly poignant way in Greek. He exclaims and then emphasizes the exclamation just to be clear.

Implications of a New Creation for Today

This has implications in our daily lives. For us, it is easier either not to think about these things at all; or we like a world that is orderly and purposive. When something or someone comes along and disturbs what we think is central to our notion of order and purpose, we are troubled by the violation. This happens to us every day when habits, routines, expectations, and promises are not kept or broken. Either we do these things ourselves or someone has done them to us. So much so that when these things happen, and they inevitably do, we tend to lack the imaginative capacity to allow for this change, get ourselves stuck, and do not know our own way out or over to some new place or way of being with ourselves or others, to say nothing of God. The insight from these two verses is that some new creation is possible, and that it is from God through the means of reconciliation, as Paul goes on to explain in the rest of the passage.

Reconciliation is *katalagete*, a word of two parts in Greek. The preposition means “across,” implying a movement from an old place to a new place and at the same time containing a sense of integrated wholeness, a connective tissue. It also suggests something foundational, underlying the movement. “*Allasso*” is a verbal root that has the linguistic range of “to throw,” “to move,” and “to carry.” Two times Paul adds yet another preposition on the front of this word, “*apo-*” that yet heightens the sense of motion with a sense of “other,” and to some extent “above.” It is difficult to achieve an English counterpart that is not awkward, but it may have the feel and sense of “motion over and across from a former place to a new place.” Finally for Paul there is an awareness that this is not from ourselves but from God. This is grace.

The human person receives this grace by disposition of love, joy, tears, memory, and imagination. Each of these requires a capacity to manifest our most fundamental humanity both within and for our own selves and within and for others.

The human person receives this grace by disposition of love, joy, tears, memory, and imagination. Each of these requires a capacity to manifest our most fundamental humanity both within and for our own selves and within and for others.

One of the deepest and most challenging reconciliations today regards the human species and the environment. Our deepest humanity can only be present if and when we stand in a new relationship and integration with the natural world, indeed from and with a cosmic perspective. The cosmos and nature will always manifest its most excellent self just as it is. It is we ourselves who, standing in a false oppositional relationship with nature, lack the imaginative capacity to place ourselves within and for nature. We inherited the world view of Victorian England and place ourselves over and above nature as its highest and most superior creation. We continue to mistranslate, or minimally translate, “dominion over all created being,” in Genesis as a hierarchical authority. A better word might be “sway over creation” in the sense of continuous and coherent caring relationship with creation, or even better, to understand the cultural context of ancient kingship, from which part of this language comes (the other parts come from an incipient theologizing) in terms of the language of care and tending as the primary function of rule.

Thus we remember our place and know it and then have the capacity of imagination to wonder about ourselves in a very new and different place within and for creation. Then if one is paying any attention at all to the movement of memory and imagination, the experience then is one of tears. The classical world called this *lacrimae rerum*, “the tears of things.” This opens up new pores in the person, and as things flow out in a purgation/purification, not to wash anything away, but to bring us to a deeper and more intense experience of an authentic manifestation of self—who we are both within and for ourselves.

That the modern world desensitizes us, limits our capacity to manifest in this way, should not surprise us. An example of this is the modern comedy that does not lead us at all to joy, as a kind of laughter, so we tend more to laugh “at” and not laugh “with.” St Thomas Aquinas says, “Joy is the most noble human act.” There’s nothing noble about the laughter of reality television. Tears and joy open up the portals of the senses to perceive and to be with the world in a new way. The newness lies just exactly in the fact that the flow of energy is both connective and receptive. This is grace, and it is the means and the goal of the soul’s spiritual journey.

New Wine for a New Creation

Let me attempt to situate this within the historical context of our precious blood spirituality. In his Fifth Circular Letter (1831) St. Gaspar reflects on the soul and her journey to spiritual perfection. He writes of the invitation to the banquet hall of the “peace-loving and meek

king.” This figure is the lover in the Song of Songs, and the banquet hall is more closely translated as the wine cellar (Song 2, 4). St. Gaspar connects the food and drink, the mystical wine, to the source of our renewal. He combines quotes from Psalm 104, 14b-15, “You bring bread from the earth, and wine to gladden our hearts, oil to make our faces gleam, food to build our strength,” and Psalm 60, 3 “You have allowed your people to suffer, to drink a wine that makes us reel.” He offers an unusual interpretation of this verse, “. . . in the spiritual order, blessed is he (sic) who is inebriated with the celestial and holy love, symbolized by the choicest wines of the vineyards of En-gedi.” This wine is new. Something new happens to us in this wine cellar.

This experience of inebriation and union of the lovers occurs in the wine cellar. The wine cellar for St. Gaspar is the unitive prayer most

desired to sustain the work of the missionary. The wine cellar is at the center of the vineyard, which is the work place; it is the garden where life and death repeats its cyclical drama. But into the wine cellar, where the work comes to fruition and the wonder of transformation takes place, the harvested grapes are brought in, crushed, and created into something entirely new, wine!

The wine cellar for St. Gaspar is the unitive prayer most desired to sustain the work of the missionary. The wine cellar is at the center of the vineyard, which is the work place; it is the garden where life and death repeats its cyclical drama.

This wine is grace itself. We are the workers, the grapes, and the new wine.

In this Fifth Letter, St. Gaspar becomes very intimate and almost overly poetic about what is happening and needs to happen to the soul, to the missionary. The letter is rich with his imagination, memory, joy, and love. These are the graces impelled and urged upon us by the love of Christ, not our love of Christ, but very precisely that Christ loves us. This grace comes when we are lethargic, immobilized, stuck, and unsubmitting to the prospects of new creation. It is in contemplative prayer that my memory and imagination allow for the possibilities of new creation. My old self can be set aside. The “I” gives way to a new space.

When God created the cosmos, Genesis tells us that God did so with Word. In order to speak this new word for the first time, God withdrew God’s self to allow and give space to this creation, beginning with light. Our contemplative prayer enables us to give way to this same space for ourselves, for others and for God to act within our lives, with the result being an entirely new creation. The old ego (“little self”) dissolves in this

kind of space, this wine cellar. I'm wondering if the Song of Songs and St. Gaspar would go so far as to say "crushed" because that is what happens to grapes in a wine cellar, so that the wine that emerges is something and someone new, a new creation. We've perhaps become too enamored with the beauty of the original grape. It becomes a sort of dinner party set piece that is merely decorative and not for use in the middle of the table, and in some cases even a wax, wooden, or plastic grape, so that it always stays the same and is "perfect" with the perfection of the factory where it was made and not the reality of an authentic and serviceable grape for eating and for wine.

*It is in contemplative prayer
that my memory and
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possibilities of new creation.*

This happens to us in reconciliation and in pardon. I am particularly struck by Raimon Panikkar's comments on this in his *The Experience of God*. He strangely calls pardon an act of "de-creation." It is a complete un-doing, so that something entirely new might come about. He describes pardoning as something different from excusing or the withdrawal of demands for retribution. It is that pardoning is irrational and not anything from the personal self. On our own it is unlikely that we should do such a thing. He attributes its presence entirely to the Holy Spirit. He writes, "Someone who has been capable of pardoning has certainly encountered God" (123). To pardon has a quality that is not from the self, but from the other, that contains spontaneity and liberation. "The experience of pardon shatters all our plans, those of the intelligence and those of the will" (123). He goes on to explain how this doesn't happen in the "big" moments of life and history, but in the daily moments, in between, in a microcosmic way, where the Holy Spirit can wedge its grace into our lives and work from the inside out.

It seems true that most of this doesn't happen in very dramatic or crucial historical moments at all as Panikkar adds, but it is often subtle and slow within us. It happens in the density and thickness of life, as in a forest. But I have to show up for it. My showing up is the activation of memory that this has happened before and my imagination that it can happen again. Hence the need for forests, oceans, mountains, high plains, and more frequently something as simple and deliberative as cooking or washing the dishes, planting a garden, and all the stuff of daily life. I don't know that I like my life to be shattered very often or that I can bear frequently the inebriation of the forest's intimacy. But I do know that when it happens, it can happen so deeply that a shift occurs, a kind of quaking, out of which we

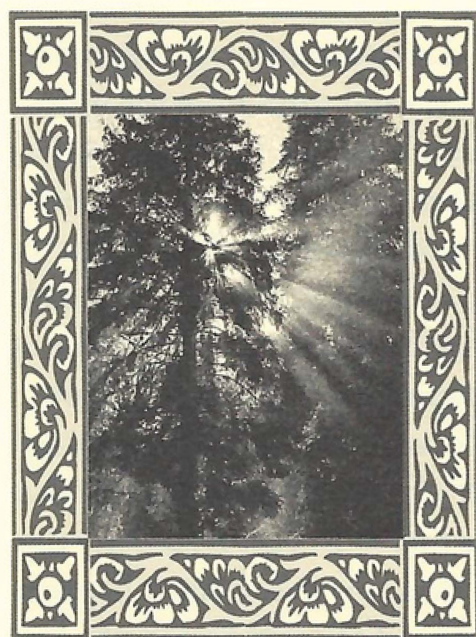
can not only be renewed, but be new altogether, and not only ourselves, but space appears for others to be new, too. This is what happens in the wine cellar between the lovers. It is this experience, this possibility of newness of creation that urges us humans on to love and to en-joy, the joy in all. If we can get this, this work of ours, we are all a new creation.



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For Reflection

- ❑ Where do you find the space or location in your life where the contemplative movement leads you to something new?
- ❑ Narrate an example of pardon in your life where the old creation was completely undone and something new was created?
- ❑ How and why do you believe a new creation is possible in your life?
- ❑ In what ways or when have you welcomed this grace of reconciliation into your life?
- ❑ What happens to you in the wine cellar of contemplative prayer?



Where do you find the space or location in your life where the contemplative movement leads you to something new?