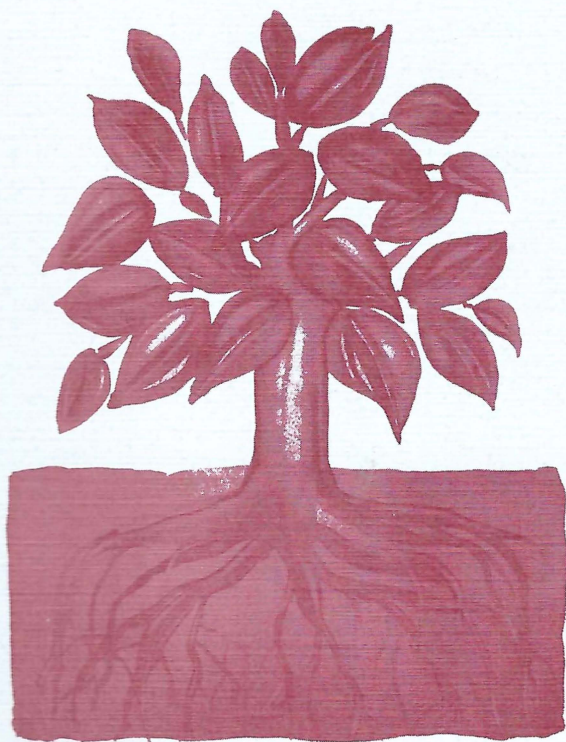


An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality



THE WINE CELLAR

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Roots & Branches

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From The Wine Cellar

by Keith Branson, C.P.P.S.

Anniversaries are exciting times in life. It's a reason to bring long parted friends and family together to touch common roots, share old stories, and reconnect souls. They give us a chance to get back to basics and remember where we come from, what the foundational values of our lives are, and where our common journey is leading us. Looking back and reconnecting is a blessed time, more than walking the sacred halls of memory: they can be a sacramental moment that incarnates a past event in a timeless way to make it a source of future growth. Touching Gaspar 200 years later can give us divine energy to move forward as Precious Blood people.

This issue of *The Wine Cellar* is unique, and not just because it's the first one under my editorship. To remember the history of our beginnings, of Gaspar's origins, and the foundation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood on August 15, 1815, several of the main articles are drawn from Fr. Richard Bayuk's thesis, *A Thousand Tongues: Proclaiming Christ in the Mystery of His Blood*. It was written in 1998 as part of his course of study at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Missouri. The first two chapters of this work are an extensive history of the origins of Precious Blood spirituality drawn from many classic sources and documents in our community's libraries. Three articles drawn from the thesis project follow important storylines in our history.

The first article in this issue explores some of the roots of Gaspar's spirituality in Salesian practice and in popular preachers responding to Enlightenment ideas through mission ministry and in two emerging communities in 18th century Italy. The second article by Saint Joseph, Missouri companion Frances Flanagan highlights the role Don Francesco Albertini had in Gaspar's life, particularly in the years of their imprisonment, as they envisioned the foundation of Precious Blood religious communities for men and for women flowing from the lay association Albertini founded. Fr. Bayuk returns in the third article to tell of the development of Gaspar's preaching in light of his times and his developing charism of the Precious Blood, and how Gaspar arrived at parish missions as his main means of evangelization. The next article by

Fr. Bayuk portrays the growth of the sacramental imagination through the devotions of Gaspar's time to today's Precious Blood spirituality, assimilating our charism into the central act of our faith: the Eucharist. Part of the thesis is a collection of voices from near the turn of the century, when the 20th century became the 21st. Fr. Bayuk organized interviews and focus groups of incorporated members and companions to explore what Precious Blood spirituality meant and how it was lived in the late 1990s. The fourth article is a compilation of these voices, and includes as well, quotes from various Precious Blood publications during those years.

To conclude this issue, I will attempt to introduce a new voice into the stream of our conversation on our spirituality: Pope Francis.

The Precious Blood community around the world will continue to bear witness to the saving power of Christ beyond the anniversary celebrations of the Missionaries in 2015. *The Wine Cellar* will continue as an anthology of Precious Blood thought, a place where we can share extended reflections, scholarship, poetry and art to help our sacred vintage ripen and blossom in our hearts. Our autumn edition will revisit the topic of Reconciliation, and we will seek contributions from around the Precious Blood family. At our table, all are welcome, and this is a standard I will try to live by.

We began this "Wine Cellar" journey together under Fr. Joseph Nassal's leadership in 1994, and continue it now in this time of renewal for the Church. It's an exciting time to be a Missionary of the Precious Blood, to be part of any Precious Blood congregation. I hope our sharing in the Chalice of Life will continue to bring us together in faith, share our stories and dreams, and proclaim the merits of the Most Precious Blood of Christ.



In Search of Gaspar's Roots

by Richard Bayuk, C.P.P.S.

This article is a small extract from the first chapter of Fr. Bayuk's thesis, with some additional material by the editor.

Gaspar del Bufalo was born into a poor Catholic family in Rome on January 6, 1786, the feast of the Epiphany. He lived in the waning years of the Enlightenment, during a time Europeans attempted to free themselves from reliance on authority, tradition, and the accepted opinion regarding human nature and the world. The Reformation attempted to respond to the search for autonomy within a context of the relationship to God; the Enlightenment asserted human reason rather than divine grace as the principal force supporting human thought and action.

There are at least three influences that helped shape Gaspar's spirituality and approach to ministry that are helpful to examine. The first is the figure of Saint Francis de Sales; the second, the experiences of two mission-oriented communities that were founded in the 18th century with similar spiritualities and pastoral approaches to the Missionaries of the Precious Blood; and the third is Romanticism, the cultural movement that arose in response to the Enlightenment.



St. Francis de Sales

The tradition which advocated the cultivation of divine love on the part of laity found a notable proponent in Francis de Sales, the bishop of Geneva in the early 17th century. Pierre Pourrat writes: "St. Francis de Sales forms a school of spirituality by himself alone. He is its beginning, its development, its sum-total" (*Christian Spirituality: Later Developments. Part I: From the Renaissance to Jansenism*). In addition, he is seen as a bridge between the Renaissance and the modern period, a strong influence on spirituality now.

If one were to sum up the spirituality of Francis de Sales in words, two in particular could be chosen: optimism and confidence. His confidence in God is paralleled by his confidence in the natural goodness of humankind.

Francis believed the devout life is an interior life, one that should be lived according to each person's profession and vocation. Perfection is attainable by each in accordance with their personal strength and responsibilities. Perhaps one of his more significant contributions was unifying Christian morality and holiness under the bond of charity.

The revival of devotion to the Precious Blood in Gaspar's time was fueled in part by a reaction to Jansenism with its stern images of God. In the 16th century, many thought of God in terms of control and power, but Francis emphasized God's mercy, goodness, and love. Human liberty is immersed in plentiful and unfailing grace. People do not lose their souls because grace fails them, but rather because they themselves fail grace.

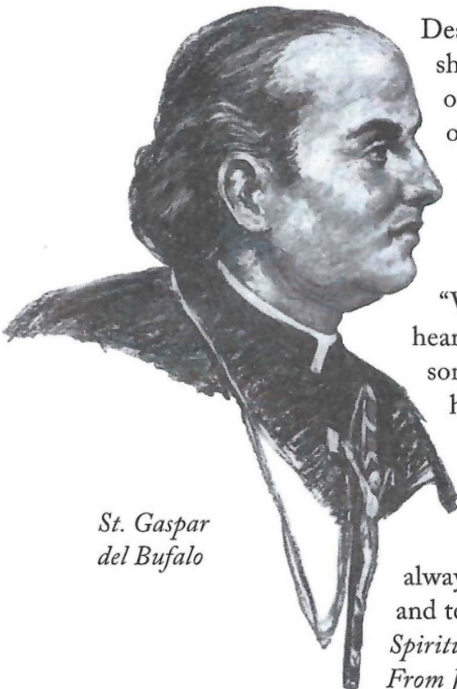
Francis conceived of a vastly merciful and good God, who would never turn away from a sinner, no matter how depraved the behavior. If one were to sum up the spirituality of Francis de Sales in words, two in particular could be chosen: optimism and confidence. His confidence in God is paralleled by his confidence in the natural goodness of humankind. For him, God was always the "One who does not want to damn" and who gives to every person sufficient grace; everything Francis wrote is based on an optimistic conception of grace and salvation.

John Colacino, C.P.P.S. has documented the influence of Salesian spirituality upon Gaspar (*At the Heart of the Christian Life: The Charism of Gaspar del Bufalo as the Basis for a Lay Spirituality*). He outlines the fundamental principles of this spirituality: a universal vocation to Christian holiness; the importance of spiritual direction and friendship for growth in holiness; emphasis on confidence in God's goodness along with the need to conform the human will to the divine (an approach which is opposition to the pessimism of both Calvinism and Jansenism); identification of Christian

perfection and holiness with the love of God; and regard for a lifestyle rich in interpersonal relationships, characterized by virtues such as gentleness, simplicity, meekness, humility, patience and cheerfulness. It is these five pillars of this spirituality which constitute for its adherents the “devout life.”

These same pillars colored Gaspar’s life and teachings and appear in the counsel and rules he gave the first members. The Society of the Precious Blood can claim Salesian spirituality as its own, and it is this aspect of the Gasparian charism that gives to the Bond of Charity a certain particular quality.

Two contemporary Italian communities founded in the early 18th century with similar spiritualities and apostolates were the Passionists and the Redemptorists; both engaged in the preaching apostolate. For Paul of the Cross, the cross was the focal point of his mystical journey and the basis of the spirituality of his Congregation of the Passion. Alphonsus Ligouri’s Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer was “an original organization combining contemplation and action. While one section of the religious prayed and meditated...the rest went out...evangelizing the countryside, preaching...fighting with word and pen against the ideas of the Jansenists and the philosophers” (Jean Canu, “Religious Orders of Men,” *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism*).



*St. Gaspar
del Bufalo*

Despite the fact that Ligouri’s formation was shaped by a harsh Christianity (he remarked on one occasion that Jansenism “makes God out to be a tyrant”), he found this view too disconcerting for him. It was not what he was to preach as a priest. Pierre Pourrat writes:

“What he wanted to do was to inspire his hearers with his own burning convictions and something of that divine love with which his own heart was on fire.... St. Alphonsus certainly did not preach Christianity according to Saint-Cyran and Jansen. He could instill a salutary fear into sinners; but he never discouraged them, and he always held up before their eyes the goodness and tenderness of God’s mercy” (*Christian Spirituality: Later Developments. Part II: From Jansenism to Modern Times*).

The church found itself losing the rural poor as she attempted to retain contact with the new urban middle class. The Redemptorists and Passionists broke away from the prevailing trend, as they found their first mission fields in remote mountain villages, forbidding swamplands, and among those to whom deism had no meaning. Paul and Alphonsus were revolutionaries, who “totally rejected the idea that Christianity was rational and did their best to evoke storms of sentiment, paroxysms of love.... To shake man to the heart, not to convince him in his mind, was what they aimed at in their missions” (Werner Stark, *The Sociology of Religion: A Study of Christendom*).

Outstanding missionary preachers like Vincent de Paul, Alphonsus Ligouri, Paul of the Cross, and Leonard of Port Maurice moved people during the eighteenth century by their emphasis on the Passion of Christ. Many others in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries promoted the love of the crucified Christ. This brought about a continued and steady increase in the number and type of devotion accorded both to the Passion and to individual phases and instruments of Christ’s suffering. The Precious Blood was one of these devotions.

This development was likely in part a reaction to the Jansenism making inroads in the Italian peninsula. A God of unbounded love, seeking to hold humanity close was an effective counterpoint to the stern, unforgiving and distant image of God competing for attention. Given the political turmoil and economic hardship of the time, the message of an angry deity only made the misery worse.

In addition the second stream, Romanticism, was becoming a conservative reaction to what remained of the Enlightenment. As nations moved from political systems of absolute monarchy toward republicanism, from a rural to an urban economy, these profound changes brought about a desire for a more unified existence to counter the experience of alienation and fragmentation. Romanticism was embodied in literature by authors such as William Wordsworth, Percy Shelley, and Lord Byron, in music by composers such as Ludwig van Beethoven and Hector Berlioz, and in art by painters such as Eugene Delacroix and William Blake. It rejected rules and rationality and celebrated raw human emotion, the beauty and power of nature, and noble aesthetic solitude, the confrontation of life on its own terms. Its spirituality tended toward extreme expressiveness, the overwhelming sacredness of the cosmos, and a generalized concept of deity, such as expressed in Friedrich Schiller’s poem *Ode to Joy*, and set to music by Beethoven.

All of this influenced Gaspar and others of his time. The rationalism of the Enlightenment did not allow for the consideration of revelation, and a denial of revelation was a denial of incarnation and redemption. Gaspar sought to counter the teaching of rationalists and romanticists. They insisted on the innocence of humankind and its need for no more than good instruction and knowledge of the good in order to do what is good. He emphasized the dignity of human beings, the love of God for his people, the evil of sin, and all this by emphasizing, by concentrating on the mystery of the Blood shed by the incarnate word for our salvation. The influences of de Sales' spirituality and Passionist and Redemptorist missiology molded Gaspar's approach to ministry as he navigated between the extremes of Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic emotional excess.

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In reply to your most esteemed letter, I say to you that you should not cease removing these thoughts from your mind. Select a single director upon whom you can depend, according to the advice of de Sales, for in doing this you make him the basis for your peace and tranquility in God. The devil would like to have you at one time make a judgment about this matter in one way and at another time, in another way. You must do nothing else than make an act of humility in the presence of God. Turn your thoughts to Paradise, to the divine loveableness, and nothing more. In short, may I express myself in this way, down with your intellectual rationalizations. Surrender your heart to God, for in this lies everything.

-Gaspar del Bufalo to Mr. Tommaso Meloni, July 10, 1825, #1202

Albertini the Rock

by Frances Flanagan

In Saint Gaspar del Bufalo's long line of God-loving and supportive friends, Don Francesco Albertini stands near the head. The two Romans were friends by 1808, when Albertini had been a priest for approximately fifteen years, and Gaspar, already a canon at the Church of San Marco, was approaching ordination. A strong friendship soon blossomed and continued until 1819, when recently ordained Bishop Albertini died as a result of an illness.

Albertini's support of Gaspar and the Missionaries lasted beyond his passing: through the effects of his spiritual directorship from 1810 until his death; through the memory of his wisdom, charisma, and personal example; and through his introduction to and countless presentations featuring St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622), a French bishop, theologian and Doctor of the Church. These gifts were dependent upon Albertini's gifts of patience, trust, love of Gaspar, and love of the Precious Blood, which were absolutely essential to the foundation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Gaspar was the founder, there is no doubt of that; if the Society stands upon a rock, however, that rock is Albertini.

Throughout his priestly life, Don Albertini was known to be a holy man: aware of the presence of God within, of his own priestly dignity, and of our call to humility. He was always aware of the human dignity of everyone and of the universal need for love. He found ways to serve the poor, and was doing so when Gaspar was still young enough to pass food from the Altieri kitchen—where Antonio, his father, was a cook—to the poor outside the window. Seminarians and priests in need of additional formation were close to his heart. He was also a scholar with a doctorate in theology and wrote on religious matters. Of great interest to us is his passionate and unflagging love for the Precious Blood and a desire to spread that love to others. Supporting that desire, he had written the “Chaplet of the Precious Blood,” possibly not long before he and Gaspar met.

When Albertini came into Gaspar's life—at least by mid-1808—Albertini was one of several canons attached to the Church of St. Nicholas in Carcere in Rome. St. Nicholas displayed a relic of the Precious Blood in the body of the church, which may have prompted Albertini and other canons to found the Conference of the Most Precious Blood, which was to grow into the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. Gaspar—who had been a priest for only three months but had become a respected preacher while he was still in the seminary—was asked to speak at the Mass of Inauguration, held on December 8, 1808.

This day was undoubtedly a luminous occasion for all participants, and for the young speaker, a thought-provoking one as well. While Albertini had long standing devotion to the Precious Blood, Gaspar was still searching for the way to combine his missionary goal of giving direct help to the poor—both to alleviate their suffering in this life and to give them a spiritual foundation for the next—with a way to

Throughout his priestly life, Don Albertini was known to be a holy man: aware of the presence of God within, of his own priestly dignity, and of our call to humility.

grow spiritually and aesthetically himself. It would be hard to believe that the preparation of the sermon for the occasion, and the aura of the day itself, did not move Gaspar toward a deeper feeling for the Precious Blood than before. How this seed would have developed in normal times can only be a surmise: within two years Napoleon had taken over the Papal States, exiled Pope Pius VII, and reached down into the lower levels of the Roman clergy to force compliance the new regime.

When Gaspar's turn came to take the oath of obedience to Napoleon, he could not, would not comply. Shortly afterwards, he was on his way to exile and imprisonment. Albertini was deported at the same time, in the same carriage, to the same destination: Piacenza.

After suffering through the experience of the journey and the difficulties of their early housing, the two exiles were able to live in moderate comfort. Nevertheless, after about three months Gaspar became so ill that he was given Last Rites. Albertini then decided the time had come for Gaspar to hear the details of a vision Pallotine Sister Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato shared with him: Albertini was to meet a young man, “a great apostle” who was devoted to St. Francis Xavier—as Gaspar was—and who would found two religious communities, one for men and one for women. Both would be dedicated to the Precious Blood.

Almost immediately after hearing about it, Gaspar began to improve, and in a few days he was up and about. As time went on, he seemed to be comfortable, even happy, with the idea of becoming a founder of two religious communities. Perhaps the greatest effect of the incident was the bonding of the two like-minded men that continued to develop as they considered plans for turning Sister Maria Agnes' vision into a reality.

Soon after Gaspar's return to his normal state of health, both he and Albertini were transferred to Bologna. It was there in late 1810 and during most of 1811 Albertini's spiritual directorship flourished: he established a schedule for Gaspar's daily life. For spiritual reading, Albertini often chose a work from one of his own great favorites, St. Francis de Sales, or something on the Passion and the cross. He also relied upon these favorites when he gave lectures, not only to Gaspar, but also to any other detainees who showed interest in his themes.

Despite the tight schedule, Gaspar still had time to dream about and plan for a future for the two communities. He even found time to write rules for the institute for women he could now foresee. Certainly Albertini was beside him to help with the planning—and much of the dreaming as well.

In December of 1811, Albertini was transferred to a dreaded prison in Corsica; Gaspar was left in Northern Italy where he was imprisoned in one place after another. By early 1814, however, an amazing reversal occurred: Napoleon was on his way to exile while Gaspar was free to return to Rome. Albertini's imprisonment lasted a few months beyond Gaspar's. When Albertini returned to Rome, he immersed himself in his highly favored activity of spreading devotion to the Precious Blood.

Astonishingly, Gaspar attempted to join the Jesuits, whom he had loved and admired since his early childhood. The Jesuits accepted him, but when Gaspar went to Pope Pius VII to seek permission, the answer was "No." The pope learned ahead of time (some say through Albertini) Gaspar would be making that request, and his brief answer was well prepared. Gaspar was to stay at home to "promote the new evangelization," which was described as the "moment's emergency." In fact, he was to become a missionary, not only in the Papal States, but also in regions beyond.

After that, Gaspar may never have looked back. Perhaps it might be said that he had found what he was looking for; perhaps when the Pope spoke, it was if God had spoken.

With his own future pathway decided, and Albertini never out of reach, Gaspar set about the task of turning dreams and plans into reality. First

of all, the society had to have members: missionaries, or men who would become missionaries. Gaspar turned to Bonanni's "Gospel Workers"; some showed interest. Perhaps he thought he could also get support through the now about-to-be designated Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. This hope must have been at least as strong in Albertini's heart as in Gaspar's, since it fit in perfectly with Albertini's lifelong pursuit of devotion to the Precious Blood.

Another need was a mission house: a home. In Gaspar's plans, the missionaries must live and work together, loving God and loving each other so much that the world could see their love—a love so strong that it would become an irresistible force in leading others to salvation. With the help of Gaspar's new friend, Msgr. Belisarius Cristaldi (later a Cardinal), the ancient and beautiful monastery of San Felice, near Giano, fell into his hands.

So it came to pass: on August 15, 1815, the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood was established at San Felice. There were four members. Thanks be to Gaspar...and to Albertini, too.

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Gaspar the Developing Preacher

by Richard Bayuk, C.P.P.S.

Gaspar's initial exposure to Precious Blood spirituality was within the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. It is significant that the purpose of this group was both devotional and apostolic. As Michele Colagiovanni, C.P.P.S. explains,

...it was not all directed to a personal way of faith, but was to have a social impact as well. The very nature of the chief devotion, that to the Most Precious Blood, led to social awareness. In fact, one cannot contemplate the shedding of the redemptive Blood without feeling obligated to make it fruitful. And the universal goal of the blood sheddings must necessarily keep one from drawing back into oneself. Besides, the connotation of "most precious" was very well adapted to impose a "thrifty" concreteness, which could not let that precious Blood be wasted ("The Formation of the Missionary According to the Rule of Our Founder," *The Charism of St. Gaspar: Three Studies*).

Gaspar's pre-exile life was zealous, deeply spiritual, yet parochial in outlook. On his return from exile, the missionary aspect of his spirituality became central. This development toward a missionary focus seems to have resulted from give-and-take with Albertini and others. It's not entirely clear when during their association Gaspar's eventual missionary impetus was *motivated* by a spirituality of the Precious Blood.

The other important influence on Gaspar's missionary spirituality was Gaetano Bonnani, one of the first four who formed the initial mission house at Giano. In his correspondence with Bonnani from exile, Gaspar was concerned about the work he had left behind, especially catechizing the poor. He consistently encouraged the ongoing work in his absence. For this purpose, Bonnani promoted the foundation of "Evangelical Workers" to preach missions, a plan Gaspar enthusiastically supported. John Klopke,

C.P.P.S. wrote that: "As neat and clear as we would like to see the spirituality of the Precious Blood operative in Gaspar's early life, it seems that this is not so. It seems that only with (Cardinal Belisario) Cristaldi's suggestion... that Gaspar name the fledgling community of missionaries in honor of the Precious Blood that something clicked in Gaspar's mind" (*Essays in Honor of St. Gaspar del Bufalo*).

In a letter to Bonnani after his return from exile, dated March 1, 1815, Gaspar said:

Mons. Cristaldi has been begging me to put our community under the title of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus. He makes this observation with every good reason. The Evangelical Workers labor so that the Blood of Jesus will be applied to the salvation of souls, and this they must offer continually, asking for pardon for sinners; if other Institutes assume the charge of propagating the one or the other devotion, this one of the Missions must be intent on the propagation of that devotion which incorporates all the others, that of the Price of our Redemption. *Per sanguinem salvi facti sumus*. I could do nothing but praise the intention of this Prelate, and making his principles my own, from now on our community is committed to the merits of the Blood of Jesus.

Gaspar's primary interest was in preaching, which came independently of the devotion to the Precious Blood. Spirituality and devotion centered on the Blood of Christ articulated and expressed this focus. It wasn't an intimate connection between Precious Blood spirituality and ministry that led Gaspar initially to the apostolate of preaching. Eventually there came to be a profound connection because he continued to preach until his death as his spirituality developed and took on a strong Precious Blood emphasis.

From the time of the community's founding in 1815 until his death in 1837, Gaspar remained a faithful and indefatigable preacher and evangelizer. He lived and preached during a time when Catholicism was beginning another renewal. This new vitality expressed itself in part through the emergence of new religious orders, and the Society was one of



many inaugurated during the hundred years beginning in 1815. Many of the congregations founded during this time period are referred to by historians as teaching or missionary congregations, usually established to address very specific social needs, especially those of the poor and otherwise neglected elements of a society. It was not uncommon for a congregation's charism to be directly related to some popular contemporary devotion, then be directed outward for the "mission," for the apostolate.

Gaspar was born into a society experiencing profound political upheavals. He felt deeply the difficult situation of his times, filled as it was with confusion and a miserable state of affairs. In his writings he often touches upon the social, economic and political effects of these factors, but his chief preoccupation was the moral consequences of such upheavals and the profound religious and moral crisis affecting the faithful and clergy alike.

He did more than lament the evils he witnessed; he went beyond a passive appraisal of the situation and gave his own answer to the needs of that time:

"It is necessary to call men back to penance, to sincere amendment and to God's love." At a time of general indifference and crisis in the faith, "the nourishment of God's word must be provided for all, for by it the faith has already been spread among the people and from it we expect a revival. Faith comes from hearing but hearing comes through the word of Christ."

Part of Gaspar's answer to the spiritual needs of his time was spreading devotion to the Blood of Christ:

We are presently facing times in which it is necessary to purge the entire earth "in the Blood of the Lamb." ...The Divine Blood, indeed, is the offering to be presented to the Eternal, Divine Father, for it is written, "They are making peace through the Blood of His Cross both in the heavens and on the earth." ...Through this devotion, may I say, the gates of divine mercy are opened and the only means established for reconciliation is made available.

His apostolic involvement wasn't restricted to fostering Precious Blood devotions. As Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S. says, it "consisted primarily in preaching the mystery of the Blood of Christ...which aimed at bringing souls back from a life of sin to the life of grace..." (*The Charism of St. Gaspar: Three Studies*). The focus on conversion meant the preaching ministry was closely bound to sacramental Reconciliation. Within this context, Gaspar made a choice of method: preaching missions and spiritual exercises or retreats.

First and foremost, St. Gaspar wanted his missionaries to be dedicated to preaching the Word. In the personal, communitarian and apostolic life of the missionary everything is centered around preaching. A key aspect of formation for the community was directed towards special preparation and competence regarding the Word. Conti summarizes this:

The ability to preach is among the essential qualities for the ministry of popular missions. Saint Gaspar explicitly requests this quality of those who wish to enter his Congregation: “The continuous experience of missions and spiritual exercises teaches us that those who do not like to apply themselves to the study of preaching cannot think to enter such an Institute, neither would this Institute accept them.” Every priest in the Congregation, therefore, according to the measure of Christ’s gift was to be suitable for preaching...to the different categories of people (*St. Gaspar del Bufalo: Minister of God’s Word*).

In addition to a candidate’s formation as a preacher, oratory, scripture, moral theology, and liturgy were studied as well.

Preaching Missions

Anton Loipfinger reminded the Congregation in the promulgation of the *Normative Texts*: “St. Gaspar founded the Society in order to renew the clergy and the people of God.” Michele Colagiovanni writes:

As in the past, many religious orders of men preached popular missions according to a traditional method, and some were specialists at it. But the most interesting novelty being discussed at the moment was the new congregation of priests, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.... The members...did not take vows because it was hoped that its membership would grow to include the most enterprising secular priests, men who wanted to develop a prophetic role in the bosom of the Church. With spiritual exercises and popular missions, but above all by the example of community life, the new institute intended to promote the moral uplift of the rest of the diocesan clergy, corrupt or forgetful of their proper idealism, and themselves no small contributors to the spiritual crisis in society (*Obedient Rebel: The Story of Maria De Mattias*).

In addition to Gaspar’s belief in the ability of God’s word to revive the faith of Christians, there are three significant reasons Gaspar choose the specific ministry of preaching missions and retreats: Gaspar’s apostolic charism, the efficacy of missions, and the needs of the Church in that time and place.

He talked about his readiness to be part of a group of priests devoted to popular missions in a letter from 1814: “The work of the Holy Missions has always been an object of my desire; it is true I lack those qualities that such a great ministry requires, but the divine Kindness comforts me, and His ineffable Mercy reassures my spirit.” In another place he writes: “There is always one grace which I constantly ask from God...and it is that I may always preach missions and die in this holy ministry.”

Gaspar devoted himself to a variety of apostolic tasks before his deportation; during his imprisonment he clearly recognized the charism’s potential. Pius VII appointed Gaspar to preach missions in the Papal States in September of 1814. Because he always considered himself to have a mandate from the pope, Gaspar consequently referred to himself as an apostolic missionary.

The second reason for his choice of missions was the good results they produced. The history of missions and Gaspar’s experience testified to the potential for great social and spiritual reform: they were an effective means to convert and sanctify a wide range of people, including the awakening of secular clergy to greater apostolic zeal.

Finally, Gaspar’s vocation was in harmony with the Church’s pastoral choices of that period. Parish missions came from a desire of 17th century reformers to provide more nourishing and comprehensible sermons. This goal wasn’t a simple matter: many priests before the middle of the 17th century weren’t capable of good preaching. Bishops often called on members of religious orders, who were usually better trained than secular priests, to preach mission. Some new orders were devoted specifically to preaching. Itinerant preachers had almost exclusively ministered in urban areas at first, then began to find their way as part of the Counter-Reformation’s pastoral program.

Alphonsus Ligouri and Paul of the Cross brought intensive missionary activity to southern rural Italy in the 1740s. According to Daniel-Rops, the growth of missions throughout the peninsula was a significant feature of what seemed like a second spring, until missions had become highly fashionable.

Because of political upheavals or civil prohibition, popular missions had almost ceased by the end of the 18th century. Once revolutionary turmoil ended, these missions resumed and increased. Pius VII understood the importance and value of missions to spiritual and moral reform, encouraging them especially in critical places in the Papal States. Most notable were regions being terrorized by brigands who practiced

murder, kidnapping, and other violence. In these regions, Gaspar and his companions would later minister most notably.

The mission ministry at this time was the one most favored as the best means to call people to conversion and a Christian life. Gaspar saw the need for his congregation to take on this apostolate, since there were few religious orders dedicated to this ministry in the Papal States at the time. The apostolate of missions and retreats demanded great mobility and availability of the missionaries in response to the many spiritual needs of the people. Gaspar was committed to this lifestyle: "Missionaries are not rooted to one spot like statues. They serve wherever God calls them." He was convinced missions were the best way to respond to the signs of the times and the spiritual needs of the faithful.

The missions Gaspar and his missionaries preached were a clarion call to a change of heart and renewal of the Christian life. He was inspired by missionaries before him, but his methodology was different from traditional ways. His missions got the entire population involved, and usually lasted up to two weeks. It was a "thoroughly organized machine in many aspects, terrible yet fascinating, externally choreographed and yet interiorized, with both group and individual aspects" (Colagiovanni, *Obedient Rebel: The Story of Maria De Mattias*). It is reported Gaspar possessed the ability to speak for hours with force and many ideas. Vincent Sardi writes:

Like a royal stream his speech flowed on; often he would preach for two hours at a time, often five and six sermons a day; on one occasion he even preached sixteen times. Noteworthy was the absence of repetition even though the themes were the same; there was always a new concept, a varied form.... His sermons were not filled with the vain artifices of mere human speech. He constantly recommended and practiced the principle: "Preach Christ and Him crucified" (*Gaspar del Bufalo: The Herald of the Precious Blood*).

It was Gaspar's custom to place a large crucifix before the listeners as he preached. Certainly this was the origin of the mission cross which was the most striking feature of the Missionaries' religious garb.

Gaspar always insisted on preaching that was plain, simple, and adapted to the common folk. Such simplicity of style never meant a lack of substance, however, for he emphasized the study of theology, scripture, and other disciplines. His personal knowledge was vast. In the end, though, it was his love for the devotion to the Precious Blood which fueled his preaching, the "dynamism" or "interior personal driving force" behind his work and his life. Gaspar was convinced that it is the blood of Jesus upon which everything

depends, and was concerned with the need for “effective application” of redemption through the Blood. Thus his well known statement, in several familiar variations: “I would I had a thousand tongues to make hearts sensitive to the price our redemption cost” and “Would that I had a thousand tongues to draw every soul to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus; if I could only spread this beautiful devotion with my own blood.” This was not for him a need born of sentiment, but rather an “explosion of love in the daily reality of the apostolate by the application to souls of the fruits of the redemption through missions, retreats and the means best adapted to and ‘most in keeping with the needs of the times’” (Romano Altobelli, *Community Life in Our Society According to the Charism of Our Founder*).



This title does not present anything novel, since it flows from what we see in the sacred scriptures: “Redemisti nos Domini in Sanguine tuo, et fecisti nos Deo nostro regnum et sacerdotes” (You have redeemed us, O Lord. In your blood, and you have made us for God a kingdom and priests.) We priests, therefore, are marked with the sacerdotal character in order to apply the divine Blood to souls. It is his Blood that is offered in the divine Sacrifice; it is his Blood that is the price of redemption. This is what we can present to the heavenly Father for the reconciliation of sinners. “Te ergo quaesumus tuis famulis subveni quos pretioso Sanguine redemisti.” (We, therefore, beseech you help your servants whom you have redeemed by your precious blood.) Whereas the devil would like all to be victims of justice, we ministers of the sanctuary must make known the depths of God’s mercy so that justificati in Sanguine ipsius salvi simus ab ira per ipsum. (Justified in blood, we will be saved through it.) In this devotion, we have the treasures of wisdom and holiness; in it we find comfort, peace and salvation.

-Gaspar del Bufalo to Pope Leo VII, July 29, 1825,

#1214

Tracing Our Bloodlines: Devotion and Spirituality as Expressions of Sacramental Imagination

by Richard Bayuk, C.P.P.S.

“Devotion” as a religious term is commonly understood as a certain passion or enthusiasm of affection directed to the things of God. The plural, “devotions,” or “popular devotions,” refers to external practices by which the devotion finds life and expression. Devotion carries with it a commitment to the object of the love; the word at its root does in fact mean “to vow.” It is this aspect of commitment, of extending oneself to others, that offers the best insight into the value of both devotion and devotions.

St. Gaspar had a devotion to the Precious Blood, a profound commitment. This was evidenced at times by devotional activity, but most often and most significantly in his apostolate, consisting in great part of preaching the word in order to foster renewal in Church and society. A variety of devotions continue to hold popularity today (some more or less than in former years), but a common denominator is this: they are expressive of devotion, of love and the desire to encounter God’s love. While they always carry the danger of becoming ends in themselves, at their best they are public and social in character, a reminder of the gospel which is a call to holiness and service. Properly practiced they extend the liturgical life of the church into daily life, rather than replace it.

Robert Schreiter has pointed out that our spirituality always interprets our theological foundation—appropriate to the present situation—and is in turn formative of our devotional response (including the mission or apostolate). This is made possible through our religious imagination which creates and employs images and symbols which help us to “make sense” of our situation and our tradition. The blood of Christ continues to be an example of such a symbol today, as it was for Gaspar and so many others at different times in history. Our images around this symbol have evolved to better articulate our renewed understanding and experience, but the spirituality of the blood of Christ still gives direction and identity to our ministry and shapes our entire devotional response to God’s word especially as proclaimed in Christ’s blood.

Historical Roots: Devotions Focus on the Sufferings of Christ

Preaching was foundational to the Society of the Precious Blood. This ministry was motivated, invigorated, and infused by a spirituality of the blood of Christ and a devotion flowing from this spirituality. It is helpful to recall there was a long-standing tradition through the Middle Ages of devotions focused on the humanity of Christ, in particular his sufferings and bodily wounds. The roots of the spirituality and devotion around the Precious Blood, articulated and practiced at the time of Gaspar, reach back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when a deep devotion to the Passion of Christ flowered. Francis of Assisi—bearing in his own body the signs of devotion in the stigmata—introduced, by way of crèches and crucifixes, a more human Christ with whom the faithful could suffer.

Other mendicant preachers developed such practices as the Way of the Cross, miracle plays, Passion tropes, and hymns and prayers, all filled with Passion references. Devotion to the Five Sacred Wounds and to the Passion became a common theme of meditation for the medieval mystics. This later developed into devotion to the Precious Blood itself. Outstanding missionary preachers moved people during the eighteenth century by their emphasis on the Passion of Christ. Many others in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries promoted the love of the crucified Christ. This brought about a continued and steady increase in the number and type of devotion accorded both to the Passion and to individual phases and instruments of Christ's suffering. The Precious Blood was one of these.

While the Middle Ages had produced the height of devotion to the Precious Blood, the nineteenth century witnessed a revival of interest in such spirituality. But whereas in the Middle Ages suffering was the defining theme for Precious Blood devotion, in the nineteenth century it was divine love. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which had begun to gain ground in France and Italy in the late seventeenth century, was quite widespread by the time of Gaspar. The Sacred Heart of Jesus was understood as representing divine love for all of humankind, the human love of Jesus, and the love of God which is present in the believer. Devotion to the heart of Christ, then, consisted primarily in recognizing and returning the love of Jesus, best symbolized by his heart.

Precious Blood Devotions: Unconditional Love

The three figures who did more than any to shape the traditions of the new communities under the banner of the Precious Blood—Francis Albertini, Gaspar del Bufalo, and Maria de Mattias—understood the blood of Christ as a symbol of God's unconditional and unlimited love for all humankind.

This was a love that extended especially to the most unloved. The devotion figured significantly into Gaspar's preaching. It especially comes from a sense that Christ has shed blood for all people, thereby making clear the inherent dignity of each and the call to exclude no one from human concern.

Gaspar's initial exposure to a spirituality centered on the blood of Christ was within the Confraternity of the Precious Blood.

It is significant that the purpose of this group was both devotional and apostolic, not only directed to a personal way of faith, but to have a social impact as well.

The very nature of the devotion to the Precious Blood led to social awareness. In addition, there is significant evidence that

Gaspar consistently understood and was

moved by the blood of Christ both shed in the Passion and also present in the Eucharist. These two aspects were never very distant in his writings. I believe that a case can thus be made for the connection between Eucharist and mission in his understanding.

Devotion to the Blood is not thought of as a particular devotion to one of the mysteries of the life of Christ, but as a universal theology or the devotion of the whole Church.

Gaspar understood or defined "devotion" as "that which makes the principles, practices and glories of our holy religion something living"; thus it is important that it be connected to the central mysteries of the faith. The devotion to and the spirituality of the Precious Blood was not particularistic or pietistic; it is rather a theology which embraces not one solitary mystery, but all the mysteries of our religion.

For Gaspar, Precious Blood devotion envelops all the other major ones, such as devotions to the Holy Cross, the Passion, the Sacred Wounds, the Eucharist, and most strikingly the Sacred Heart. Devotion to the Blood is not thought of as a particular devotion to one of the mysteries of the life of Christ, but as a universal theology or the devotion of the whole Church.

Based on his conviction that devotion to the blood of Christ penetrated every area of Christian life and action, his spirituality was dynamic; reflection on the blood of Christ led him to commitment to the service of others. It was Gaspar's focus on responding to societal and church needs, flowing from the spirituality of the blood of Christ, which kept the reform and renewal of both as his central concern. Missionary action and spirituality of the blood of Christ is a single reality since this is an eminently apostolic spirituality.

Devotion and Spirituality: Anchored in the Eucharist

Present day Precious Blood spirituality and devotion continues to be anchored in the Eucharist, which appropriately expresses and strengthens the commitment to mission. It is the same pattern which we see already in Gaspar's life, although our images and symbols have evolved as we attempt to express and shape our spirituality and devotion.

The renewal of the liturgy itself has impacted Precious Blood spirituality. The change to vernacular as the language of public worship in effect eliminated the felt need for devotions concurrent with the celebration of Mass. The reintroduction of the cup for all into the communion rite has helped declericalize the liturgy as well as our spirituality, as all now have "access" to the full sign of Eucharist. Physically drinking from the cup is gradually transforming the blood of Christ from a distant object to a dynamic aspect of spirituality and life. This development is significantly related to the renewed emphasis on the communion/meal aspect of Eucharist, which has allowed us to reclaim and experience the Mass as something we do, not only an object of adoration. This communal dimension of liturgical renewal is accompanied by a social outreach focus. Spirituality is necessarily extended, lived and practiced beyond the former confines of church buildings or times of worship.

The social focus of liturgy is in part an expression of the social renewal in general which has impacted our spirituality. The most significant result is perhaps a change in emphasis from the salvation of individual souls to an understanding of the blood of Christ as a source of solidarity with the suffering and the poor. In addition, it provides an impetus for attention to a broad spectrum of justice issues.

Images of Precious Blood Spirituality

There are three dominant images around which the spirituality seems grouped in recent years: pouring out, bringing near, and call of the blood. The image of pouring out, or being poured out, is connected to both cup and cross and is associated with many "liquid" representations such as drinking, spilling, washing, immersing, bathing, and staining to name just a few. Bringing near seems more connected to covenant and cross and offers association with such things as inclusion, belonging, compassion, and forgiveness. Closely related to bringing near is going outside, with its connection to both outreach as well as the movement toward the margins and edges; and standing between, a description of the prevailing tension between covenant (belonging) and cross (outside the gate). Call of the blood flows from the first two images and helps describe the prophetic

witness aspect of the spirituality, as well as the mission of renewal and conversion which is still a major focus of the apostolate.

The image of pouring out or being poured out is very much connected to the symbol of cup. The cup is an incredibly rich source and focus for Precious Blood spirituality today, filled with layers of meaning and association which would not have been present even fifteen or twenty years ago. It is quite evident that in Gaspar's time, to the extent that he used a large one while preaching, the cross or crucifix was the fundamental symbol. As the Eucharist has become a primary moment and experience of Precious Blood spirituality, within that ritual it is the cup which holds the most symbolic power and value for many today. It cannot, of course, ever be separated from the cross without losing its power to hold the fullness of Precious Blood spirituality and devotion. The cup has no meaning without the cross.



There is a keen sense among many that taking the cup is a way of accepting the cross in our lives, and this is ultimately a redemptive act. As all share in the bread and cup, they are doing far more than receiving communion. The redemptive reality of the cup has to do with offering and taking it, looking at what it holds, and drinking it anyway. The act of drinking from the cup, despite the contents, is the very act of pouring oneself out, being willing to live the consequences of the act of taking the cup of suffering and salvation. As one writer has described it, "Simply put, the 'body'...is what we

are to become; drinking the cup of the covenant in his blood shows how that is done...Drinking from the cup is accepting a way of being in the world, of sacrificial living...Sharing the eucharistized cup symbolizes...our willingness to be in the world the way Jesus was—as love, self-surrender, mercy, and justice" (Edward Foley, "Sharing the Cup—A Way of Being in the World." *Emmanuel*, April 2001).

To drink the cup that Jesus drinks is an act of solidarity, committing ourselves to offering life and blood for all as he did. To drink the cup at eucharist points to the passion while at the same time it is connected to baptism. Mark's account of the Lord's Supper makes clear that "all of them drank from it," thus answering Jesus' earlier question about their ability and willingness to partake of his cup. A recommitment to the baptismal covenant occurs in every eucharist where we eat the bread and drink the cup. This is, of course, the basis for the dying—the transformation and conversion. Each time we drink the cup, we commit ourselves to live with Christ and to make the new covenant a reality.

An Incarnational Spirituality: Experiencing and Expressing the Sacred

A sacramental imagination makes it possible for us to weave together into one what at times may feel unraveled and disconnected—or at least separate. To the extent that we can claim the deeply incarnational nature of all of life—and thus spirituality—we are able to be moved by grace and open to discovering it everywhere. Ultimately, spirituality without experience is merely an abstraction; spirituality which is not incarnated is simply an ideology or a science. Eucharist, for example, is the experience of the incarnation in the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, not simply an enacted ritual. It is immersion into experience; thus it becomes a personal and communal experience of spirituality: As Christ becomes body and blood for us, we commune for the purpose of being for one another that which we become, body given and blood poured out.

The table of Eucharist is not a place where we get to linger for long. It calls us quickly to a world in need of transformation, of redemption. The primary eucharistic symbols of taking, blessing, breaking, pouring, giving, receiving, and sharing bread and cup mediate more than mere presence; it is the entire Jesus event of life, death, resurrection, teaching, loving—all saving acts. Bread broken and cup poured out in drinking is so expressive of what we are called to be as church that to engage in this action is to commit ourselves to the sacrificial self-giving and nonexclusive universal love at the heart of the paschal mystery.

Precious Blood spirituality which informs preaching and ministry is incarnational. It's earthy and very messy and real. The spirituality of the blood of Christ and the proclamation of the blood of Christ has as a focus the humanity of Jesus, evidenced in his blood. This should come as no surprise, given what we have seen as the beginnings of this spirituality which focused on the human (and therefore, suffering) Jesus. The presence

of God and the reality of redemption permeates all of creation. This is, however, tempting to flee from. As one writer puts it, “The dignified pagans of Rome considered Christianity a repulsive and barbaric religion because of the doctrine of the Incarnation—that Jesus Christ was fully human, fully divine, and very much alive. Over the centuries, Christians have grown adept at finding ways to disincarnate the religion, resisting the scandalous notion that what is holy can have much to do with the muck and smell of a stable, the painful agony of death on a cross. The Incarnation remains a scandal to anyone who wants religion to be a purely spiritual matter, an etherized, bloodless bliss” (Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*).

Because our spirituality is incarnational, we can speak about and respond to the “call of the Blood,” a voice which can be heard in many and various situations today. It summons us to dialogue and communion; a relationship of covenant; it calls us to speak of the “preciousness” of each and every person; invites us to witness to the inclusive love of God. Ultimately, the call of the Blood is a call to ministry with a social conscience. And it is a call that comes from the blood, even in the context of Eucharistic preaching, according to one writer: “Eucharistic preaching thus begins when the word is broken open and ends when communicants drain the cup. The homily at Mass opens with the word of the preacher and ends with the voice of the blood... The preacher’s voice is heard... so that the “loud cry” of Jesus’ blood may be heard by all who come to the table... [E]very eucharistic homily... will always come to the same conclusion: the cup. There is fire in the cup that burns until it ignites the fire in our belly” (Nathan Mitchell, “A Fire in the Blood: Preaching the Cup,” *Preach*, May/June 2005).

Gaspar del Bufalo, called to the ministry of the Word, was on fire with a love for God and God’s people, a love which compelled him to preach a gospel of universal redemption and to put that preaching into practice in his concern for the poor and needy of society. He seemed to have a sense of urgency about calling others to repentance and the life of faith, knowing that this was a starting point and a necessary component of social outreach. He responded to the “signs of the times” in a way that was consistent with his religious heritage, but was not satisfied to remain tied to the past. Despite experiencing opposition at times because of his “new” ways, he was tireless in his persistence.

The blood of Christ animated the life of St. Gaspar, who lived his life and ministry in a relatively small geographical area and died in his thirtieth year of ministry. Precious Blood spirituality sparked his apostolic enthusiasm and continued to be his hope and strength to the moment of death. According to witnesses, he held his missionary crucifix, and kissing it

reverently, exclaimed in a weakened voice, “Ecce, amor meus, crucifixus est.” It has been said that all his sentiments, the doctrine he spread in his preaching and writing, all his apostolic activity, is summed up in that simple gesture; his entire life was in that kiss that spoke of a life being poured out and handed over. A life of devotion lived out in mission.

Towards the end of the Book of Revelation we encounter Jesus astride a white horse with eyes like flame. “He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is called The Word of God.” Reflecting on this image, Kathleen Norris states: “The human Jesus, blood and all, as the very Word of God. Human blood as holy, because Jesus was human... Blood includes us in the Incarnation... The rhythm of life that we carry in our veins is not only for us, but for others, as Christ’s Incarnation was for the sake of all” (*Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*). This is surely something that we in the Precious Blood family can devote ourselves to.

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Voices of Precious Blood Spirituality, 1998

compiled by Richard Bayuk, C.P.P.S.

The thesis project featured themes of Precious Blood spirituality emerging from focus groups of members and companions. The interviews were with individuals and groups that were drawn from all four North American Provinces at the time, and represented a diverse sample of people from different backgrounds and different parts of the United States. Also, much material was drawn from a range of Precious Blood publications, particularly *The New Wine Press* and *The Wine Cellar*. The richness of the spirituality results in more of a tapestry woven from many threads rather than discrete categories. These themes connect intimately with the symbols of Covenant, Cross, and Cup.

Bringing Near

“By the shedding of his blood, Christ included each person in his kingdom. The Blood marks us as members of the household and so marked, we are entitled to citizenship, membership, inclusion in the family of God. Jesus accepted and included everyone. We need to listen to and accept the “call of the Blood” to inclusion, belonging, and incorporation into the life of Jesus still present in our world. We do this by imitation of Jesus, by being his presence in the world today, by accepting and including all people into our household of believers” (“Renewing the Covenant: A Mission of Precious Blood Spirituality,” *The Wine Cellar* 5, February 1996).

From *People of the Spirit* (1995):

“Our spirituality implies a movement in ministry that is both internal and external—a healthy balance so that the fabric of the bond of charity can in justice be extended to and be inclusive of all.”

“All people have salvation through the Blood of Christ.... This means membership...[who] need to learn to personalize this concept of Precious

Blood, inviting all people, especially those to whom Christ was ever so present—the outcast and forgotten.”

“Implications of Precious Blood spirituality that are important in our discernment are a spirit of forgiveness, a spirit of conversion, and a spirit of hospitality.”

“Implications of Precious Blood spirituality that are nonnegotiable: We would be a reconciling people...would be inclusive...would share our wounds...be aware of the destitute, the oppressed, the marginalized.”

“A sense of identity with the marginalized.”

“Gaspar stood with the poor. With Christ’s help we are to stand there too.”

“I think of giving blood, donating blood, and the fact that it has no race, creed, color, nationality or other characteristic to identify it. There are no distinctions.”

“It is a spirituality of inclusivity—of always being aware of who is left out of the circle of community and expanding the boundaries of our understanding so that all might find room to more and to grow into the person God calls each of us and all of us to be. Here I have found a place where there’s always enough room at the table for one more; where there’s a place to pray for and with all peoples from all religious traditions and faiths.”

“Jesus draws into his inner circle those whom culture, religious or social, has put at the margins. A 1960s refrain has a gospel ring to it and nonviolence builds on its truth: “They drew a circle which shut me out,/Hypocrite, rebel, someone to flout./But love and I had wit to win,/We drew a circle which shut them in.”

Two reflections referring to Revelation 5:9, with its image of a multitude who have washed their robes in the Blood of the Lamb:

“The 144,000 from everywhere—and the strangest people are numbered among them—are a tribute to the fact that where we would draw the lines, God doesn’t; where we would have rejected, God accepted; where we would have dwindled numbers, God expanded them. The incredible love of God in Jesus Christ is so vast it can collect 144,000 people and so deep that it will slip between the cracks and gather in even the marginal. The gospel that brings us together is this: we believe in Jesus Christ and he is the revelation of God, and Jesus would not draw the lines that we do.”

“Rooted in our spirituality...is something about the blood that birthed a covenant that is unimaginably inclusive in terms of respecting or cooperating with other understandings of how to live and be with God....Ironically, the blood of Christ has invited me to rethink Christ...the preeminence of Jesus for all people, the fullest expression of God.... This has invited me to a more respectful openness to all the ways that God would want to bring about images and understandings...and in that sense what was birthed in the death of Christ and the shedding of his blood is perhaps bigger than what we've allowed ourselves to contemplate.”

About being an inclusive community:

“Being an inclusive community means deep and abiding respect for the dignity and dreams of those with whom we differ. It implies a reverence of the image of God that is carried in every human heart.... Being inclusive doesn't mean we deny our own beliefs or throw water on our own passionate pursuit of God's presence. Being inclusive means we allow our core beliefs to expand our heart rather than close our minds; enlarge our vision rather than narrow our view; extend our compassion rather than limit our mercy.”

“One of the things about Precious Blood spirituality that is so important is reconciliation. In family life, I come across many victims of abuse, and there is healing needed there. Reconciliation is needed in town between us and them, those with kids in the Catholic school and the others; between the two parishes.”

“I look at our ministry here in this part of the country, not just the Society of the Precious Blood, but the whole area. There is a need to link these two cultures together, the Anglo and Latino. Bringing people together. Getting people reconciled in marriage, marriage cases are so numerous here.”

“We need to give people a chance to talk.... We have become so polarized in the church that people don't want to talk anymore. They are not ready to talk about things. We need to find a way, like Cardinal Bernadin's *Common Ground Initiative*. No matter who we are we have some things that we can understand together. They may be small, but we agree on some things, and coming together to talk can lead to changing much in the world and the church.”

Joseph Nassal, C.P.P.S. relates the story about a medieval monk who, upon his death, was buried according to custom in the monastery wall. Upon hearing noises from within the wall several days later, the monks removed the stones to find their brother alive. He told all he had learned on his journey to the other side, and everything was contrary to their beliefs and the teachings

of the church. Whereupon he was returned to the crypt and sealed in for all eternity. The point is that we should not be patching holes and filling in cracks in the wall; rather we might seek to make the holes even larger, enough for “every nation and race, people and tongue” to enter in and find a home.

On renewal flowing from reconciliation:

“I try to listen to those who are oppressed, knowing that women still experience oppression, for example. Part of the reason I did not become a priest is that I heard the call to combat clericalism, break down barriers between lay and ordained. I felt that I could do that as a brother, be a bridge builder, be a part of this renewal of the church, thinking of church in new ways.... The blood of Christ empowers me, refreshes the soul. So many people need their souls to be refreshed in the blood. Reconciliation is so very much needed.... The blood liberates us. The Word of God liberates us. There is a connection there.”

“I’m wondering what our spirituality has to say about enabling human beings to do some peacemaking and reconciling within their own understanding of who they are.... I’ve moved away from reconciliation as getting rid of or being absolved of something, or even forgiveness. Reconciliation is deeper. It’s a full understanding of what it means to be human with the alternations and different seasons within. The healthy people I know...are as at home with fear as courage; with despair as with conviction; with feelings of anger as well as gentleness.... I’m beginning to discover that if I can be at home in my own diversity, I am more apt to be at home in the diversity around me.”

On Christ’s blood as the symbol of God’s unconditional love:

“I believe in that spirituality because it speaks to recognition of all individuals, especially those who are neglected, or on the fringes of society, or oppressed, the “nobodies,” those who are isolated, the lonely, the hungry, the disabled. Precious Blood spirituality speaks to the need for justice....”

“The manipulation of people, materialism, consumerism, cheapening the dignity of the human person, entrapping people in mindsets that cause them to fall into ways of looking at others that drag down the dignity of personhood. That relates to marriage where a husband degrades the wife, the way Anglos treat Mexican Americans in our area, the way people treat children, the way people treat someone with whom they’ve had a terrible disagreement, the words that flow out of our mouths and destroy reputations. The gospel is a challenge in every area of our relationships to put forth the dignity of persons.”

Describing ministry at a shelter for prostitutes and runaways:

“I merely wish to be their companion and be present to their reality. I want to be present...because of their human dignity, their right to have hope, and their right to be loved.... This ministry is meaningful to me because it has to do with reconciliation. It is the work of restoration...of destroyed people, families, and societies. Through this ministry human dignity can be found again.”

On the dignity of the human person:

“Paul urges us to ‘have the same mind,’ the mind of Jesus, the marginal one, in ourselves. We also need to see that Jesus’ life, a life of emptying, letting go, allowing himself to be on the edges of his society, is the way to a life of hope. Jesus...reveals that fullness of life comes from being empty, from recognizing one’s radical dependence on God, from being with those on the periphery.”

““You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.’ A wonderful passage, people used it all the time. But for me it was still magical. It was as if Christ shed his blood and the sprinkling landed on us and we were saved. And that never satisfied me. But in all these stories I see how God is present. I’m in the worst trouble, in the worst darkness, outside in the darkness, and that is where God is—arguing with me so I will change my mind. If I am in pain or suffering, I believe that is where God is. God is outside arguing with the older brother. The bridegroom is absent, outside arguing with the foolish virgins. I can find that piece everywhere now.”

On ministry with those with HIV/AIDS:

“Precious Blood is a symbol of God’s unconditional love for a sinful humanity. The message of the Precious Blood was a message of hope.... Followers of St. Gaspar are to be motivated in their life and work by a spirituality of the Precious Blood. The challenge that we face is to find current expression of that spirituality. We must look at Precious Blood spirituality in the context of the time and place in which we live.”

“Because AIDS is a contagion of the blood, I saw an opportunity to gain an increased understanding of blood in my life. I hoped it would give me an understanding of what it means to be a Precious Blood community member. I continually ask myself, ‘How can I allow the contagion of the blood to affect my life in this community?’”

“If the Blood of Jesus is a sign of reconciliation, then for me it means that as HIV is the contagion of persons with AIDS, I need to allow the Blood of Christ to be a contagion in my own life. In my work with persons with AIDS, I want to continually confront my fears and be a sign of reconciliation by saying, ‘I’m not afraid to touch you.’”

On hospitality and welcome:

“I think with the Precious Blood pastors there is a noticeable difference in their concern for the marginalized. You can tell that they care.”

“I think of the importance of touch.... I think that’s a form of spirituality. Those people who visit the sick and...hold their hand, or someone who’s had a difficult time to give them a hug. That is one of the strongest preaching methods I can think of.... Since I’ve been involved with the Precious Blood community, I am more aware of the power of that kind of sign.”

“I see the spirituality of the Precious Blood in everything around here... realize that we are very much in tune with Gaspar and what it means to be part of the body and blood. And action of it. I prayed once at Rotary and mentioned in the prayer about the need to touch our children. You know they didn’t ask me to pray again for two years.... But it is a form of preaching, conveying yourself and your beliefs when you touch someone with support and love and concern.”

“When I came here...I had the feeling of being wanted, being needed to be there [at Mass], of someone listening to me. I felt so at ease and felt like I was doing something very special. And I appreciated Mass even more. And after Mass you took the time to talk with me.... I had never had that happen.”

“My husband—never that I can remember—hugged or kissed his sons after they became teenagers. But he does now. And I think a lot of that has to do with the openness of the Precious Blood priests here. I really do believe that.”

“I think that is the pattern of Precious Blood spirituality that helps gather us together and help us to then share who we are. Because when you have been welcomed, you are made to feel needed and respected.”

Two companions spoke about welcome and hospitality taking on flesh and blood for them through their experience of visiting in Rome and staying at the Generalate as guests of Fr. Daniel Schaefer, C.P.P.S. One particular day, they got lost while making their way home from sightseeing and returned very late:

“As we walked through the massive gates, there was Fr. Dan walking the circle drive with a cane in one hand and a rosary in the other. When he looked up and saw us, he walked toward us and said, ‘You clowns! Where have you been? I’ve been worried about you!’ Then he gave Fr. Jim a whack with his cane and we all went inside. As long as I live I will never forget Fr. Dan standing there waiting to welcome us home. His invitation to stay at the house, his loving welcome and friendship were offered so freely. He probably didn’t realize how much he touched us that week because he was just being himself. But he knew what welcoming meant. He lived hospitality and he nourished us not only with food but with the kindness and caring that changed hearts.”

Pouring Out

“Each Friday I begin the liturgy in the greeting by saying this is a Precious Blood day. The whole day puts us before the cross. For me at Mass this is the most meaningful, saying ‘This is the cup of my blood,’ holding it up. It speaks to me of unity, of celebration. That has become very meaningful for my spirituality, a centering around the cup of the covenant.”

“The human creature is the cup of the Eucharist. Jesus says: ‘Dip your hand into the dish where my body is! Take up the cup of my blood!’ But of them both he says: ‘Eat! Drink!’ Here we no longer have a creature who takes a vessel to drink and eat what is in it; it is the very vessel which receives unto itself the Creature-Creator! We are the cup and we must be filled again with Him. We are to become a single being just as the cup and the wine are conformed to each other, just like life and the blood are a single thing.”

“Through this common consecration, together we share value in the mystery of the blood source of death and life. Our common consecration...brings us together in the realm of the holy—transcending the limits and bounds that keep so many apart in our world.... Precious Blood needs to be with us all the time. It should be at the very center of our lives...that we cannot get the Blood off our hands or out of our lives.... Most of us now wear the pin of the Society—the cross and chalice...a visual reminder of the cup of suffering and salvation, the cross of death and life. We wear it over our hearts.... Just as our blood circulates within our own bodies...may we...remember the common bond we share. May that bond nourish and sustain us in our ministry so that we may give life to the hurting, starving, suffering and broken members of the Body of Christ.”

“When I drink from the Cup, I say with my life, ‘I am opening myself to you, Christ, and by this act I am willing to suffer with you. I will walk this

life with you, knowing that my life will be splashed with the shared suffering and pain of those who walk near me.' Yes, my life is poured out daily for my husband, my children, my family. Mistakes allow us to dip into the Blood of Christ and forgive and hope and believe."

"In my prayer life I found it very meaningful to take these sufferings [of mine]...take them at Mass and consciously offer them with the blood of Christ. I was also aware of those who came to me for counseling, or the sick, and I united them with the sufferings of Christ at Mass also."

"As all share in the bread and cup, they do far more than receiving communion; they are: 'entering into their lives in the hard part of suffering and pain and anxiety and confusion...trying to understand the crosses... that everyone has, especially sickness, the young leaving home, marriages breaking up.'"

"There are inclusion and exclusion, joy and pain, all together in my experiences of church and community. The image of drinking the cup, which is both celebration and sharing in suffering, fits my experience. The image of the cup is suffering and blessing together. I cannot say 'yes' to one and not the other."

"...the cup holds the courage to speak our truth, though we know we'll be opposed, lose a few friends, distance a few relatives, unsettle a few superiors, rattle a few cages, see a few hands close into a fist, can we drink this cup?"

On Compassion:

Compassion is an integral aspect of Precious Blood spirituality. A Companion said she would make it the fourth "C" after Covenant, Cup, and Cross.

One member believes there is the danger of justifying the reality of suffering if we focus too much on compassion. Is it possible that we would not have to be as compassionate if we would address the deeper roots of the pain? Visiting a person with AIDS, he was stunned by a remark that came from a lifetime of pain: "You wouldn't have to be extending this care and compassion now if at some point in the past you had revered my sexuality instead of merely tolerating it."

"I don't want to be about cosmetic stuff...it's too late to simply deal with repercussions.... The hallmarks of the new covenant are sometimes brutally so, as are the justice and the inclusiveness which characterizes that justice. If I would link myself more to that, then I would not have to expend as much energy being compassionate."

Being Poured Out

“So many people are suffering. If Christ died for us, can’t we pour ourselves out for others?”

“...(to) allow a part of one’s self to be poured out, emptied so that there may be a place for the other within my life...a Gethsemani and a piercing of the heart to be sure.”

About a priest murdered in Guatemala “...drank fully, not leaving a drop. In giving his life to the last drop of blood, the chalice of his love overflows like a fountain...this bath of pain is really a river of redemption.”

“For [them], who often do not have Jesus as the center of spirituality and understanding of faith, I need to preach about the love of Christ as expressed in the Precious Blood, so they know they are included and redeemed in the society and the church where they often feel marginalized.”

“...emphasis on God’s mercy more than anything is the heart of devotion to the Precious Blood. Trying to reconcile.”

“Precious Blood spirituality touches the deepest core of our being. Even if you don’t believe in God, it is something that speaks to humanity, as we are all striving for something in our humanness. There is always a sense of looking for something, and for most that something is love and acceptance for who and what we are. That is what Precious Blood spirituality is all about.”

“...whereas in the beginning I saw this in the sense of preaching to others, as being a light to others, now I experience it as a light given to me.”

“...to follow Jesus and to be obedient to his call in changing historical and cultural contexts.... As Missionaries of the Precious Blood, we are also being called by the Blood of Jesus.”



To believe that the Son of God assumed our human flesh means that each human person has been taken up into the very heart of God. To believe that Jesus shed his blood for us removes any doubt about the boundless love which ennoble each human being. Our redemption has a social dimension because "God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men." To believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone means realizing that he seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds: "The Holy Spirit can be said to possess an infinite creativity, proper to the divine mind, which knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs, even the most complex and inscrutable." Evangelization is meant to cooperate with this liberating work of the Spirit.

-Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, paragraph 178

A New Voice in the Dialogue

by Keith Branson, C.P.P.S.

March 13, 2013 saw someone new on the balcony above St. Peter's Square. He wore a simple white cassock, an iron crucifix and dark shoes, and he asked the crowd and people around the world to bless him as he started his new ministry. Since then, Pope Francis has changed a lot of things. A new spirit of hope has blown across the Church in the time since, and a renewal of interest in Christianity in general and the Catholic Church in particular has arisen.

In the past few months, I have been studying Pope Francis as well as Gaspar, and I think they would have a lot to say to one another. At one time, Gaspar wanted to become a Jesuit following his hero St. Francis Xavier, and used Jesuit authors extensively in mission house study sessions. The Ignatian Pope has a mutual starting point with our founder.

There is one set of quotes I paired for the *Gaspar Virtual Spirituality Center* that I think highlights this similarity of outlook between St. Gaspar and Pope Francis:

“Whereas the devil would like all to be victims of justice, we ministers of the sanctuary must make known the depths of God’s mercy so that *justificati in Sanguine ipsius salvi simus ab ira per ipsum* (Justified in blood, we will be saved through it). In this devotion, we have the treasures of wisdom and holiness; in it we find comfort, peace and salvation” (*Gaspar del Bufalo to Pope Leo VII*, July 29, 1825, #1214).

“The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. There are other doors that should not be closed either. Everyone can share in some way in



the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself “the door”: baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not

a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, paragraph 47).

These two quotes speak to returning to God and Jesus our source:

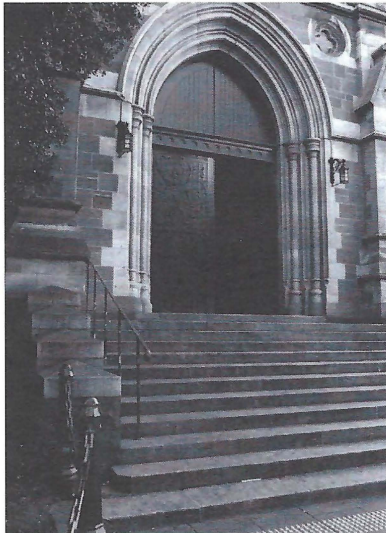
“Anyone who loves deeply (final characteristic of divine love), that is to say intensely, so noble an object as God, is never satisfied with his service to him. Nothing upsets him. Nothing frightens him. Nothing restrains him. His heart is like a torrential river that inundates the surrounding countryside; or similar to a fire when it consumes and reduces all to ashes. It finds its nourishment in no other thing than in love the Lord; its thirst never say that it has enough. Just as bees feed on nothing other than honey, so also this person is entirely immersed in the nectar of paradise, in that fountain of sweetness, in that holy, divine love.... However, Jesus could have achieved that without undergoing so much suffering, I mean, without the total outpouring of his Blood. Jesus wanted to be the universal master. Jesus wanted to nourish us with his very self; he wanted to die for us! Oh love! Oh love! Oh love! My dear redeemer, grant that I may live only to love you. Amen” (*Gaspar del Bufalo to Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi*, March 10, 1813, #66).

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.’ The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us

with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: ‘Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace.’ How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another ‘seventy times seven’ (Mt 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards!” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, paragraph 3).

In my view, we have in Pope Francis the most Precious Blood pontiff since John XXIII. There are three things in particular that have hit my radar from the Holy Father’s contributions that are Gasparian:

Evangelization. Gaspar ate, drank and breathed evangelization, traveling up and down the Papal States to preach missions. The Mission Houses all had attached churches which served as a basis for ongoing missions with those nearby. He also saw care of the poor, the sick and



disenfranchised as an essential part of the ministry of evangelization. Francis calls all of us to be “spirit filled evangelizers,” and every parish to be on permanent mission and a home for missionary outreach. Gaspar and Francis both put a huge emphasis on preaching, and his standards from Chapter 3 of the *Joy of the Gospel* aren’t far from Gaspar’s techniques of preaching as we know them.

Reconciliation. Gaspar served the need for reconciliation in his time and place by his preaching mission and outreach to the poor, as well as fostering the sacrament of Reconciliation. He tried to

address the political, social and economic problems of his day through proclaiming Christ, and Christ's justice. He also set up *ristretti*—lay associations dedicated to peacemaking—finding ways to heal old rivalries and divisions. Gaspar was always ready to speak with those who disagreed with him, especially writing to Pope Leo XII in 1825 to persuade him of the validity of the Society. Pope Francis also has made a general call for Catholics to return to the sacrament of Reconciliation, to be a reconciling force for justice and peace in our communities and in our world. He has also called for dialogue between those who disagree on various issues and sees it as a normal state of the Church.

Solidarity with the poor. Gaspar served a poor church, even as he navigated the turbulent waters of politics of his day. His vision embraced all as equals. Pope Francis has called for a poor church for the poor, and calls us to the “art of accompaniment” with the poor. Accompaniment calls on skills of listening, patience, and a willingness to learn that Gaspar would have embraced even if he would not have used that language.

As we enter the third century of our existence, we are in a troubled world torn by social upheaval, gross imbalance between rich and poor, intellectual disdain of faith, militarism and weakening moral standards. The post Cold War era and its subsequent conflicts have as much emotional displacement as post Napoleonic Europe. Pope Francis calls us to offer what Gaspar offered: deeper encounter with Christ. The cup of blessing, the cup of suffering is also a cup of refreshment, a cup that enlivens our hearts and strengthens our joy. The Call of the Blood is still the same call for us that Gaspar heard, and in the papacy of Pope Francis and beyond, we are still urged to respond to the Call with a deeper commitment to Christ.

We live in an exciting time, a blessed time, a challenging time in the Church. In our times today, I think our mission has much to offer in hope and solidarity that will propel us forward in Christ as the Church begins a new time of renewal.



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

— Gaspar del Bufalo —