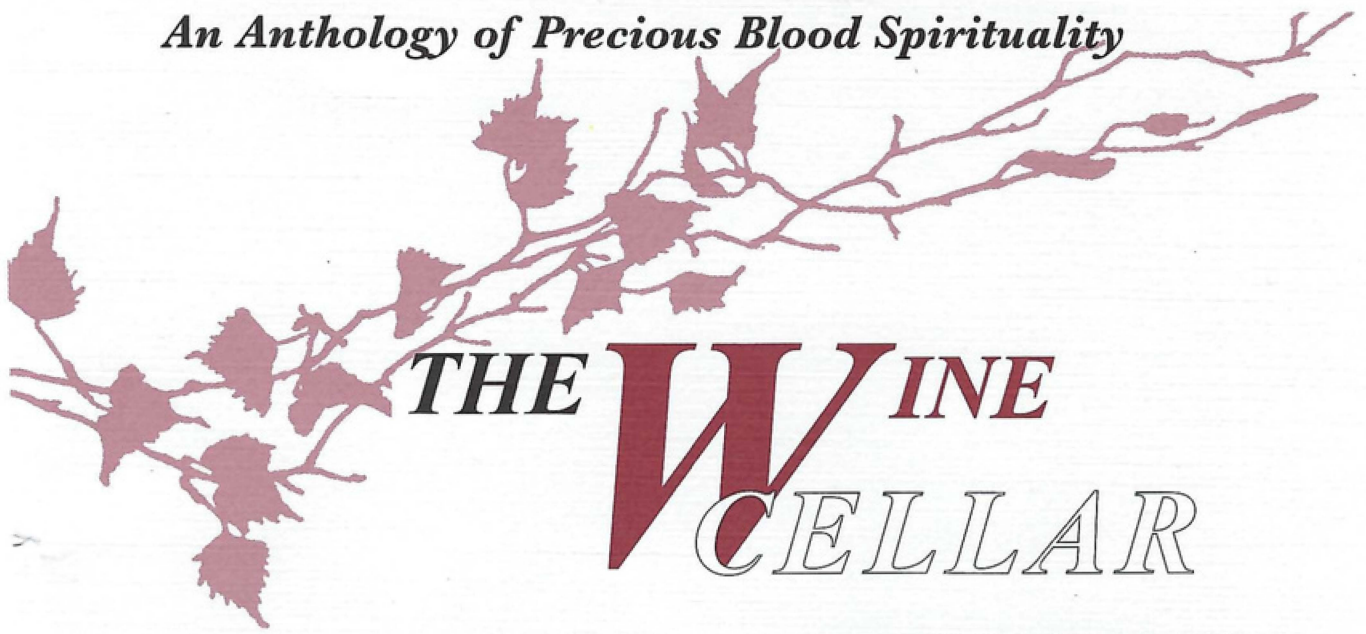
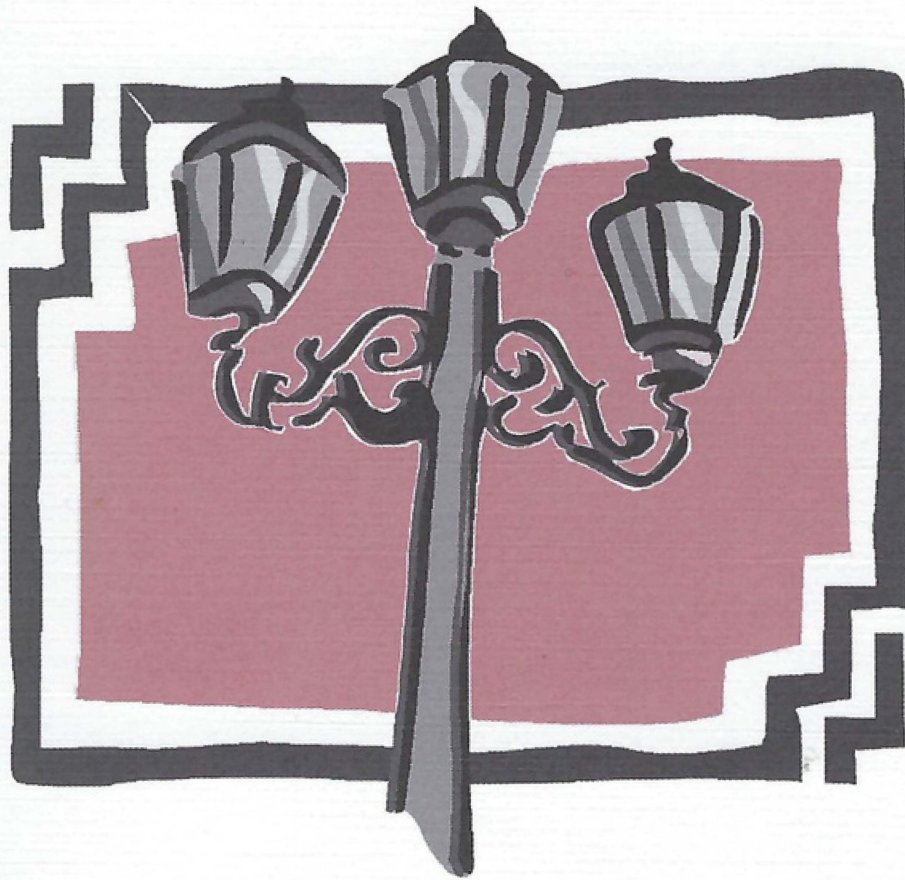


An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality



THE **W**INE
CELLAR

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Spirituality
DEVOTION

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

Gaspar del Bufalo

*The
Wine Cellar*

An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality

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Sanctuary Lamps and Streetlights: The Convergence of Devotion and Spirituality

In one of his letters, St. Gaspar describes praying one day and “while contemplating the Crucifix, it seemed that I heard these words: ‘Look, my son, at my divine Blood. Through sufferings, I poured it out, and through sufferings will its adoration be promoted.’ Humankind shudders at the word suffering, but it is nevertheless necessary for one to learn to carry the Cross. This is the great ladder to heaven (3785)!”

While climbing this ladder to heaven, St. Gaspar gathered around the cross circles of priests, brothers, lay women and men who shared his devotion and commitment to the blood of Christ. As precious blood people, we give witness in our ministry to how the blood of Christ redeems us, reconciles, and brings us near to one another. In our prayer and devotion, we meditate on the suffering of our own lives and our brothers and sisters in the world as we seek to unite them with those of Christ. This is why devotions such as the Stations of the Cross are so central to our identity as people of the blood. More than personal devotion or a parish spiritual practice especially during Lent, this prayer unites us with the suffering ones of our planet. When we walk the Way of the Cross, we stand with all people in our world today in places where violence reigns, where death is epidemic, where chaos becomes the order of the day.

Here then is the convergence of devotion and spirituality as we recognize our solidarity with all who suffer in our world. We stand with those who like Jesus are experiencing their own crucifixion. We can

stand there because we remember our own experiences of crucifixion. We plead on behalf of those who are dying or in dangerous situations. The answer to this prayer is found in our unwavering belief that we are not alone.

The purpose of this issue of *The Wine Cellar* is not to dwell on the distinction between devotion to the precious blood and the spirituality of the blood of Christ but rather to appreciate how our devotional practices and spiritual exercises deepen our understanding and strengthen our witness in living the spirituality of the precious blood today.

Devotion can sometimes be mistaken for pious practices and not spiritual exercises. Piety can be other-worldly and not rooted in reality. It can have us light candles in church while remaining fearful to be a light in the street.

Maybe this analogy can help us appreciate the difference: devotion kindles the light through prayer and contemplation, meditation on the sufferings of Jesus, the cup, the cross, and the covenant. Devotions keep the flame burning, the fire in the belly glowing. Spirituality takes this fire out of the sanctuary and into the streets. For me, spirituality is a living experience that takes in all of our life experiences.

If devotion to the precious blood is the sanctuary lamp, spirituality is the streetlight. Devotional practices fuel the flame, the fire and desire to be a new creation in a world grown old and weary under the weight of oppression, injustice, war, and violence. In our devotion, we pray for and with the poor; in our spirituality we work with the poor to confront the economic systems and societal attitudes that cause, condone, and condemn so many in our world to live in poverty.

Devotion to the blood of Christ invites us to look into the chalice and see our hopes and our hurts, our longing and losses, our shame and our sanctity mingled with the precious blood of Jesus and the blood of all humanity and creation. Our commitment to this blood gives us the courage to drink the cup and to become the new wine of compassion, a full-bodied expression of God's love in the world. This expression as disciples of the blood of Christ captures and carries our spirituality.

Under the glow of the sanctuary lamp and the glare of the streetlight, precious blood people see the world. Under these two lights of devotion and spirituality we read the signs of these times and respond as people of reconciliation and renewal in our faith communities, our religious communities, our neighborhoods, our relationships, our society, and our world.

For the founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, Saint Gaspar del Bufalo, devotion to the blood of Christ formed the center of his meditation and contemplation. Gaspar then put this devotion into

action as he lived the spirituality of the precious blood in his time and age. As Father Jerry Stack points out in this issue, Gaspar “did not simply make use of Precious Blood devotions” but rather saw “his entire life was a living devotion.” For Gaspar, “The Blood of Christ was not just a compartment of his spiritual life,” according to Father Stack, “It was the keynote spiritual theme that gave him a vision of God’s plan and the spiritual nourishment to sustain his response to that plan.”

These twin lights of devotion and spirituality illuminated the life of the woman who founded the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, Saint Maria De Mattias. Sister Angelita Myerscough explores how “the mystery of the blood of Jesus was at the core of Maria’s faith, vision, and her faithful response to God’s unfolding plan in her life and ministry that led her to a life of heroic virtue.”

Precious Blood amicus and companion George Lubeley offers a theological reflection on his own passage through the landscape of precious blood devotion and spirituality. Beginning with the Seven Offerings of the Precious Blood he learned as a seminarian at Brunnerdale some seventy years ago, Lubeley traces his journey to understand the precious blood as a way of life. “My own experience of this passage,” he writes, “leaves me with a deep sense of freedom and some questions.” While acknowledging “a keen sense of loss in reference to the old devotion” and “reservations that stem from approaching the whole Christian faith ‘from below,’” Lubeley underscores the need for “the old theology for its clarity and the new for its meaningful personal challenge.”

Two Precious Blood sisters from the Dayton community, Terry Walter and Terry Maher, contribute creative responses that serve as bridges between precious blood devotion and spirituality. Sister Terry Walter has adapted the Seven Offerings prayer in response to the signs of these times. We offer her version of the Seven Offerings for a Church in Crisis. Sister Terry Maher reflects on the incident in Mark’s gospel when the woman with a hemorrhage (5, 25-34) reaches out to Jesus for healing. This encounter, Sister Terry writes, has been “significant to me in my own healing from life hurts.” She shares its significance in a reflective, poetic piece.

Father Richard Bayuk anchors this issue of *The Wine Cellar* by highlighting some of the historical roots of devotion to the precious blood and affirming how for Gaspar “devotion to the blood of Christ penetrated every area of Christian life and action” and “led him to commitment to the service of others.”



Devotions or Devotion: The Spirituality of the Blood of Christ in the C.P.P.S. Today

By Jerry Stack, CPPS

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

Normative Texts, C4

While Missionaries of the Precious Blood would heartily assent to this statement from our Normative Texts, just what does this mean for us today? What does it mean for us to hold devotion to the Blood of Christ in a special place in our spiritual, community, and apostolic life? This article explores two ways in which this “devotion to the Precious Blood” can be found in our Society today. It exists as *a devotion* (understood in a narrow sense which I will explain) and it also may be found as *devotion* or *spirituality*. I realize that setting up such a neat dichotomy may run the risk of being artificial, but I believe that it is useful nonetheless.

Passion of the Christ: An Expression of Devotion

One of the most publicized events of the film industry in 2004 was the release of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*. Some praised the work as the finest film of its kind ever made, while others criticized it for its violence and for missing the point of the gospels.

Without wanting to delve too far into that discussion, Gibson's film is a good example of a certain kind of *Precious Blood devotion*. In some ways it is the heir to some devotional practices or forms of piety that have been more or less common in Catholicism for many years.

I am using the word *devotion* in this context to refer to exercises of piety, to prayers, ceremonies, meditations, or other similar activities which are popular expressions of faith, often focusing on one or the other event in the life of Jesus (the Stations of the Cross are a good example) or to some symbolic expression of one facet of the mystery of Christ (e.g., the Sacred Heart or the Precious Blood), or to a saint.

I believe that in its graphic depiction of the violence of Jesus' suffering and death, the film is in some ways in the lineage of popular devotions like the Way of the Cross, or even the Chaplet of the Precious Blood, both of which are extended meditations on the sufferings of Jesus.

Religious devotions, however, run the risk of focusing too much on individual piety, the so-called "Jesus and me" mentality. By a too narrow emphasis on the physical sufferings of Jesus, it is possible to forget the context of his sufferings as well as the implications of his suffering, dying, and rising for us—the "mystery of Christ who gives his Blood for the salvation of all."

Gibson's film offers us a filmic devotional meditation but does not go far enough in helping us to understand Jesus' death. *The Passion of the Christ* does not offer us, in other words, a sense of the *spirituality* of the Blood of Jesus, of *devotion* understood in a broader sense.

Devotion and Spirituality

I have already used the term *devotion* in a different but related sense and should explain what I mean by the term in a broader sense. A dictionary defines the verb *devote* as "to dedicate by a solemn act...to give over (as to a cause, use, or end) wholly or purposefully." Thus *devotion* involves a response of the total person, of one's entire way of life, to a cause, in this case, to the service of God and God's kingdom. This kind of devotion implies a kind of transformation that leads to wholehearted giving of one's life to the Lord and to the service of his Word.

A synonym for devotion in this sense would be *spirituality*, understood as "the serious response of [men and women] to the revelation of God's love in Christ and [which] consists in loving knowledge and service of God and one's fellow men [and women] in the Mystical Body of Christ," according to *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*. This is not very different from the traditional

understanding of devotion as readiness to do the will of God.

True devotion or spirituality, then, cannot remain at the level of an individualistic religious experience, however intense and meaningful, but involves the transformation of one's life. It is not enough, for example, simply to pray Precious Blood prayers, to meditate on the passion of Christ, or develop wonderful spiritual or theological treatises on the Precious Blood. In some fundamental way the mystery of the Precious Blood ought to transform our lives, enabling us to see our world and ourselves through the lens of Jesus and his Paschal Mystery, the shedding of his Blood. It ought to impel us to live the mystery of the Blood of Christ as an integral part of our lives and not only as a spiritual exercise or practice.

In short, the Blood of Jesus becomes a symbol of transformation and of devotion, understood as passionate commitment or spirituality, in our personal lives and in our mission and community life. Religious devotions may be part of a healthy spirituality, but they are parts and not the whole.

True devotion or spirituality, then, cannot remain at the level of an individualistic religious experience, however intense and meaningful, but involves the transformation of one's life.

A Devoted Disciple: Gaspar del Bufalo

Our founder is frequently referred to as the “Apostle of the Precious Blood.” What did the Blood of Christ mean for him? Was it a matter of devotions or of a spirituality?

As a priest educated and ordained in early nineteenth century Italy, certainly Gaspar believed in devotions or pious exercises. I have recently been reading some of his earlier letters and am amazed at how many times he mentions such devotions—to St. Francis Xavier, to the Sorrowful Mother, to the Precious Blood. In prison he writes to friends asking for printed devotional materials to distribute. Gaspar appreciated the value of popular devotions and used them as part of his method of giving popular missions, retreats, and in the evening oratories.

Gaspar, however, did not see devotion to the Blood of Christ as one devotion among many, but as the central devotion: “In this devotion the whole faith is condensed in a nutshell; all the mysteries converge in the infinite Price of Redemption, like the lines of a circle meet in a common center. Other devotions are all means to help Catholic piety, but this one

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is its basis, its support, is essence
[*Gaspar's letter to Pope Leo XII
defending the title of Congregation in
1825, No. 1215*].”

It is thus not surprising that St. Gaspar speaks of the special aim of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood as that of dedicating themselves to the missions and retreats as well as promoting devotion to the Blood of Christ [*c.f. articles 2 and 5 of the original Rule of the Congregation*]. He had in mind more than promoting pious exercises: he was an apostle of a spirituality of the Blood, of devotion in the broader sense.

From his letters we know that Gaspar saw his work and that of his fellow Missionaries as calling people to a deeper awareness of the meaning of the Blood of Christ for their lives, to become more profoundly conscious of the great love the Lord has for them, and to lead them to repentance and conversion, to reconciliation with God and with one another.

Not long ago I was thumbing through a copy of the proceedings of the Precious Blood Study Week held in 1957 in the United States. This was the first of a series of conferences that marked a renewal of the understanding of Precious Blood spirituality in North America. In that volume there is a brief reflection on St. Gaspar as an “exemplar of devotion to Precious Blood” by the late Fr. Bob Lechner, who notes that while we find it disappointing that Gaspar has left us no treatises on the Precious Blood, we nevertheless can say with confidence that it was at the core of his life.

Christ in the very act of shedding his Blood is the mysterium—what we might call the sensible symbol, the living action—around which St. Gaspar organized his life...this symbol not only gives meaning to the deepest tendencies and movements of his life. It also communicates to him the divine plan and makes known the incomprehensible depths of God's love.

Father Lechner gets to the heart of the matter when he says, “The shedding of blood is the only language that can give an adequate and fitting response to God’s love for us.” The Precious Blood is the “common treasure held between God and ourselves...the only adequate expression of our love for one another...the unique means we share with God for telling what is in our hearts.”

Gaspar saw the Precious Blood as a powerful symbol of the ever-faithful and mysterious redemptive love of God as well as a symbol of our response. For example, Gaspar often refers to the fact that suffering, a kind of symbolic shedding of blood, is the way to salvation and he emphasizes the importance of reading the “book of the Cross.” Blood expresses something fundamental about God and God’s relationship to us as well as something fundamental about the shape of our response.

Perhaps we might understand that phrase often used by Gaspar, “the price of our redemption,” as referring to the cost of a love that redeems, pardons, reconciles. In his dying and rising Jesus showed us not only the depth of human love, but revealed in a unique way how God loves us. It is a love that has no bounds, no limits, always faithful, a love, in the words of the Song of Songs that is “as strong as death (8,6).” Such love does not come cheap, but only at a price, the price of one’s very lifeblood poured out either figuratively or, in the case of Jesus, quite literally.

Such a love is redemptive, in that through the shedding of his blood, Jesus offers us the possibility of a restored relationship with God and with one another. Only the love of God is strong enough to bring about such healing, only God’s love is strong enough to be faithful to that covenant established in the shedding of the Blood of Jesus. We find forgiveness and reconciliation when we enter into that mystery of the Blood, when we are touched and healed and appropriate its power for ourselves.

Gaspar’s vision, his work, his life, was nothing if not one that focused on the *redemption* of the men and women of his day. His contemporaries, who had lived through such difficult times, needed to

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be restored and healed. Gaspar used the language of sin and repentance and focused on individual conversion in his missions and retreats. The Blood of Christ was a powerful symbol of the patient love of God as

well as of the horror of sin. On the one hand, the Blood is comforting and reassuring: this is how much the Lord loves us. On the other, it is a symbol of the horror and destructiveness of sin: see how sin can wound and cause suffering.

For Gaspar the Precious Blood was not just *a* devotion. It was at the center of his vision and his work, a symbol that summarized his faith and drew him to service in his ministry. It is what impelled him to work with the marginal people near the Roman Forum, to found our Congregation, to preach tirelessly, to seek out the brigands in the hills south of Rome, to seek reconciliation when the destruction of the village of Sonnino was imminent. As Fr. Lechner observed, the Blood of Christ communicated to Gaspar God's plan and was the organizing principle of his life and work. Above all, the Precious Blood was a powerful symbol of the gratuitous and faithful love of God.

Gaspar did not simply make use of Precious Blood devotions: his entire life was a living devotion, in the sense of a total and passionate commitment to the Lord. The Blood of Christ was not just a compartment of his spiritual life. It was the keynote spiritual theme that gave him a vision of God's plan and the spiritual nourishment to sustain his response to that plan.

The Spirituality of the Blood Today

The renewal in the theology of the Blood of Christ in the past several decades is really a return to the spirituality of Gaspar, albeit reinterpreted in the light of the signs of the times and contemporary theology. We are rediscovering Gaspar's unique insight and contribution, his charism, his devotion, his spirituality.

Recently, I shared with a management consultant a few observations about refounding and the resolutions of our last General Assembly. "What is your vision of success?" he asked. His simple question caused me to pause. How will we know that our goals and objectives are realized? What would be the "vision of success" that a genuine spirituality of the Blood of Christ is alive and well in our Congregation today? Let me offer a few observations on what that vision might look like.

A healthy spirituality would be more than a matter of many devotions. As important as these might be for individuals and groups, the practice of such exercises of piety does not automatically guarantee a holistic spirituality of the Precious Blood. Praying Precious Blood prayers, preaching on the Blood of Christ, or writing articles on this theme do not constitute spirituality in the deepest sense of the term. The spirituality of the Blood of Christ is the lens through which we see

ourselves and our world; it is the horizon against which life finds its meaning and purpose. Fr. Luigi Contegicomo once observed that our spirituality should give a “tint of red” to everything. Our spirituality is both a way of naming and explaining our spiritual experiences and insights as well as a way of shaping, motivating, and sustaining our choices and actions. Precious Blood spirituality shapes our choices of mission, our style of ministry, and the way we live with one another.

The spirituality of the Blood of Christ ought to influence the apostolates that we undertake. In other words, we draw from the spirituality of the Precious Blood our criteria for mission, for the direction our ministry takes as individuals as well as corporately.

Concretely, this would mean that in some way we commit ourselves to those ministries that flow from our understanding of the meaning of the Blood today. This would mean in general terms the ministry of reconciliation, ministry with the marginalized, and choosing, as the late Pope John Paul II reminded us in his address to the delegates of the General Assembly in 2001, to the mission of building a “civilization of life,” especially with the marginalized, and to the mission of reconciliation.

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This does not mean we abandon all current apostolates or that every member be involved in such ministry, but rather that the option for reconciliation and for the marginalized be a significant one in making decisions about corporate as well as individual commitments in ministry. Our spirituality has something important and unique to contribute to the world today and we should be sharing it and, more important, living it in our ministry.

In practice this could mean that in situations where there are diminishing human resources, we would still choose to do something new, rather than simply clinging to what is comfortable. It might call for a certain amount of courage to let go of familiar and longstanding commitments so that we respond to the cry and call of the Blood.

While it does not strictly speaking grow out of a spirituality of the Blood of Christ, the ministry of *preaching the Word* ought to have a special place in the C.P.P.S. Certainly Gaspar saw his devotion to the Precious Blood as leading to his preaching activity, and we all

remember his famous remark, “I would like to have a thousand tongues to draw every heart tenderly to it and I wish that my own soul would be totally penetrated with it (*quoted by Sr. Maria Giuseppa Pitorri*).” A commitment to good preaching and a willingness to engage in this ministry ought to be priorities for us. Preaching is historically and theologically bound to our spirituality.

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Precious Blood spirituality should shape the style of our mission. It should flavor the way we engage in traditional ministries, for example, in parishes, as chaplains, in education or internal ministry. The great themes of that spirituality—cup, cross, and covenant—ought to shape the way we preach, the priorities of our ministry, as well as the quality of that ministry.

This has already happened

and some people have even remarked that they notice a certain style of Precious Blood preaching.

But our spirituality ought to affect not only what we *do*, but also *how we live community*. Gaspar’s idea of the *mission house* was not simply creating a place for missionaries to live, but was, in his words, an “ongoing mission.” He realized that *how* the members lived was as important a part of the mission as what the members did. It grew out of his spirituality of the Precious Blood. In a certain sense community is also our mission, since the witness of common life is a powerful ministry in itself.

One might ask, for example, if our common life reflects the spirituality that we believe in and promote. Is there willingness to forgive and to be reconciled? Is there a concern for members who might end up being marginal or “far off?” Do we take seriously the covenant relationship to which we have committed ourselves through the bond of charity, through our incorporation?

Do we take care in praying together, celebrating the Eucharist together? We say that the Eucharist is important to us in a special way as Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Do we celebrate it as though we really mean that? Do we put thought and effort into making community life a living witness to our spirituality and not just a convenient living situation?

In short, we ought to be people passionately devoted to the Blood of Christ in our mission and in the way we live in community. The spirituality of the Blood of Christ challenges us to see the world, our confreres, and ourselves, in a unique way, through the lens of the Blood, against the horizon of the Blood.

Conclusion

In making the distinction between devotion and spirituality perhaps I have simplified and maybe even distorted the lived experience of some of our members. But such an analysis helps us to respond to the challenge of living the spirituality rather than simply engaging in various spiritual practices, however praiseworthy. The Blood of Christ is not only the object of our devotions, but is meant to be an integrating force in our personal lives, in the communal life of our Congregation, and in our mission to the church and to the world today. It summons us to lives of devotion, to an integral spirituality that guides and motivates us, and not just to devotions.

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As Father Bob Lechner said during that Precious Blood Study Week in 1957, Gaspar knew of the “superabundant” love of God and responded to that love in heroic fashion. For both that love and for our response to it, the symbol of the Precious Blood “is the unique and privileged symbol and sign. The shedding of blood is the only thing love has to bear witness to its deepest meaning. Everything else falls short.”

This was at the heart of the charism of Gaspar: to know that superabundant love and want to return that love. He knew that in the shedding of blood one finds a symbol that expressed the deepest meaning of love. May we in our mission and in our common life be faithful to that vision and that devotion of our Founder.



For Reflection

- ❑ St. Gaspar said that in the devotion to the Precious Blood, "...the whole faith is condensed in a nutshell; all the mysteries converge in the infinite Price of Redemption..." How do I understand Gaspar's words in the light of my spirituality and the "signs of the times?"
- ❑ What is my "vision of success" for a ministry shaped by a spirituality of the Blood of Christ? What would that vision be for the Congregation?
- ❑ How would I describe the "growing edge" of my spirituality? How has Precious Blood spirituality shaped my spiritual path?
- ❑ In what ways have I found that our spirituality has shaped the style of my ministry?
- ❑ Does Precious Blood spirituality make a difference in the way I live in community? How do I experience that difference?



Jerry Stack joined the Missionaries of the Precious Blood at age 14, back in the days of many Precious Blood devotions. Over the years he discovered the meaning and power of Precious Blood spirituality, especially in his 20 years of ministry with the mentally ill and their families. He is currently secretary general of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and has resided in their generalate in Rome since November 2001. His responsibilities include maintaining a website, editing publications, and preserving the corporate memory of the Congregation through its files and archives. He enjoys exploring the wonderful neighborhoods and attractions of the Eternal City.



The Spirituality of the Blood of Christ in Maria De Mattias and the Adorers

By Angelita Myerscough, ASC

On February 17, 1936 an inch high headline on the front page of the Vatican's official newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, proclaimed: "The Holy Father Reaffirms the High Dignity of Souls Redeemed by the Divine Blood." The subhead read: "The Proclamation of the Heroic Virtues of Venerable Maria De Mattias." The text of the decree itself filled a good portion of the page. Whoever arranged that front page almost seventy years ago was certainly deeply impressed by the precious blood spirituality of Maria that was so evident in her life and ministry.

The mystery of the blood of Jesus was indeed at the core of Maria's faith, vision, and her faithful response to God's unfolding plan in her life and ministry that led her to a life of heroic virtue. Fourteen years later, in a solemn ceremony at St. Peter's Basilica on October 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII would attest further to her holiness by declaring her "Blessed." Five decades later, on May 18, 2003, Pope John Paul II would recognize the high quality of the precious blood spirituality of this humble woman from Vallecorsa by solemnly declaring her "Saint Maria De Mattias."

Maria was canonized because she lived a life totally devoted to Jesus who gave his precious blood for us. She promoted various devotional practices in honor of the precious blood current at the time.

Maria knew and loved the Seven Offerings, the brief prayer of offering to the Eternal Father, and the precious blood chaplet that Gaspar Del Bufalo and other Missionaries had taught the people. She knew these would help her and her sister Adorers respond to God's call in their daily living.

These devotions, however, were only the springboard that helped shape her faith orientation and her response of love and deep hope that characterized her spirituality. At the canonization Mass, Pope John Paul II declared:

It was the mystery of the Cross that absorbed the spirit of Maria De Mattias, who placed her Institute of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ under the banner of the Divine Blood. Her love for Jesus crucified became in her a passion for souls, a humble dedication to "her dear neighbor." She often said: "Let us suffer willingly for love of Jesus who gave his own blood for us with so much love. Let us work untiringly to help people reach heaven."

Beginning of the Institute Expressed Spirituality

A century and many decades before the canonization solemnity at the Vatican, twenty-nine year old Maria De Mattias had left her home to serve as a teacher for the girls at the little mountain town of Acuto. She had made her intent clear to Bishop Lais of Ferentino when she wrote him that she was going there, not just to teach, but also to found an institute, which would have the title of the Most Precious Blood. She envisioned the ministries of religious instruction and retreat work as well as teaching. A few months later, asking for a helper, she reported to the bishop: "I am not free even for a moment on any day, not only on school days but also during the vacations and on Sundays."

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The desired helper arrived in the person of Anna Farrotti. On July 5, 1835, Maria and Anna met formally to establish the new institute. The hand-written minutes of that meeting indicate clearly the essence of Maria's spirituality and that of those who would join her. The new congregation would be called the Institute of the Adorers of

the Divine Blood “because the purposes of the new institute are exactly the same as the purposes of this divine blood.”

For three decades Maria De Mattias lived the spirituality of the blood of Christ as she spent her life energies in teaching, counseling, building, catechizing, negotiating with bishops and civic officials, writing hundreds of letters, traveling back and forth across the mountains of central Italy, founding some sixty schools staffed by women who joined her as Adorers of the Divine Blood. In prayer and contemplation, and especially in the Eucharist, she found strength to stay the course. Nearly every letter she wrote, whether to a discouraged Adorer in a small mission house or to an eminent bishop, was prefaced with the short prayer, “Viva il Divin Sangue”: “Praise to the divine Blood”.

For Maria, fidelity to the Jesus who gave his lifeblood for us meant living with Jesus, and loving Jesus and others. At a very difficult moment, she wrote to Sister Bernice Fanfani : “Always, always with Jesus! God always in view, Jesus in our actions, our life in sacrifice. With Jesus let us think; with Jesus, let us speak. Let us labor with Jesus.” Living with and laboring with Jesus, Maria knew, would mean growing in love, the love that was the dynamic heart of her precious blood spirituality. Writing to Don Blaise Valentini, successor to Gaspar as head of the Precious Blood Missionaries when he was planning to send two candidates to Acuto, Maria asked him to make sure that they were aware that “the spirit of this Institute is love—all love, love for God and for the dear neighbor.”

Spirit of Love

To assure that this spirit of love would always be at the heart of the spirituality of the Adorers, with the help of Don Merlini Maria wrote clearly in the preface to the original printed Constitution in 1857:

To reveal his infinite love for us ...Jesus Christ our divine Redeemer consented to shed his precious blood for us, in the midst of suffering and humiliation, as the price of our salvation and glory....He gave it all, he gave it for all, and he does not cease to give it.... Now this our lowly Congregation that lives and labors under the glorious title of the most precious blood of Jesus Christ, must be patterned and shaped into a living image of that divine charity with which this divine blood was shed and of which it was and is sign, expression, measure and pledge.

These basic affirmations were followed by several paragraphs on the ministries of the Adorers, which would be their way of living out in love the precious blood spirituality to which God called them.

Most of that first constitution of the Adorers was taken up with formation, governance, and especially ministries. There was only one short chapter entitled “Devotion to the Precious Blood.” This reminded the sisters of the daily hour of adoration and called them to reflect often on Jesus shedding his precious blood and to pray the seven offerings. It also encouraged them to share these devotions with others.

Today, after several other intermediary versions, the latest text of the constitution of the Adorers, which comes from the post-Vatican Council II period, includes the key portion of the original preface of 1857 as an appendix. The opening lines of the constitution reflect the same precious blood spirituality:

“Let us give thanks with joy to God, who has graciously called us to fulfill our baptismal consecration by committing ourselves to following the Lord Jesus in a life of adoration that impels us to apostolic service.... To be Adorers of the Blood of Christ means to be wholly consecrated to the adoring and redeeming love of Jesus Christ, who shed his blood to free us from sin and reconcile us in love.”

Like the original constitution, but in terminology of today’s Church, this most recent version speaks to living the spirituality of the blood of Christ in community life and in ministry, as well as in a life of prayer. It calls the Adorers “to respond gratefully to the invitation to partake of the blood of Christ in the Eucharistic chalice, wherein is joy in the Spirit and pledge of eternal life.” Prayer “oriented to the mystery of redemption through the blood of Christ” is encouraged as a priority, but only one formula of prayer is specifically mentioned as a community prayer. That is a psalm or canticle of praise that originated with Maria herself. It begins: “Clap your hands, all you peoples” and is interwoven with brief New Testament phrases that touch the mystery of the blood of Jesus.

Hopefully, as the more than fifteen hundred Adorers of the Blood of Christ on all five continents recite or chant this precious blood psalm each day, they are strengthened for living out their spirituality of service to God and the “dear neighbor.” Their ministries are diverse, depending on the needs of God’s people, especially the poor, wherever they are sent to minister, whether in the freezing cold of Siberia or La Paz, or the burning heat of Brazil or Guinea Bissau.

Yet they are all guided by the same constitution. They all have received the same charism of precious blood spirituality, the same as that which God gave to Maria De Mattias two centuries ago. They all wear the same small metal heart surmounted by a cross, marked with three precious drops of blood, the design of which goes back to the time of Maria. This small symbol is a constant reminder of their God-given call to go on living, day by day, the same spirituality that led Maria De Mattias to holiness.

One can only hope that for each Adorer today it could be said that her life also reaffirms “the High Dignity of Souls Redeemed by the Divine Blood.”



For Reflection

- ❑ In the Preface for the feast of St. Maria De Mattias, we pray: “You, Father, origin of life and source of holiness, have gifted St. Maria De Mattias with the gifts of the Holy Spirit that she might be...a messenger of peace and reconciliation, an undaunted apostle of the precious Blood of Christ, a witness of the saving glory of the Cross.” How are these words true for those called to live precious blood spirituality?
- ❑ What value might precious blood devotions have for living precious blood spirituality?
- ❑ How does the goal or purpose of my life and ministry reflect the purpose or goal of Jesus in the mystery of his precious blood?



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The Passage

By George Lubeley

For some seventy years I have been meditating on the passage from the *prayer* “Seven Offerings of the Precious Blood” to the Blood of Jesus as *a way of life*. There have been interruptions. This may be my last try.

We met the prayer as seminarians in 1935: seven times each break of day a Ruby offering, not ours to give, not yet understood. Instead, there was the experience of seven stripes of discipline, a hair shirt for the knees, automatic dial for message, and the good intention. Today Brunnerdale is a country club. Is the Sacred Gift now profaned? Has the Price been reduced, from the Blood of God to human blood? Fear not.

My first attempt to make this passage came with the preparation of my first sermon on the Blood of Jesus. Every Sanguinist needed a loaf of bread on this theme in his traveling bag. The works of Father Edwin Kaiser of the Seminary faculty furnished the ingredients. Indeed, I handled his writings on this theme, from 1930 to 1978, more perhaps than I consulted the Scriptures for the same.

The Theological Passage

Spirituality, as a critical reflection on a way of life, is “almost a theology.”(1) Examining the theological base for a particular spirituality is possible and helpful. There are other bases too, such as culture or the way we pray. My passage for a long time was the way I theologized. Real spirituality grew in me like a retarded child.

Kaiser originally saw the Blood as an object to be adored. He sought it out in St. Anselm's commercial context of redemption by satisfaction and merit. To the end, he preferred to work with the Blood of Jesus in the conceptual language of the ecumenical councils and scholasticism. For a moment in 1941 he discovered the symbolism of blood in a sacramental context (2), but he never expressed his spirituality in the language of the new theology, the interpretation of tradition in terms of contemporary experience, or of liberation theology. My own interest sought a more personal approach, the meaning of the Blood in the mind of Christ and trying to locate the devotion in the biblical base of the Law of Christ. (3)

My own growth in the spirituality of the Blood of Jesus suffered an unexpected interruption with my departure from priestly ministry thirty years ago and a career with the elderly, mainly in mental health services. "Pondering the faith," Aquinas' definition of the act of faith (4), remained as a personal responsibility, always within the beloved institutional Church. Only in retirement for the past fifteen years do I recognize the return of a truly living faith and a fresh approach to the Blood of Jesus.

Interest returned as the original grace had come, unsought, a Pauline confrontation. It came unexpectedly amid private study of contemporary scripture, tradition, new theological methods, and with my wife's assistance. The "new theology" has become a churning ocean with contrasting currents. I have shared the disquiet of friends in the Society, both humble and sophisticated, who were torn by the same theological undertows. We could not understand the passage to the new "spirituality of blood."

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Clarifying the Ambiguity

The discomfort is destined to remain a while. A few sensitive areas need clarification, which comes only with considerable adjustment. Currently, ambiguity is a general experience in

theology, affecting content, method and purpose. (5) As such it contributes to pluralism within the spirituality of the blood of Jesus.

The *content* of the theological base of the devotion has changed in the way we view Jesus today. In former times, we approached him in his entirety, but more from the side of his divinity, as scholasticism tended to view him. Now we see him, still in his entirety, but more from the side of his humanity, as the new theology approaches him. The contrast is commonly referred to as approaching Jesus “from above” or “from below.” Karl Rahner is credited with beginning this change by his “Christological anthropology.” The Italian Precious Blood community’s studies took the devotion a major step forward by introducing this adjustment. Henceforth, along with a change from conceptual to symbolic thought, the devotion would become “a spirituality of blood.” Ironically, this emphasis on “blood” came at the same moment that Carlo Molari warned in a pastoral context, “Today, the symbology of the blood of Christ ought to be used with great parsimony. Indeed, it should always be accompanied with reference to the free expression of love which Jesus achieved amid conditions of violence and injustice.”(6) Covenant, cross, and cup have become substitutions for “blood.”

The *method* of the devotion has shifted from the scholastic effort to *understand* the mysteries of faith in their conceptual clarity. Contemporary efforts focus on *interpreting* these truths critically in terms of contemporary experience; the interest is on the *meaning* of the truths. The approaches are not contradictory but they differ enough to puzzle the unwary. Father Schreiter used this method with great insight, subtlety, and effectiveness. He has surely become the mentor

Let for us today. (7)

me challenge the reader who glories in the new “spirituality of blood” with the following conundrum.

Is it possible for you to pray the Seven Offerings of the Precious Blood?

Since it is a conundrum, you must give a reason for your answer.

The *purpose* of the devotion has been adjusted by a shift from worship and cult associated with the old devotion to active and direct participation in Jesus’ mission to bring in the Kingdom of God, notably by concern for the poor and the marginalized. In this way liberation theology, especially as it is reflected in South America, has entered the spirituality of the blood

decisively and permanently. As lived by the missionaries and interpreted by Schreier, the charism of St. Gaspar is given contemporary, compelling force. It is truly a distinctive way of living one's life.

Summing up, current ambiguity in its theological base contributes to variety within the spirituality of the blood of Jesus.

The Lived Passage

A first consequence of variety within Precious Blood Spirituality is the need to understand our own while respecting and appreciating others. Our own history, our own experience should not blind us to the gifts of others.

We need to encourage and cooperate with others. We may be playing different melodies, but we have the same text. Why should we not enjoy both Bach's Mass in B Minor and Bernstein's contemporary Mass? As we might appreciate the "Te Deum" in Gregorian chant, and in the symphonic chorus of Bruckner, we should be able to enjoy at least some other varieties of our common spirituality, even if we do not understand the specific difference. The purpose of this essay is to provide at least a map to find our way together.

More important, another sort of reconciliation is needed within our own community. I knew one community theologian, universally respected as up-to-date, who gave up trying to understand "theological correlation" and "reconstructive hermeneutics" and limited his homiletic sources to Scripture and the liturgy. Let me challenge the reader who glories in the new "spirituality of blood" with the following conundrum. Is it possible for you to pray the Seven Offerings of the Precious Blood? Since it is a conundrum, you must give a reason for your answer.

Again, if two parties in the Society cannot reconcile their differences in spirituality, they will experience in their own fashion the misunderstanding between Jesus and the disciples throughout the gospel of Mark. Near the end of the Galilean ministry after many miracles, he complained, "Do you still not understand?" (Mk 8, 21) He, on his part,

The purpose of the devotion has been adjusted by a shift from worship and cult associated with the old devotion to active and direct participation in Jesus' mission to bring in the Kingdom of God, notably by concern for the poor and the marginalized

also felt the frustration! On the very day of resurrection the women fled from the tomb and “said nothing to anyone.”(Mk 16/8) They did not understand. Those who cannot reconcile at least share the same cross.

My own experience of this passage through devotion to the precious blood and precious blood spirituality leaves me with a deep sense of freedom and some questions. For several years I felt a keen sense of loss in reference to the old devotion. Even more disquieting was the feeling, in the presence of misunderstanding, of being pressured to embrace the new. I still have reservations that stem from approaching the whole Christian faith “from below.” Now I understand and compensate. In the end I find that I need the old theology for its clarity and the new for its meaningful personal challenge. I treasure the scholastic vision and the new theology for its transforming power.

If old age were to offer wisdom, it would suggest that we move from disquiet to insight, from isolation to cooperation, and—if necessary—from opposition to reconciliation.

One of the afflictions of contemporary man is that he carries his critical spirit with him even to his prayers. One of the questions the old devotion keeps asking the new interpretations of the spirituality is, “has the concentration on finding Jesus in the neighbor in some way lost the old intimacy with Jesus in the Stations of the Cross, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, etc.?” Perhaps we need to take up another basis of the “Passage,” our ways of praying. That would be possible but daunting. I have thought a lot about this in recent years. It would be a task for the private work of a Companion, much more valuable than the present reflections.

I began this meditation searching for a single passage through the mountains. It has become a stroll through a garden of flowers.



For Reflection

- In what way is the transition from the old to the new spirituality similar to the relationship between “transubstantiation” and “transfiguration?”
- Is the passage similar to the passage from “saying” the Divine Office to “praying” the Office?
- How does the Liturgy fit into the new spirituality of blood?

- ❑ Could the new book “The Cry of the Blood” be classified as a “charismatic” variety of the spirituality?



NOTES

1. Roger Haight, “Sin, Grace, and Spirituality.” In Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John Galvin, *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, II, p.135. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1991.
2. Edwin G. Kaiser, “The Devotion to the Precious Blood,” *The American Ecclesiastical Review* 83, July, 1930, pp. 1-16. “The Theology of the Precious Blood,” *ibid.* July, 1941, pp. 1-10. “The Blood of Christ: Its Social Significance,” *ibid.* July, 1942, pp. 1-11. His subsequent bibliography on these themes is long, but continuous. He was conscious of having revised the old devotion in his final work, but his death left the transition incomplete. *The Precious Blood in Our Spirituality, Reflections on Contemporary Redemptive Thought*. Messenger Press, Carthage, 1978.
3. George Lubeley, “The Precious Blood in the Mind of Christ,” *Messenger of the Precious Blood*, (between 1951-54). “The Law of Christ and Devotion to the Precious Blood,” Proceedings of the First Precious Blood Study Week, 1957, pp.149-171. Carthage, 1959.
4. Literally, “to think with assent.” *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 2, a.1. St. Thomas’ formal definition of the act of faith was also a psychological description of the experience. Believing is never a frozen assent.
5. Francis Schussler Fiorenza, “Systematic Theology: Task and Methods.” In *Fiorenza-Galvin*, op. cit., I, pp. 1-87. Splendid survey of methods in Catholic theology, particularly from neo-scholasticism through contemporary practice. The study inspired the present interpretation of my experience.
6. Father Milton Ballor generously contributed a full set of these Italian studies on “blood and anthropology” in the *Bible, Christian literature, and Liturgy*, for my work.
7. Carlo Molari, “Blood: The Human and Theological Experience,” the opening presentation for the Workshop Week on Precious Blood Spirituality in Rome, 1986; English translation, *Precious Blood Spirituality*, pp. 3-18. No data on publication. (Carthage, 1986?) His study was an indispensable turning point for me.
8. Robert J. Schreiter, *In Water and in Blood. A Spirituality of Solidarity and Hope*, Crossroad, New York. 1988.



George Lubeley is a Precious Blood Amicus and Companion (Putnam County, OH). He taught theology at St. Charles Seminary, St. Joseph’s College and Dayton. He holds graduate degrees in theology and education. His second career involves work with senior citizens principally with mental health issues. George and his wife Marie find the new spirituality very significant in their lives.



Seven Offerings For A Church in Crisis

By Terry Walter, CPPS

Loving God, we offer you the Precious Blood of Jesus, poured out on the cross and offered daily on the altar, for the Church rocked by scandal, that our faith may be purified in this time of darkness.

Glory be...

Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus.

Who with his blood has saved us.

Loving God, we offer you the Precious Blood of Jesus poured out on the cross and offered daily on the altar, for all persons who have been mistreated in any way by representatives of the Church, that they may experience justice that leads to healing.

Glory be...

Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus.

Who with his blood has saved us.

Loving God, we offer you the Precious Blood of Jesus, poured out on the cross and offered daily on the altar, for all who are guilty of abusing God's people, for their conversion, reconciliation and complete healing.

Glory be...

Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus.

Who with his blood has saved us.

Loving God, we offer you the Precious Blood of Jesus, poured out on the cross and offered daily on the altar, for the Holy Father, bishops and priests, that they may hear and respond to God's call to conversion and integrity as shepherds of the Church.

Glory be...

Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus.

Who with his blood has saved us.

Loving God, we offer you the Precious Blood of Jesus, poured out on the cross and offered daily on the altar, that the church be strengthened with the true armor of Jesus Christ to resist evil within and without.

Glory be...

Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus.

Who with his blood has saved us.

Loving God, we offer you the Precious Blood of Jesus, poured out on the cross and offered daily on the altar, for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit anew in the Church through gifts of courageous prophecy, relentless love and faith-filled healing.

Glory be...

Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus.

Who with his blood has saved us.

Loving God, we offer you the Precious Blood of Jesus, poured out on the cross and offered daily on the altar, that God may reign in our hearts and in our communities, transforming us into leaven for the Church.

Glory be...

Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus.

Who with his blood has saved us.

Praise to the Blood of Jesus.

Now and forever.

Amen.



Terry Walter is a Sister of the Precious Blood (Dayton) who serves in Guatemala. She has composed many variations of the Seven Offerings for meditation and communal prayer. Used with permission of the Dayton Precious Blood Sisters.





*Take this, all of you, and drink from it:
this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.
It will be shed for you and for all
so that sins may be forgiven.
Do this in memory of me.*

Eucharistic Prayers

Blood as Belonging: Re-claiming Identity as Beloved of God

By Terry Maher, CPPS

EDITOR'S NOTE: As a Sister of the Precious Blood, Sister Terry Maher writes, "It has been very helpful for me to use the image of Blood as a life-giving source in my prayer." The following reflection is based on the story from Mark's Gospel about the woman with a hemorrhage (5, 25-34). In its original form, Sister Terry's reflection also included the story of Jesus meeting with Jairus, which frames the other story. "Both of these encounters with Jesus have been significant to me in my own healing from life hurts," she writes.

She struggled with the rhythm of life. She wanted to be understood. And, she tried to understand it all herself. She wanted to be close to people. Perhaps she was so used to living her life in such a safe, protective manner she forgot how to be close to people. Perhaps she was afraid. Perhaps she didn't know what else to do.

*It is a disease
this BLOOD flowing out
life
forcing its way out
of me
It is a reminder
to me
of what is denied me
a full life
something I really want*

but
will hide that desire
not to be mine

the BLOOD flow
is hidden from the outsiders eye
they don't need to know
they don't need to see
I can live
I can keep my distance
they won't be touched by me
or
disturbed by me
I can wrestle with life
all by myself
though I do not know how
and
even as the BLOOD flow
empties me of life
eats away at me
like a cancerous tumor
I can keep it all a secret
stay safe
stay isolated
the law says so

Such an irony
to live
one has to die
one has to bleed

Because of her bleeding this woman was set apart. She was ostracized. She was abandoned. Her dignity was denied. She was considered by the Law to be unclean. Anyone who touched her made himself or herself unclean. Perhaps people feared her. We all tend to fear what we do not understand. As a result she probably had few friends. However, just maybe there were people around her who looked beyond the Law and befriended her. Who tried to love her. Who were able to withstand whatever resistance she may have shown them.

She was ostracized.
She was abandoned.
Her dignity was denied.

LOOK AT ME!

*look into my eyes
see the life hidden inside
can you see me?
my fear
my loneliness
my shame
my self hate
my guilt
can you see why I've abandoned me?
to live behind protective walls?
look into my eyes and see the struggle
to love me
to love you
to accept this disease that weakens me
to understand the consequences of healing
look into my eyes and see my heart
a heart filled with hopes
vision
fear
look into my eyes and see the life I hope for
a life of freedom
not a life bound by law
LOOK AT ME!*

and see yourself

*She probably found solace
in some empty, dead space
deep inside herself.*

The woman did all she could to stop the bleeding. She had an inner yearning that compelled her to seek healing. So, she visited doctors, healers—anyone who could stop the flow of blood. She desired healing. Sometimes it was hard and she may have grown tired.

She needed to keep herself safe from any jeering or name-calling. Hard to do when one has to beg for food, money, clothing—debasing herself. She probably found solace in some empty, dead space deep inside herself. She couldn't trust anyone. She knew what betrayal felt

like. So many people had walked out on her. She only had herself and even that wasn't too comforting. She knew all too well how to abandon herself.

Her life was not an easy one. Most probably everyone knew her, and maybe even talked about her. She could have been the butt of many jokes. There was no way she could hide her illness. Not only was the blood flowing out of her—the blood that gave LIFE to her physical being—but the blood flowing out of her denied LIFE to her. The kind of LIFE that one feels when accepted. When loved. When one really belonged. When one can love one's inner self.

But that LIFE was not hers.

Where were those that could have given her LIFE? What of her family? Did she have children? Husband? She had no identity as one who belonged. She was even denied God's love as the Law interpreted it. The Law says that if one is unclean one no longer belongs to the family of Abraham and Sarah. According to the Law though she was alive she was dead. She was to be left alone until she was no longer considered as one accused by God. Her deepest desire was to belong: to family, to a community, to a people. She knew what it meant to survive all by herself.

*She touched Jesus
because healing is what
would make her whole again.*

*BLOOD pouring out
womb scraped clean
barring generativity
banning creativity
forcing a kind of death
on woman
by unknown disease
eating away at her identity
purpose
place in life
never to be a woman who grows wisdom within
to become wisdom woman
as
aged woman
BLOOD flowing out*

Her simple action of touching the hem of Jesus' garment was done not to draw attention to herself. The people already knew her. She already carried the scars of rejection. She touched Jesus because healing is what would make her whole again.

She left her home knowing that Jesus was her last hope. As she made her way to where Jesus was, crawling, wanting to stay close to the ground, so as not to be seen. She knew the crowds would not let her near Jesus. She stayed close to the earth, which gave her warmth and strength and courage. She made her way to Jesus.

*I would rather touch him
than let him touch me
then I don't need to look
into his eyes
or tell him my shame
my guilt
my anger
I'm just not good enough
worthy
I would rather touch him
than let him touch me*

*It didn't work!
he still wanted to know*

*In the touch
power went out from him
some part of him
has become a part of me
as beloved
as begotten of GOD*

In faith she reached out to reclaim her identity as one claimed by God. She was, after all, entitled to the binding relationship God established with the chosen people of Israel. In touching the garment of Jesus she takes back her LIFE. She is healed. She is free.

*some part of him
has become a part of me
as beloved as begotten of GOD*

the daring
the courage
the desperation
the touch, by her

the gasping crowd
horrified by her
“how dare, she, really...?”
moving away
fearful of her
him

the touch, by her
confusion by him
spinning around
power leaving him
looking around
the question, by him

the touch, by her
the look, by him

All that is around her disappears. The crowd becomes lost in their own questions, their judgments, and their own lack of faith.

For her, no one can hear her. No one can see her. She is looking in a gaze, a kind of embrace of heart and all of who she is known by him. Power flowing out of him will flow into her if only she forgives those she feels damned the LIFE-BLOOD in her. Forgive and release the straightjacket holding her heart, her soul hostage.

The look by him. She is stunned by his request. It takes her breath away and she stares at him open mouthed, questioning the need to forgive those who damned her soul.

But they did. They said. They hurt. They stole. Scattered pieces of soul surround them. The look by him.

Turn and look at those you blame, those who abandoned you, those who stole LIFE from your soul, who deadened you and caused you to live dead on the inside out. Look at them and meet their eyes and the SOUL LIFE they have. Unstop the flow of LIFE-BLOOD within you. Forgive.

It was hard enough to face TRUTH. It was hard enough to march into a crowd of people who knew her well, who stayed away from her. Wasn't that enough, to be so daring? The call to wholeness, to holiness, is to move deeper to be healed. And to be in dialogue with the one who could stop the bleeding, the pain, the shame, the unknown. And, there she stood searching herself—eyes still fixed on him.

*The call to wholeness,
to holiness,
is to move deeper
to be healed.*

*power flowing out
in the touch of one
to another who desires w-holy-ness
in life-poverty
to another whose life has been violated
as a sacrificial offering to some
ill fitting god of desire
desecrated
to another who believed herself worthless
yet
longed
yearned
for healing
for new power*

*power flowing out
in the touch of one to another
laboring
birthing
to
recreate and restore
in the mingling of
the divine
with.....me
enlivening
abolishing idols of fear
and their captive hold
begetting freedom
churning LIFE forces*

*and
bringing to birth the true self
and casting off the old
to let safety traps be life-less
to cease the inner oppression
no longer denying
the disease
that
eats away at life
accepting the truth*

*to labor
at dying
and standing empty
while embracing a child
held within the inner self
the child who holds treasures
and fears
to comfort
to console
and let the child sing
her freedom from the loss
of LIFE BLOOD*

*begetting freedom for the whole self
the true self
beloved
begotten of GOD
animated by the breath of GOD
growing wisdom within*

*power flowing out
labor
indestructible birthing*

*establishing a COVENANT relationship
sealed in the LIFE BLOOD flow
binding
healer and healed
restoring
making whole again
securing identity as one loved
wisdom woman*

*establishing COVENANT relationship
new patterns of being with self
with others who call
who challenge
toward growth and truth
companions in broken body
sharing broken bread
power flowing out as lives touch
deepening bonds of love
sealed in the LIFE BLOOD*

*establishing COVENANT relationship
circle of LIFE BLOOD
blessing and curse together
laboring
creating
touching
to be shared
in the CUP of blessing
as power flows out
in the LIFE flow of BLOOD
to die.....again
to heal.....again
to give birth.....again
to be free!*



A sister of the Precious Blood (Dayton) for twenty-five years, Terry Maher has been involved in parish work as a DRE, youth ministry, and as a pastoral associate. She serves presently as pastoral associate at Our Lady of the Valley Church, Hemet, CA.



"The spirituality of St. Gaspar,
in fact,
is truly at the heart
of the Christian life:
the Most Precious Blood of our Lord
was always the object
of a special attention
on the part of all the saints;
it is a school of holiness,
of justice, of love...
Never stop deepening
your understanding
of this mystery of justice and love:
spread it through the whole world."

Pope John Paul II

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

By Richard Bayuk, CPPS

*The God of curved space, the dry
God, is not going to help us, but the son
whose blood spattered
the hem of his mother's robe.*

Jane Kenyon
Looking at Stars

*He has redeemed us through love,
Has shed all his Blood in love,
And through him we have
A mystical dwelling in his heart.*

St. Gaspar del Bufalo

“**D**evotion” 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.

*Properly practiced
popular devotions
extend the
liturgical life of the
church into daily
life, rather than
replace it.*

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 that is a call to holiness and service. Properly practiced popular devotions 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 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. The history of spirituality in Europe during the several centuries preceding Gaspar is much too complex to consider here in detail. It is helpful to recall, however, that 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 that 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.

Devotion to the Five Sacred Wounds and to the Passion became a common theme of meditation for the medieval mystics.

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

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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.

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 the Precious Blood and the spirituality that flowed from it was not particularistic or pietistic; it is rather a theology that 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, therefore, 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 & 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.

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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

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

As one might expect, 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” (Foley 150–151).

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

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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 that 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 that 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 that focused on the human (and therefore, suffering) Jesus. The presence of God and the reality of redemption permeate 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

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wants religion to be a purely spiritual matter, an etherized, bloodless bliss" (Norris 114).

Because Precious blood spirituality is incarnational, we can speak about and respond to the "call of the Blood" as a voice that 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.” (Mitchell 22–23).

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 and ministered 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, one writer 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” (Norris 115). This is surely something that we in the Precious Blood family can devote ourselves to.



NOTES

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For Reflection

- ❑ How do popular devotions, properly understood and practiced, extend the liturgical life of the community of faith? What popular devotions resonate in your own experience and how do they express the spirituality that shapes your life?
- ❑ Reflect on how devotion to the Precious Blood can lead to a deeper social awareness. In what ways has the spirituality of the Precious Blood influenced your views on issues of social justice?
- ❑ How do you experience drinking from the cup at Eucharist as an act of solidarity and an expression of your baptismal commitment?
- ❑ What images, ideas, and insights can people who claim the spirituality of the Blood of Christ bring to bear on recent changes in liturgical practices in our parishes?



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