

Outline of Precious Blood Devotion and Spirituality from Saint Gaspar to the Present Day

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PRECIOUS BLOOD DEVOTION AND SPIRITUALITY FROM SAINT GASPAR TO THE PRESENT DAY

Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S.

Introduction

The theme of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ has been central to the identity and self-understanding of our Congregation from the very beginning. It was under this title that St. Gaspar del Bufalo created our Institute in 1815, and it was this very title he defended before Pope Leo XII when the Institute came under attack in 1825 from his opponents. The diffusion of devotion to the Precious Blood was seen as central to the work of the Missionaries in their popular mission preaching, and was even enshrined for a time as the principal purpose of the Missionaries in the 1946 Constitutions. One cannot, therefore, think of preparing candidates for our Congregation without considering an immersion in this mystery of Christian faith a necessity.

The purpose of these presentations is directed to those who are responsible for the formation of candidates for the C.P.P.S. As such, it does not attempt to give a full account of the various themes which make up our understanding of the blood of Christ. Nor does it give a complete history of the various turns which this reality has taken for us in the course of nearly two centuries. Rather, it is an attempt to step back from the immediate details of our understanding of the blood of Christ to raise questions which are important for the work of formation in communicating the meaning of the blood of Christ.

The first question has to do with *the concrete form* of our understanding of the meaning of the blood of Christ in the history of redemption and what that means for our response to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We live, after all, not with a general, abstract or purely theological understanding of the blood of Christ. We live out that meaning in very concrete forms of prayer and action. To that end, we will examine our experience of the meaning of the blood of Christ for us under two separate, but deeply interrelated forms, namely, as *devotion* and as *spirituality*. These represent two distinctive approaches to the meaning of the blood of Christ for us, approaches which exist alongside, and interrelated with, one another.

In order to do that, we will need to examine something of the *structure* of devotion as a response to the mystery of blood of Christ, and also the structure of spirituality. These two approaches—devotion and spirituality—have the same purpose or end : namely, a deeper union with the great mystery of God's interaction with our world, and the meaning and destiny of our very being. But their internal structure is somewhat different, as is also their mode of interacting with the larger world.

To that end, we will need to look at a second question as we scan the history of the Precious Blood from the time of our Founder, St. Gaspar, to the present day : namely, how *the concrete situation* in which we have found ourselves has shaped our presentation of the heritage of this great mystery, as well as how we live it out in our ministries and in our daily lives.

Bringing these two questions together—namely, of our how we understand the mystery of the blood of Christ in concrete form as devotion or spirituality, and of how that understanding shapes our response to the world in which we live—is essential for the work of formation of candidates and lay associates in our Congregation. To live as Missionaries is to do more than know certain things about the blood of Christ, and then to present them directly in our ministries. We must know also

how to engage the people with whom and among whom we minister. There have been, for example, periods of time in some parts of our Congregation where our members have wondered whether we could continue to speak of the Precious Blood as central to our identity at all. That is not a major question today, but the concerns raised at those times provide us with important questions which can help us respond to the questions arising from our candidates today. Such questions I found when I worked in formation included : Why focus on the blood of Christ ? What does this mean for my ministry ? How does it shape the Christian life and a Christian response to the world in which I work and live ?

I will structure this presentation in two parts. The first part will focus on *Precious Blood devotion* as it has been understood from the time of St. Gaspar to the present day. The second part will look at *Precious Blood spirituality* as it has developed in certain parts of our Congregation in the last two decades or so. As I said at the beginning, both of these forms are alive and among us today. Both are concerned about the same things, but take distinctive perspectives on how to communicate the mystery of Christ in our world today.

In each of these parts, on devotion and on spirituality, I will talk about three things. First of all, the *distinctive structure* of devotional practices and the practice of spirituality. This is necessary in order to understand the second area we need to examine, namely, how the *major themes of the blood of Christ* are taken up in each of these forms. Third and finally, I will look at the *contexts* which make devotional practices or the practice of spirituality the more appropriate response to a situation or part of the world where the C.P.P.S. finds itself today. By looking at contexts, or reading the “signs of the times”, we can see more clearly how devotion and spirituality both provide appropriate forms of communicating what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

By approaching the meaning of the blood of Christ for us, both in history and today, I hope to set the stage for examining more closely what is role and what are the responsibilities and challenges for formation today and in the near future. In effect, then, I am giving you a reading—one person’s reading—of the place and history of the Precious Blood in our lives and ministries as the C.P.P.S. Thinking about this not only contributes to the “three pillars” of our identity (i.e., mission, community, spirituality), but also will help in your construction of the over-all sense of “mission” in the fourth week of this course.

Part I

DEVOTION TO THE BLOOD OF CHRIST FROM ST. GASPAR TO OUR DAY

Through most of history of the C.P.P.S., we have spoken of our manner of responding to and living out the meaning of the Precious Blood in terms of *devotion*. In order to understand why our founding figures used this term, and why it continues to be used, we must begin by examining what we mean by *devotion*.

Devotion as Personal Commitment and as Practices

The term “devotion” encompasses two distinctive meanings. Devotion is first of all a posture, an approach, or an attitude toward an aspect of the divine mystery. Michele Colagiovanni, in one his reflections on the meaning of devotion, aptly traces the meaning of devotion back to its etymology in the word “dedication.” To engage in devotion to someone or something is have a special commitment to that reality, a commitment that is marked by a focusing or dedicating of one’s life to

that reality.¹ To engage in devotion is, therefore, to “be devoted.” Everything encompassed in that field of focus and dedication constitutes “devotion.”

Devotion has also a second meaning. It refers to the set of spiritual practices one engages in to give expression to that object of dedication. These practices are the concrete embodiment, if you will, of that devotedness. Sometimes this second meaning of devotion is expressed in the use of the term “devotion” in the plural, as “devotions.”²

When we speak of devotion to the blood of Christ, we generally include both of these meanings. In the first meaning, of devotion as an object of focus and dedication, we can enumerate certain themes included in our understanding of the meaning of the blood of Christ. I would enumerate four principal themes regarding the blood of Christ which recur in our understanding of its meaning, from St. Gaspar down to the present time :

- The first is *God’s great love for humankind*, manifest in God’s sending of the Son into our world to become one of us, and his taking our sins upon himself as a sign of that love. The Son’s total dedication to us and to our humanity is expressed in his willingness to shed his blood for us to the point of death. The blood of Christ, therefore, is a sign of God’s unbounded love for all of us.
- The second is our devotion to this great mystery in the *passion and death of Jesus Christ* for the sake of our sins. The meaning of God’s great devotion to us is given in the story of Jesus’ willingness to undergo suffering and death on our behalf. In this story of the suffering and death of Jesus, we give special attention to the bloodsheddings noted in the Gospel accounts (the agony in the garden, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the carrying of the cross, the crucifixion, and the piercing of Jesus’ side after his death). These moments in the story when blood is shed give us a special entry into the suffering of Jesus on our behalf. Moreover, the story of the suffering and death of Jesus opens us for us the larger narrative of God’s intentions regarding human destiny : that we are deeply loved by God, and God wishes reconciliation and a renewed communion with us, despite our sinfulness.
- These meanings of God’s love, our sinfulness, and the suffering and death of Jesus for our sakes finds profound symbolic presentation for us in the *Eucharist*. Participation in the Eucharist recalls for us all the dimensions of this great story. In the Eucharist we are invited to enter into these holy mysteries and into deeper communion with God. In the Eucharist we offer once again to God the blood of Jesus, source of infinite merit for the taking away of our sins, and the pledge of eternal communion with God.
- The fourth theme is that God’s great love for us in the story of Jesus reminds us of our *sinfulness* and the need to respond to this great love by *reparation* for our sins. Reparation involves both acknowledgement of our having sinned through engaging in penitential practices to show the depth of our sorrow. Those practices of penitence both acknowledge our wrongdoing and represent an effort to participate in sufferings of Christ so as to enter more deeply into communion with him. The blood of Jesus can also give meaning to our own

¹ Michele Colagiovanni, “Il sangue di Cristo in San Gaspare del Bufalo Fondatore dei Missionari del Preziosissimo Sangue,” in Achille M. Triacca, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo e l’esperienza cristiana* (Roma : Ed. Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, 1987), 575f. See also Robert Schreier, “Introduction,” *In Water and in Blood : A Spirituality of Solidarity and Hope* (New York : Continuum, 1988 ; Carthage : Messenger Press, 1994).

² The use of the term “culto” in the Romance languages denotes more or less the same thing.

suffering, as a means of participation in the suffering of Christ. A corollary dimension of this theme is the importance of *martyrdom* as the ultimate expression of our commitment to Christ.

If we look across the authors who have tried to articulate the focus of our dedication to the meaning of Christ for us, these are the four themes which are returned to again and again, from St. Gaspar's mentor, Francesco Albertini, through Gaspar himself and down to the present time.³ There are, to be sure, many additional themes derived from these four, but it is to these four—God's love, the suffering of Jesus in his passion and death, the Eucharist, and penitential reparation for sin—that they all, in one way or another, return.

Devotion, then, represents entering into the divine mystery with a special focus. Devotion also entails engaging in spiritual practices which give expression to these commitments. There are a number of such spiritual practices clearly identified with the devotion to the blood of Christ. Let me remind us of them.

- Certainly participation in the *sacraments of Eucharist and Penance* (or as it is now called, *Reconciliation*) are principal practices marking a devotee of the blood of Christ. As already noted, it is in the Eucharist that all the themes of the blood of Christ converge. Frequent participation in and reception of the Eucharist show one's devotion to the blood of Christ. For Missionaries of the Precious Blood, these practices of participating in Penance and Eucharist are enjoined upon us in the Normative Texts (C13, 14).
- A second practice flowing from the participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist is *eucharistic adoration*. Although not enjoined upon us in the current Normative Texts, it has a long history in our Congregation, dating back to the Founder himself. It is a practice which has gained renewed interest in certain parts of the C.P.P.S. in recent years.
- A third practice distinctive to the Precious Blood family is the *chaplet of the Precious Blood (coroncina)*. Similar to the rosary, it is a means of meditating on the seven bloodsheddings of Christ. It originates from Francesco Albertini, and was propagated enthusiastically by St. Gaspar and his Missionaries. In recent years a variety of forms of praying the chaplet has been suggested, but all of these go back in one way or another to Albertini's original form.⁴
- A fourth set of practices includes a variety of prayers and hymns. Among the former the best known are the "Seven Offerings of the Precious Blood" and the short ejaculatory prayer "Eternal Father". Also, the Litany of the Precious Blood, approved for use in the universal Church by Pope John XXIII, and a variety of other prayers to be found in manuals of prayers issued by the different provinces of the C.P.P.S. Likewise, observance of special prayers during the month of July, the month devoted to the Precious Blood can be mentioned.⁵

³ For example, Beniamino Conti, *S. Gaspare del Bufalo Apostolo del Sangue di Cristo* (Roma : Missionari del Prez.mo Sangue, 1970), 15-27 ; Colagiovanni, op.cit. ; Alberto Santonato, "Il Sanbgue di Cristo negli scritti di Mons. Francesco Albertini," in Triacca, op.cit., 555-573.

⁴ For both a history and some useful suggestions on how to pray the chaplet, see Romano Altobelli, "La meditazione delle sette effusioni del Sangue di Cristo nella Coroncina," in Achille M. Triacca (ed.), *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo nella liturgia e nella pieta popolare* (Roma : Ed. Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, 1989), 15-46.

⁵ Santina Dio, "Preghiere al Sangue di Cristo," in ibid., 93-138 ; Tullio Veglianti, "I canti al Sangue di Cristo," in ibid., 139-287 ; Beniamino Conti, "Il mese del Preziosissimo Sangue," in ibid., 289-312 ; Matias Augé, "Le litanie del Sangue di Cristo nelle formulazioni precedenti all'attuale," 47-92..

- A fifth set of practices are more generalized forms of Catholic piety, such as Stations of the Cross, pilgrimage, participation in popular missions, retreats, days of recollection, and the like. These are widely shared with other Christians but often carry specific themes of the blood of Christ.

Distinctive Features of Devotion

Devotion to the blood of Christ has been, and continues to be, part of the identifying feature of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Having said something about the themes and practices of the devotion, can something also be noted of this approach to the blood of Christ as devotion? I would like to suggest a number of features.

First of all, the practices of the devotion are intended help us enter more deeply into the great themes of the Precious Blood. The practices do this by engaging our intellect, but also especially our emotions and bodies in reflecting on the blood of Christ. They are intended not simply to provide knowledge, but to stir up our feelings, deepen our commitments, and strengthen our motivation to seek communion with God under these forms. An important of devotional practice in general, therefore, and of Precious Blood devotion in particular, is to engage us more closely with the divine mysteries.

Second, devotional practices, to a large extent, can be either individual or communal. One can recite the chaplet of the Precious Blood or the prayers alone or communally. When done alone, they provide scope for linking one's own life and experience to the story of salvation. When done communally they can create profound bonds of solidarity among those who are participating. For members of the Congregation, praying these prayers alone can remind us of the links we have to those present who are praying with us, but also fellow members and devotees who do the same elsewhere.

Third, many of devotional practices do not require the presence of clergy. Reception of the sacraments require clergy, but eucharistic adoration, prayers, and penitential practices do not. Even though that has changed since the Second Vatican Council, the persistence of these devotional practices reminds us that so many of these practices are rooted deeply in the popular religiosity (*religiosidad popular*) of Christians. The value of popular religiosity is more appreciated today as an authentic form of faith, thanks especially to the efforts of theologians in Latin America. They are not just deracinated or incomplete forms of Christian piety which will pass away if there is greater liturgical participation.⁶

Fourth, one cannot but notice the instrumental or motivational dimension of devotion. That is, devotion is not an end in itself. It is intended to lead to a deeper commitment in Christian faith and can be seen in at least some measure as an instrument for achieving that. To realize this we need but think back on why St. Gaspar was so keen on propagating this devotion. Colagiovanni collects and notes some of those motivations of St. Gaspar and his followers in a now-familiar list: the reform of morals, the salvation of souls, the reform of the clergy, and the rescue of the faithful from lack of faith or indifference toward religion. Engaging in Precious Blood devotion was for the purpose of achieving these ends.⁷ The fact that elements of the story of redemption are just referred

⁶ It would be worth exploring at another time whether the capacity of the Missionaries to work so closely with and be identified with the people is not at least partly the product of the fact that their identification with the Precious Blood was marked by such practices of popular piety.

⁷ Colagiovanni, op.cit.

to, rather than explicated, assumes that people already know the story and only need to be reminded of that story so as to renew their ardor.

Devotion represents, therefore, a special way of configuring the themes and practices of Christian faith. They confer a certain identity on those who practice the devotion, and in so doing serve a way of entering into the mysteries of faith.

Contexts for Devotion to the Precious Blood

Devotion to the blood of Christ has at times been presented as somewhat timeless and universal, that is, at home in every time and every place : we can engage in the devotions of St. Gaspar and his first followers, even though we are separated from them in time, place, and culture. There is a certain truth to this, and this gives us a solidarity with the time and very origins of our Congregation. However, the fact that devotion to the blood of Christ as it has been outlined here has flourished more in some times and places than others makes us raise questions about context : Are there certain conditions that make Precious Blood devotion more lively and fruitful for people ? Why has Precious Blood devotion flourished more at some times than others ?

The second half of the twentieth century brought a greater awareness of understanding context and culture, and how these influence are capacity to understand and appreciate certain things. Learning to read the “signs of the times” at the Second Vatican Council, the appearance of the language of “inculturation” in the 1970s, and the language of the “refounding” of religious communities in the 1980s and 1990s have heightened our awareness of the importance of context. Indeed it would now be considered irresponsible to form candidates without some awareness of the specific features of the situation in which they find themselves, and how that affects what people are able to hear and to experience. Culture, and the capacity to live and work with people of different cultures, are clearly challenges before us today.

Can something be said about the contexts which make devotion to the Precious Blood flourish in a special way ? I would like to respond to this by looking first at the place of the Devotion’s origins, in Italy in the nineteenth century, and then our current situation in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Precious Blood Devotion in 19th Century Italy

I begin by looking at the origins of devotion to the Precious Blood in nineteenth century Italy. I do this not only because that is where the origins of the C.P.P.S. can be found, but also because it is widely acknowledged that devotion to the Precious Blood as it has come to be practiced worldwide in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had its roots in Italy. Devotion in Italy can be traced as the source of all the some fifteen religious congregations in the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century which have “Precious Blood” in their title. The largest Confraternity of the Precious Blood in the world today is traced back to an Anglican convert to Catholicism, Fr. William Faber. He learned of this devotion when he studied in Rome shortly after his conversion. When he returned to England, he published in 1860 *The Precious Blood ; or, the Price of Our Redemption*. This book has never gone out of print since. It set up a worldwide Confraternity of the Precious Blood much larger than the Archconfraternity set up by Albertini, or its subsequent Union of the Blood of Christ.

There is widespread agreement that the modern devotion to the Precious Blood began with Francesco Albertini in 1808, as Don Beniamino Conti has already noted. Albertini founded the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood at the Church of S. Nicola in Carcere in Rome in 1808, developed the chaplet of the Precious Blood as a principal devotional practice, and mentored Gaspar del Bufalo in the founding of a Missionary Institute under the title of this mystery. He is the single

source for these developments, not only among the Missionaries and the Adorers of the Blood of Christ founded by St. Maria De Mattias in 1834, but also, at least indirectly, of all the other congregations dedicated to the blood of Christ founded in Italy in the 19th century.⁸

What was the context that made Italy such fertile ground for Precious Blood devotion, and how were those conditions replicated elsewhere to spread that devotion? In her research, Sister Nicla Spezzati, A.S.C., has identified the two most important features of 19th century Italy that made this possible: the Restoration and Romanticism.⁹

The Restoration

The foundation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in 1815 was a direct outcome of a project by Pope Pius VII to restore the spiritual and social life of the Papal States after the depredations of Napoleon's occupation. This program, inaugurated by Pius VII and continued up to the beginning of the reign of Pius IX in 1846, is usually called by historians "the Restoration." What it was trying to restore was the faith and morals of Catholics in the Papal States, as well bring about the reform of the clergy. There was an awareness on the part of Pius VII and others that reform was also needed in many aspects of the State and of Church life, but there was never clear agreement on how far the reforms should go. What was in any case clear was that the Pope was to be the sole sovereign in the Papal States.

The winds of political reform, first apparent in the French revolution and fed by the ideology of the Enlightenment, continued to grow in strength throughout Europe after Napoleon, culminating in the 1848 revolution in France and parts of Germany. Nationalist forces began coming together in the Italian peninsula, leading to the rise of the *Risorgimento* in the 1840s, which temporarily unseated Pius IX in 1848, and eventually led to the dissolution of the Papal States altogether in 1870.

St. Gaspar died in 1837, before the *Risorgimento* began to gather force. He was clearly a person of Pius VII's Restoration, and his polemics against the evils of the time cannot be understood apart from the policies of the Restoration. "Restoration" did not mean for him so much political reform as the reform of personal morals. One finds this already in his confrontation with the Carbonari, the Freemasons, and other free-thinking sects in his missions north of Rome.¹⁰ It is evident also in how he approached the problem of the *banditti* south of Rome in the 1820s. His concern was personal moral reform, be that of the brigands, the Papal governors, or the police. He did not raise larger questions about the nature of government itself as we might today.

Devotion to the Precious Blood, as an "armament against the times," was intended to make strong the souls of those struggling within the shifting social and political currents of that era. By living an upright life, in the union with the Church, one would be found righteous before God.

Romanticism

It would be wrong, however, to see Gaspar and his Missionaries from a point of view of a century and a half later as political reactionaries. The Restoration was a reactionary movement against the

⁸ For a presentation on these congregations, see John M. Behen, *Religions of the Precious Blood* (Carthage: Messenger Press, 1957). For studies on the founding figures of some of these congregations, see the articles collected in volume II of Achille M. Triacca (ed.), *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo e l'esperienza cristiana* (Roma: Ed. Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, 1987). It should be noted that Fr. Faber's work was the principal resource for the naming of the Anglican Congregation "The Society of the Precious Blood", a contemplative congregation of nuns founded in 1905.

⁹ Nicla Spezzati, "San Gaspare: I suoi tempi," in *San Gaspare del Bufalo. Tempi - Vita - Personalità - Carisma* (Roma: Ed. Pia Unione del Preziosissimo Sangue, 1980), 21-72.

¹⁰ For a nuanced reading of Gaspar's place in the Restoration, and how to read that in light of subsequent political developments in Italy, see Mario Spinelli, *Vita di Gaspare del Bufalo: Senza voltarsi indietro* (Roma: c.m.pp.s., 1996), ch. 14.

French Enlightenment and its attendant ideas, to be sure. But there was also a more positive image or vision which guided this critique of the Enlightenment. It can be found in the movement which began to move through Europe in those years, known as Romanticism.

Romanticism began in Germany in the eighteenth century as a reaction to the universalizing character of the Enlightenment as it had come to Germany from France.¹¹ Romanticism, as it spread from Germany to England, France, and Italy, countered the universalizing political perspective of the Enlightenment and insisted upon the importance of the particular and the local. In Romanticism we find the roots of nationalism, that is, the belief that each people has a unique character and temperament, which needs to be expressed in a distinctive language and culture as an organic whole. Likewise, the individual is not simply an instance of universal principles, but a uniquely constituted person within a distinctive culture.

This sense of being part of an organic whole expressed itself *politically* in the revolutionary and nationalist movements of 19th century Europe, of which the Italian *Risorgimento* is a prime example. It swept through Latin America at the same time, leading to the emancipation of the colonies from Spain and Portugal.

The Church in all of these places was decidedly ambivalent toward nationalism, since the place of the Church in post-nationalist settings would likely be less privileged than it had been in the monarchical states (this was especially clear for Pius IX and for the Papal States). But the Church had its own Romantic ideal. This was the Catholicism of the European Middle Ages, before the trauma of the 16th century Reformation.

The medieval Church was seen to be an organic and ideal society, where everyone knew their place. Undivided Christendom, under the tutelage of the papacy, was seen as the ideal form of society. Consequently, one sees in the 19th century a renewed interest in the Church and the culture of the Middle Ages. Neo-gothic became the preferred architecture for church buildings. The medieval guilds represented the best form of commercial life. In England, for example, this developed into the Tractarian movement in the 1830s, which in turn in the 1840s led Anglicans such as John Henry Newman and Frederick William Faber away from the Church of England and back to the Church of Rome.

The revival and power of Precious Blood devotion in the 19th century cannot be understood without these medieval antecedents. St. Albert the Great and St. Bonaventure had been great advocates of devotion to the bloodsheddings of Jesus. Many of the great medieval mystics—one thinks of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Julian of Norwich, B. Angela di Foligno, and St. Catherine of Siena—spoke of being inebriated in the blood of Christ, or seeking entry into his wounds. There was a lively devotion to the Passion of Christ in those centuries, which received expression in the penitential fraternities founded in Spain, in the Passion Plays developed throughout the southern German-speaking territories, and in the development of the Stations of the Cross.

And one can also not discount the proliferation of shrines to the Precious Blood throughout Europe, especially between the 12th and 16th centuries. These shrines were basically of two types. Some claimed to have relics of the passion, such as earth or clothing stained by the blood of Christ as he died on the cross. Major shrines of this type could be found in Mantua, in Bruges, and in Weingarten. More numerous were shrines to miracles of hosts which bled when priests doubted the

¹¹ It should be noted that the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries was not a uniform movement. The French version was particularly anti-clerical and against the preponderant power of the Church. The Scottish Enlightenment (with figures like David Hume and Adam Smith) represented a form of Enlightenment more favorably attuned to religion. It was this form of Enlightenment which had the greatest influence on the founding of the American Republic in the 1780s.

Real Presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements, or to hosts which bled when profaned.¹² In their research into these shrines, Frs. Charles Banet and William Volk noted that at least 221 such shrines have existed or continue to exist in Europe today.¹³ The shrine at S. Maria in Vado in Ferrara, entrusted to the C.P.P.S. in 1930, is a site of a eucharistic miracle dating from 1171.¹⁴

This medieval backdrop helps clarify the development of the devotion to the Precious Blood in Italy in the 19th century. Francesco Albertini's devotion to the blood of Jesus was centered upon a relic of the Passion, which the Savelli family had donated to S. Nicola in Carcere in 1708. Albertini celebrated Mass regularly at the altar where the relic was enshrined, while the faithful recited the chaplet of the Precious Blood.

The emphasis on miracle and other forms of divine intervention permeate the 19th century devotion. It was the prediction of the ecstatic Sister Agnes of the Incarnate Word which convinced Albertini—and the Gaspar—of the divine will that an Institute of Missionaries of the Precious Blood be founded. Pious biographies of St. Gaspar recount a number of miracles attributed to him.¹⁵ This atmosphere of miracles is certainly reminiscent of medieval piety.

Finally, if one looks to the texts on devotion to the Precious Blood from this period, their sighs, exclamations and ejaculations recall those of the medieval mystics. All in all, it seems to me, one cannot understand the rise and the persistence of Precious Blood devotion in the 19th century without reference to the Romanticism which formed its context and gave it many of its forms. This was not simply a rejection of the modern world which was developing, but has to be seen also as a desire for a more integrated, organic way of living in the midst of the political, social, and economic upheavals of the time.

Neo-Romanticism Today

Placing the rise of Precious Blood devotion at the intersection of the Restoration and Romanticism might lead some to think that this devotion has no relevance for the beginning of the 21st century, or that it can only find acceptance among those who live in utter reaction to the developments of modernity. To think in such terms would be short-sighted.

What has become evident since the interaction of the Enlightenment and Romanticism over the past two hundred years is that this was not a dialectic that played itself out only in the first part of the 19th century. It represents a larger interplay between the universal and the particular, the global and the local, which continues into our own time.

For example, the interest in inculturation of faith in the Church since the 1970s is unthinkable outside this dialectic. The Second Vatican Council, especially in documents such as *Gaudium et spes*, attempted a broad new vision for the Church of the 20th century. It left room for interpretation of cultural difference, but this challenge was only really taken up more than a decade after the Council. Insisting on the particularity of culture as integral to the human being and to human development is part of the heritage of Romanticism very much alive with us today. Our language of multiculturalism and interculturality has romanticist roots.

¹² The bleeding hosts were common during the time of the eucharistic controversies regarding the real presence. The profaned hosts were often connected to anti-Semitic accounts of Jews profaning the eucharistic elements.

¹³ William A. Volk, "Le reliquie del Sangue di Cristo," in Triacca, op.cit., II, 325-334.

¹⁴ For an historical study, see Dante Balboni, "Il miracolo eucaristico di Ferrara (28 marzo 1171) in Triacca, II, op.cit., 415-452.

¹⁵ For a late-twentieth century interpretation of this see Spinelli, op. cit., ch. 17.

The experience of what is now called “postmodernity,” the experience of the loss of an overarching worldview that would hold the Western world together, has been fruitful ground for the resurgence of Romantic sensibility. The quest for wholeness in the midst of what is perceived as fragmentation, unmanageable pluralism, and cultural relativism makes the organic view of life particularly attractive for many people today.

One form of Precious Blood devotion very much alive in parts of the C.P.P.S. today that reflects this Romantic heritage, but in a postmodern way, is the interest in Charismatic forms of piety. Such interest in charismatic forms of prayer represent a reappropriation of the Romantic heritage. They must also be read in terms of the wider Pentecostal/Charismatic forms of Christianity widespread in the world today. By all accounts, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements represent the fastest growing form of Christianity in the world today. An estimated 350 million of the 2 billion Christians in the world today profess a Pentecostal or Charismatic form of faith. It is especially fast growing in West Africa, Latin America, Southern Asia, and the Philippines. One finds it in the C.P.P.S. in Central Europe, but also to some extent in Chile and elsewhere.

Why the sudden upsurge of interest in Pentecostal faith in our time? Scholars are not of one mind on this.¹⁶ The first stirrings of Pentecostalism occurred at the beginning of the 20th century in the United States, Chile, and India. Since the 1970s, the numbers have increased exponentially, not only among Protestant Evangelicals, but also among mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, and even Orthodox.

I see three reasons for the growth of Pentecostal forms of faith today. First of all, among the poor, it is a way of gaining self-respect and dignity. The poor may be despised by the powerful, but their access to divine favor in Pentecostal faith (prophesying, healing, speaking in tongues) shows that the Holy Spirit does not despise them. It gives them a sense of self-worth and autonomy which the rich cannot take away from them.

Second, among middle class people who embrace Pentecostal and Charismatic forms of faith, it can be a reaction against the fragmentation and confusion of modern and postmodern life. Much as the Romantics protested against the abstract and universalizing character of life under the Enlightenment, so too middle-class Charismatics today seek a more organic way of life amid the confusion and the pluralism they experience.

Third, although participation in Pentecostal and Charismatic faith can be positive for the reasons just given, it also—as does any movement—have negative sides. Among the poor, it can turn energy away from improving their situation to finding a way to simply survive within it. For middle-class people, it can be an avoidance of engaging the difficult process of living in a pluralistic, multicultural context. For both groups, such forms of faith have also sometimes become tied to what is known as the “prosperity Gospel”: love Jesus and get rich.

Thus, phenomena as different as a commitment to intercultural and multicultural living, and the widespread Pentecostal and Charismatic forms of Christianity show part of the heritage of Romanticism. One sees how devotion to the blood of Christ flourishes today especially in those contexts. These do not exhaust the reasons why Precious Blood devotion continues to be a vital form of faith for people. In Italy, for example, I would hazard the guess that sheer cultural continuity between the forces which shaped modern Italy in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and what sustains modern and postmodern Italians today, accounts for the continued vigor of the devotion. In Poland, where the Church was the sole guarantor of Polish national identity for more

¹⁶ Perhaps the single best book on worldwide Pentecostal faith is David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World, Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

than two centuries of occupation and oppression, devotion is ideally suited to connecting present experience to that cultural and religious heritage denied under totalitarian and atheistic regimes. For others, devotional practices give an emotional and spiritual intensity to connect with the transcendent in a way that gives them genuine sustenance in their lives.

Conclusion

In this first part, I have tried to show something about the structure and content of devotion to the Precious Blood as it developed from the time of St. Gaspar, and continues to show itself as lively and vigorous at the beginning of the 20th century. I hope that this helps us explain the origins of the devotion in the modern period, and also to some extent why it continues to be a lively option for so many people today. I would like to turn now to the second part of this presentation, the development of the *spirituality* of the Precious Blood.

Part II

SPIRITUALITY OF THE BLOOD OF THE CHRIST

Introduction

Today we speak both of Precious Blood *devotion*, and of *spirituality* of the blood of Christ. Why make this distinction? Where does it come from? And is it of any significance? In this second part, I wish to explore the emergence of the spirituality of the blood of Christ. It is important to trace just where this development comes from, how it differs from Precious Blood devotion, and where it seems to be pointing for the future. As a final point, some attention will have to be given to how devotion and spirituality relate to one another in the larger world of the C.P.P.S. of the 21st century.

In this part, I will begin with emergence of the language of spirituality, and try to trace some of the reasons why it began to appear in the Catholic Church in the 1980s. Then, I will trace its emergence within the C.P.P.S. over the past two decades. In a third moment, I will trace what have become the principal themes in a spirituality of the blood of Christ. Fourth and finally, I will explore how patterns of devotion and spirituality might relate in the C.P.P.S. in the immediate future of the first part of the 21st century.

The Rise of the Discourse of Spirituality in the 20th Century

In the lengthy article on “blood” in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, published in the mid-1980s, the author, Réginald Grégoire, declared that today the devotion to the Precious Blood “is in a time of stand-still.”¹⁷ Why did he make such a bold assertion?

That same feeling could be found in the C.P.P.S. in the period of the 1970s and early 1980s as well. Devotion to the Precious Blood, which seemed still to be so alive only a decade or two earlier, appeared in some sectors to be in decline or even to have become hopelessly irrelevant. Part of the problem rose from the crisis which devotions in general found themselves after the Second Vatican Council. Within the C.P.P.S. and in other Congregations under this title, the question was raised about changing the title of their Institutes altogether during this time. Devotion to the Precious Blood seemed for some to connote a different, now distant era, and a sensibility which no longer

¹⁷ “Aujourd’hui, la dévotion au Précieux Sang marque un temps d’arrêt.” *DS* XIV, 319-333. The citation is at 333.

engaged the heart or the imagination.¹⁸ Blood-drenched images, so favored in the Middle Ages and again in the 19th century, now seemed almost alienating to many.¹⁹

Such shifts in sentiment usually say less about the practices of the past and more about questions of how contexts have shifted and certain ways of thinking, speaking, and acting no longer have the same resonance they once had. What had so dramatically changed as to make a devotion once so vigorous suddenly seem moribund? The change was, of course, not sudden. Three important developments which had begun earlier in the Church in the 20th century contributed to this new situation: the biblical renewal, the liturgical renewal, and a new relation between the Church and the world.

The Biblical Renewal

The renewal of biblical studies which received official sanction in the Papal Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* in 1943 was an important development for changing how Catholics read the Bible. By introducing modern hermeneutical interpretation, contemporary readers of the Bible could experience both the cultural distance they had from the biblical text, but also its enduring message for them in their own time. The newer forms of interpretation emphasized looking at a biblical passage as a whole, rather than simply going to single verses of the Bible to legitimize a doctrinal position. It allowed for a more integral entering into the biblical world, alien as that might be for modern readers.

Many exegetes within the C.P.P.S. took up these new methods and started a wider exposition of texts which had been important for devotion to the Precious Blood. This opened up new ways of thinking about the biblical foundations of devotion to the Precious Blood.²⁰

Such research created some dissonance with devotional uses of the biblical texts. Up to that time, biblical texts were often used as points of departure for meditations. However, closer scrutiny of the biblical text showed that the references to the bloodsheddings of Jesus were indeed present, but scarcely developed in the New Testament. Moreover, attending to the integrity of the biblical documents prompted some shifts in emphasis in Precious Blood devotion. Thus, blood gets its principal significance in the Scriptures from the covenant, not from Christ's bloodsheddings on the cross. Indeed the latter is intelligible as salvific only within the larger context of the covenant. The significance of Christ's blood at the Last Supper is less centered on the medieval disputes about the Real Presence, and more on a new Covenant in memory and hope. References to blood in the Letter to the Hebrews and in Revelation had less to do with the triumph and pomp of the liturgy than with the collective suffering of Christ and the saints. Even the reference to the "precious" blood of Christ is based on a single reference (I Peter 1 :19). So a renewed reading of the Bible would necessarily lead to a rereading of how the blood of Christ was presented in Precious Blood Devotion.

The Liturgical Renewal

¹⁸ Interestingly, this happened not only among Catholics, but the Anglican Society of the Precious Blood went through the same crisis. (Personal communication from Mother Elizabeth Mary, S.P.B., September 10, 2002)

¹⁹ An exploration of this malaise from that period can be found in Robert Schreiter, "Communicating Precious Blood Spirituality Today," *Summary of the Precious Blood Congress, August 1-4, 1986, St. Louis, Missouri* (mimeographed), 25-35.

²⁰ In the United States, Edward Siegmann, C.P.P.S. and Robert Siebeneck, C.P.P.S. led this work. Siegmann was one of the pioneers of biblical renewal in the United States. The first edition of the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, the fruits of the biblical renewal published in 1967, carries a special dedication to him. Siebeneck published meditations on the biblical passages in *The Precious Blood Messenger* in the 1950s and 1960s, which have been collected in mimeographed form. Patrick Sena, C.P.P.S., continued and synthesized this research in the early 1980s. See his contributions in *Nel Sangue di Cristo* (Roma: Ed. Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, 1981), 7-50.

The renewal of the liturgy in the 20th century, culminating in the Sacred Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* at the Vatican Council in 1963, and in subsequent reforms after the Council, also created challenges for devotion to the Precious Blood. Let me note but three.

First of all, the reform of the liturgy, and the introduction of the use of local languages, led to a greater level of participation of the faithful, rather than it being a religious ritual performed by clergy while the faithful looked on. This new level of participation made such practices as saying the chaplet of the Precious Blood during Mass unnecessary or even obtrusive.

Second, the restoration of the eucharistic cup for all the faithful has had the potential—not yet entirely realized—for changing the relationship to the celebration of the Eucharist. Drinking from the cup places the recipient of the Eucharist before greater challenges of sharing in Jesus' cup of suffering (cf. Matt 20 :22), as well as pondering what it means to drink of the cup unworthily (cf. I cor 11:27).

A greater level of participation and the reintroduction of the eucharistic cup had immediate effects on devotion to the Precious Blood. First of all, the new relationship to the Eucharist and to the eucharistic cup narrowed the difference between what devotion to the Precious Blood meant for priests and what it meant for laity. Rather than two different spiritual worlds, it meant two perspectives in the same celebration of the Eucharist. Secondly, this shift in perspective meant that eucharistic adoration, such a beloved and central devotional practice before the liturgical reform, now needed to be resituated and rethought. The Eucharist was no longer some distant divine reality to be adored or seen beyond the confines of the communion railing, but was now an event in which all believers, clerical and lay, participated.

Third, the renewed understanding of the Eucharist as an act of thanksgiving of the whole people of God meant that the Eucharist needed to find its connection with the wider world. The dismissal rite at the end of the Eucharist was not just an admonition that the Mass had ended (“Ite, missa est” – “Go, the Mass is over”) but it was also now a challenge to carry the Eucharist into the world (“Go, to love and to serve the Lord”). The Eucharist affects not only our interior lives, but how we see and move in the world.

A New Relation between the Church and the World

The thinking about what was called the “theology of worldly realities,” and the rise of social action movements from the 1930s onward (think of Msgr. Cardijn’s methodology of “see-judge-act”) called for a new relationship between the Church and the world. The effects of social and political shifts in the 19th century had led the Church to withdraw into itself, and see itself as a bastion of righteousness against a hostile modern world. Pius IX’s *Syllabus of Errors* and the campaign against Modernism by Pius X were indicative of such a fortress mentality.

The renewal movements of the 1930s and 1940s created a new climate that found official acceptance and expression at the Second Vatican Council. In *Lumen gentium* the Church was proclaimed to be a *sacramentum mundi*, a moment of grace within the world. The profound change of position represented by acceptance of religious freedom in *Dignitatis humanae*, and a new relation to other religions proposed in *Nostra Aetate* extended this vision of a new relationship between the Church and the world. It culminated in the sweeping and ambitious vision of the relation between the Church and the modern world presented in *Gaudium et spes*.

The result of all of this after the Council was a newly invigorated (we might say today perhaps over-optimistic) evaluation of engagement with the world. A devotion to the Precious Blood which only aimed at the human heart did not seem to take into account sufficiently the need to change

social structures in the world. Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum progressio* embodied much of that optimism.

All three of these developments—the renewal of biblical studies, the liturgical renewal, and the new social action—led to a collapse of the devotional piety which had sustained Catholics through the previous two centuries. This was by no means uniformly the case, but it was certainly strongly felt in Western Europe and in the Americas. In many ways, devotion to the Precious Blood was swept into this same eclipse along with other devotions. Although the Vatican Council had made no sanction against devotions, devotional practices went into steep decline.

What began to take the place of devotional piety was a language of *spirituality*. Spirituality was understood as including many of the interests of devotional piety, but placing them in a broader scope. There was a greater concern for how a wider and more integral understanding of the Scriptures and the place of the Church in the modern world created a need to *interpret* the world in which Christians found themselves in biblical, theological, and even liturgical terms. Rather than seeking *responses* to the world in which we lived, spirituality was seen as an array of *resources* with which to interpret that world. Spirituality created a *horizon* out of which tried to live out the message of Jesus. It was, in this sense, more interpretive of the world itself than had been devotion, which had seen itself as a set of commitments and a set of established practices.

The Response to the Crisis of Devotion in the C.P.P.S.

Members of the C.P.P.S. were not unaware of all these renewal developments in the middle of the 20th century. One of the first concerted efforts to begin rethinking the meaning of the blood of Christ in light of these emerging realities occurred in the American Province as early as 1957. In that year, and on two subsequent occasions in 1960 and 1968, a series of what were called “Precious Blood Study Weeks” were held at St. Joseph’s College in Indiana to survey the changing landscape.²¹

It was the 1980s, however, which were to see the greatest amount of work which laid the foundations for a renewed spirituality of the blood of Christ. Research and reflection took place in three different places of the Congregation that contributed to this.

Perhaps most significant was a monumental historical research project undertaken by the Italian Province through the 1980s and beyond. Under the auspices of the Centro Studi Sanguis Christi, led by Don Beniamino Conti, scholars within the C.P.P.S. and other scholars from throughout Italy were invited to a series of scholarly meetings at the Collegio Preziosissimo Sangue in Rome, where papers were read on different aspects of the Precious Blood in the Scriptures, the Church Fathers, and the history of theology. The proceedings of those meetings, held between 1980 and 1991, were published in a series of twenty-two volumes under the title *Sangue e antropologia - Sangue e vita*. Alongside these volumes, publication of proceedings of scholarly meetings on the Precious Blood in the liturgy, in the history of religious congregations, and on a wide variety of other topics appeared in a series entitled *Collana Sangue e vita*, which began in 1986 and continue to appear. As of 2003, 16 volumes had appeared.²² The historical and theological work collected here will be an enduring resource for spirituality of the blood of Christ for years to come.

²¹ The proceedings of the three study weeks were published by the Precious Blood Institute at St. Joseph’s College in Rensselaer, Indiana, USA. A guiding figure behind this effort was Fr. Edwin Kaiser, C.P.P.S. (1893-1984) who also wrote numerous books and articles on this topic.

²² D. Beniamino Conti has published an index of these volumes up to 2002, *Sangue di Cristo, Sangue dell’uomo. Indice degli atti “Sangue e antropologia” e “Sangue e vita”* (Roma : Centro Studi Sanguis Christi, 2002).

In Latin America, a new commitment to the Church of the poor which had begun among the bishops at Medellín in 1968, led to the emergence of a new way of doing theology, known as the theology of liberation. In that same period, there was a dramatic increase in military dictatorships in countries across Latin America. This led to considerable ferment within the Latin American Church.

In response to this dramatic situation, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in Chile, working with the C.P.P.S. Sisters of Dayton, and the Religiosas de la Preciosa Sangre, initiated a series of biennial study weeks on the Precious Blood in 1982. Four volumes of proceedings appeared by 1988. These were attempts to interpret the meaning of the blood of Christ for Latin America.²³

In the United States, beginning with a conference in 1983 to honor the ninetieth birthday of Fr. Edwin Kaiser, C.P.P.S., a tireless writer on Precious Blood spirituality, the Cincinnati Province of the C.P.P.S. engaged in a number of study days to examine what a Precious Blood spirituality might mean in North America today.²⁴ The publication of a study on the biblical spirituality of the blood of Christ in 1988, inspired by the encounter with Latin American realities, and later expanded to cover wider areas, represented an important attempt to articulate a spirituality of the blood of Christ which met the challenges to renewal which have been explored in this section. For many, it marked the arrival of a spirituality of the Precious Blood for the new situation.²⁵

The impulses of the 1980s toward a new spirituality of the blood of Christ laid the groundwork for continuing work through the 1990s. The Brazilian Vicariate (in 1994) and the Iberian Province (in 1995) initiated annual study weeks on the spirituality of the blood of Christ.²⁶ The Kansas City Province began a periodical entitled *The Wine Cellar*, edited by Joseph Nassal, C.P.P.S., at about the same time. The Italian Province continued to publish studies aimed at a renewed understanding of the blood of Christ, as well as a series on Patristic texts relating to the blood of Christ.²⁷ At the meeting of the C.P.P.S. major superiors in 1995, the Moderator General and General Council were mandated to issue an anthology of writings on this new spirituality. This appeared first in English as *A Precious Blood Reader*, and has appeared in German, Italian, and Spanish translations.²⁸ Since 1996, the General Curia has published a semiannual periodical in five languages devoted to developments in Precious Blood spirituality.²⁹

A series of international symposia were also held in the 1990s to look at specific areas of Precious Blood spirituality. The Teutonic and Iberian Provinces, and the Chilean Vicariate, sponsored two symposia on Precious Blood Spirituality and education ministry, held in Santiago de Chile and Neuenheerse, respectively. The Cincinnati Province sponsored an international symposium on Precious Blood spirituality and parish ministry in Dayton, Ohio in 2002.³⁰ Two international symposia on Precious Blood Spirituality and the Ministry of Reconciliation were held in Cáceres (1998) and Lima (1999).³¹

²³ *Cuadernos de la Espiritualidad de la Sangre de Cristo* (Santiago : SUSC, 1982-1988). 4 vols.

²⁴ Papers from these encounters can be found in the *C.P.P.S. Newsletter* of those years, especially a seminar held in July, 1984, which mapped out directions for the development of a renewed spirituality.

²⁵ Robert Schreiter, *In Water and in Blood : A Spirituality of Solidarity and Hope*, op.cit. This work has also appeared in Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and German editions.

²⁶ A number of those from Spain have been published as *Quartos de Jornadas de la Espiritualidad de la Sangre de Cristo* (Cáceres, 1995--).

²⁷ Here the pioneering work of D. Luigi Contegiacomo, C.P.P.S. (1914-2001) must be noted. D. Tuglio Veglianti, C.P.P.S., edits the *Testi Patristici sul Sangue di Cristo* (Roma : Centro Studi Sanguis Cristi, 1992--). As of 2003, 7 volumes.

²⁸ Edited by Barry Fischer and Robert Schreiter.

²⁹ *The Cup of the New Covenant* appears in April and October each year. Each issue is devoted to a specific theme, and draws upon authors from around the world.

³⁰ The proceedings of this symposium are being published in the *C.P.P.S. Resources* series in 2003.

³¹ The results of the Lima symposium was published as *Reconciliación* (Lima : CEP, 1999).

Finally, the work of Fr. Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S., has been played a key role in developing this new spirituality. Along with numerous articles, his book *Along the Road Marked by Blood* related themes of Precious Blood spirituality to his experiences in Chile and Guatemala. His most recent work, *Il Grito del Sangue*, extends his horizon to the entire C.P.P.S. community, and to how this renewed spirituality can lead to a genuine “refounding.”³² An important distinction he has developed has now become commonplace in the spirituality of the blood of Christ, namely, “the cry of the blood,” and “call of the blood.” The “cry of the blood” refers to the situations of suffering and injustice we discover in our world today, crying out as it were for a response. The “call of the blood” refers to the resources of our heritage of Precious Blood spirituality which we can bring to bear upon those situations crying out for healing and liberation.

I provide this long catalogue of work in Precious Blood spirituality over the past two decades to show that we have arrived at a new moment in reflection on our spirituality. It is safe to say that never in the history of our Congregation has there been such an amount of reflection going on regarding all aspects of our spirituality. It is upon these wonderful developments that we build our future.³³

Principal Themes in a Spirituality of the Blood of Christ

Just as there were discernible themes in Precious Blood devotion, so too are there recurring themes in a spirituality of the blood of Christ. In order to understand those themes, we must begin with the larger significance of “blood” in the Scriptures. Blood is a symbol both of life and of death. Blood is a symbol of life because it was believed that the very breath of God was in the blood, and it was this that made humans and animals alive. To spill blood was therefore a sign of death. The spilling of blood in the case of murder was a profanation of God’s creation. (In this regard, it is interesting that the first reference to blood in the Old Testament is to the blood of the murdered Abel [Gen 4 :10].) Blood shed in sacrifice became a unique medium of communion between humanity and God. This forms the backdrop for understanding the more than 400 references to blood in the Bible.

At this point in its development, the spirituality of the blood of Christ finds expression in four principal themes. I would like to explore each of them briefly here.

The Blood of the Covenant

The symbol most connected with blood in the Bible is the covenant, that bonding of God with humanity in a series of promises to remain faithful. The Old Testament recounts a series of covenants, from that made with Noe, through that with Abraham, and most especially with Moses and the people of Israel. The death and resurrection of Christ marks a new and everlasting covenant for Christians in the New Testament. All of these covenants are sealed in blood. What gives Christ’s blood such preeminence is his being at once human and divine, and therefore able to bring humanity and God closer than ever before. All the language of redemption and salvation hinges on this idea of covenant.

In the spirituality of the blood of Christ, the blood of the covenant finds its meaning today in acts of solidarity with those who have been excluded or oppressed. It is an invitation to belonging, for

³² Published by the Italian Province. An English version is in the process of publication.

³³ This overview does not include the extensive publications on the Precious Blood which have appeared in Poland, especially from the hand of Fr. Winfried Wermter, C.P.P.S. I do not read Polish, and so am not in a position to evaluate them. From what has appeared in translation, it would appear that they focus (rightly so !) on Polish situation, and reflect a stance closer to that of Precious Blood devotion than to what has been described here under the rubric of spirituality. But again, I cannot judge this..

those who are excluded for whatever reason in society (race, class, gender, ethnic origin, or whatever). It also speaks to the loneliness, lack of self-esteem, and anxiety of individuals in society. Under the impulse of the teaching of Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, it speaks to the dignity of each human person, and the protection of life in all its stages—from conception to death—and to the creation of what he calls a “culture of life.”

The parallel to the language of the covenant in Precious Blood devotion is that the Precious Blood is a sign of God’s unbounded love for humanity. In the language of spirituality, it is more biblically based and better positioned to address different social circumstances in which people find themselves.

The Blood of the Cross

The blood of the cross speaks in a special way to the suffering experienced in the world today. The cross stands a sign, first of all, of the unjust suffering of so many in our world who are hungry, poor, ill, abandoned, oppressed, and excluded for no reason of their own actions. This reflects the state of perhaps the majority of people living on our planet today. The suffering of Christ on the cross, as the one who knew no sin, stands in solidarity with those who suffer today.

The blood of the cross reminds us also of the suffering we inflict on one another through war, violence, hatred, discrimination, and oppression. The blood of the cross reminds us of how sin stalks our world, and how much the world is in need of suffering.

The cross stands too as a sign of contradiction. It reminds us of the limitation of human power and all that counts for human success. It reminds us that we, of ourselves, cannot bring ourselves to completion or perfection.

The cross, in summary, becomes the place where we take the suffering of our world and unite it with the suffering of Jesus. Suffering in itself is not ennobling of the human being ; by itself, it is destructive. Only when we can place our sufferings in the suffering of Christ—conform our sufferings to the suffering of Christ (cf. Phil 3 :10)—do we have hope in sharing in Christ’s triumph over suffering in his resurrection.

The spirituality of the blood of the cross reminds us of all these paradoxes and contradictions. The world is not what it seems or how it wants to present itself to be. The blood of Christ shed on the cross reminds us how much wrong there is with our world, and how we need to stand critically over against it. At the same time, it invites us into solidarity with those who suffer.

An important passage for the spirituality of the blood of cross today is Hebrews 13 :10-13. In that passage we are reminded that we will not find God in the sanctuary, safe inside the camp. Rather, we must go out to Christ, crucified outside the gates, and take upon ourselves the ignominy he has borne. What this means is that the presence of God can be found today most acutely today outside the gates of safety, in the garbage dump, among those considered the refuse of humanity.

Precious Blood devotion stressed the bloodsheddings of Christ in his Passion and death. These remain legitimate sites of meditation. What the spirituality of the blood of the cross does is expand that vision to contemplate suffering. Why is there so much suffering in the world ? How does the blood of Christ give us perspective and lead us to a new place in dealing with suffering ?

The Blood of the Cup

The spirituality of the eucharistic cup has opened up for us the full meaning of the symbol of the cup in the Bible. The cup is first of all a measure of destiny. Can we drink of the cup which is being offered to us ?

It also encompasses two other meanings. The first of these is the cup of suffering. The Book of Revelation presents the cup of God's wrath being filled with the suffering of God's faithful people (15 :7 ; 16 :1). At the appointed time, the cup of suffering will overflow in God's judgment against evildoers.

But the cup is also the cup of hope, the cup Jesus offered to his disciples at the Last Supper as the "new and everlasting covenant" (Luke 22 :20).

The reintroduction of the cup for receiving communion among the laity underscores an important dimension of a spirituality of the blood of Christ. If the eucharistic cup which is offered us, we are accepting what God has prepared for us. In drinking of that cup, we take upon ourselves in solidarity the sufferings of others. We also place in that cup our hope for a redeemed humanity. The giving and the sharing of the eucharistic cup is more than a reception of the sacrament. It is an act of commitment to live a life in solidarity with those who suffer, and to watch and wait with those who hope.

The eucharistic chalice in Precious Blood devotion was often depicted as the vessel which caught Jesus' blood being shed on the cross, and as then offered to God in reparation for sin. These elements are still very much part of the understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice, but as we have seen, the liturgical reform expanded our view of the eucharistic action. Those elements of a spirituality of the cup which I have just presented now become part of our celebration of the Eucharist.

Precious Blood devotion placed great premium on eucharistic adoration. As was noted above, liturgical reform has caused us to refocus our practices of eucharistic adoration. Perhaps in this renewed understanding, our attention is less focused on the distance between God and ourselves, and now more how the Eucharist, as a memorial of suffering and hope, illumines and heals a world broken by suffering and sin.

The Blood of Reconciliation

A fourth theme has come forward strongly in a spirituality of the blood of Christ since 1990 : reconciliation in the blood of Christ. The 1990s saw an intense growth of interest in reconciliation in a world overcoming war, totalitarian oppression (Soviet Europe, South Africa, Latin America), discrimination and exclusion, abuse in families and in the Church, and the deprivations of globalization. The great themes of reconciliation in Christian faith have been called forward in a distinctive way at this time.³⁴

God is reconciling the world in Christ through Christ's blood. He has brought those who once were far off near through the blood of Christ, making of enemies a single household of God (Eph 2 :12-22). In the midst of conflict, God is making peace through the blood of the cross (Col 1 :20), and is reconciling all things to himself (Eph 1 :18-23). That reconciliation is possible is a message for which so much of the world yearns today.

³⁴ I have developed this in *Reconciliation : Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY : Orbis Books, 1992—also in Croatian, German, Indonesian, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish translations) ; and in *The Ministry of Reconciliation : Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY : 1998—also in Indonesian, Portuguese, and Spanish translations).

Reconciliation was certainly part of the message of Precious Blood devotion. There it was expressed especially in the forgiveness of sins, especially with the Sacrament of Penance. What is new about the current interest in reconciliation is how God reaches out to the victim, and can heal the victim even when the wrongdoer refuses to repent. This perspective on reconciliation brings new approaches to understanding forgiveness, memory, and how healing works in people's lives.

Conclusion

Developments in a spirituality of the blood of Christ continue to unfold. This is especially so as Missionaries of the Blood of Christ have expanded into a worldwide Congregation in the past two decades. I hope that these two presentations have shown not only the roots of our understanding of the Precious Blood in the history of devotion and in recent developments in spirituality. I hope it is also clear that one does not preclude the other ; indeed, they can enrich each other.

What is happening around us as we come of age often becomes determinative of our view of the world through much of our adulthood. It is my hope that these reflections will help us identify how our contexts—matched to our heritage—creates expressions of the importance of the blood of Christ in our lives. In our work of formation, we need to prepare candidates to engage in these kinds of reflections, even as they grow in their love for the blood of Christ. At the same time, none of us need be limited by our own specific experience. Indeed it is incumbent upon us to learn from the experiences of others—both in the past and in the present—so that we can be a source of enrichment for those whose lives we touch. We have a great heritage. And we have a great hope. In these opening years of the 21st century, let us hope that we can achieve something of that vision of the blood of Christ given to us by St. Gaspar, and so marvellously expanded through the years in his Congregation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.