

**Saint Gaspar del Bufalo,
Apostle of the
Blood of Christ**

**Volume I: Devotion to the Blood of
Christ in the Life and Apostolate of
Saint Gaspar**

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C.PP.S. Resources—No. 31

2009
Missionaries of the Precious Blood
Cincinnati Province

Cover design: Jean Giesige

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ISBN 978-0-9820516-1-0

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of Christ, Volume I: Devotion to the Blood of
Christ in the Life and Apostolate of Saint
Gaspar*
by Beniamino Conti, C.PP.S. and translated by
Jerome Stack, C.PP.S.

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

This book traces the spiritual journey of St. Gaspar as he allowed the fire of Christ's love, expressed so profoundly in the mystery of the Precious Blood, to transform him into a living fire of love, the preeminent apostle of the Blood of Christ.

In his letters St. Gaspar sometimes uses the metaphor of *fire* to describe the divine love and in several places he quotes the words of Jesus: *Ignem veni mittere in terram* 'I have come to cast fire on the earth' (Lk 12: 49). The fire Jesus has come to cast on the earth is, in Gaspar's understanding, the fire of his love for us.

Gaspar came to see the spirituality of the Blood of Christ as being a particularly suitable means for describing this burning love of Jesus. The Precious Blood was the great symbol that he used to draw people to a greater awareness of that love. Gaspar himself was aflame with that love throughout his ministry. In the words of Don Beniamino, St. Gaspar

. . . appeared as a fire of love for the Most Precious Blood of Jesus, completely intent on kindling a great blaze of that love in the Church for the benefit of souls and for the praise, honor, glory, and power of Him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb that was slain (Rv 5: 13). (Cf. page 79 of this volume.)

This volume contains the first and larger of the two parts of Fr. Conti's original *San Gaspare Del Bufalo, Apostolo del Sangue di Cristo*, published in 1970 and reissued in 1978 and 2002. (The second part, dealing

with Gaspar's preaching on the Precious Blood, will be published as a future volume of this series.) As Don Beniamino notes in his own introduction, in the first section of the book we follow the development of the devotion to the Precious Blood in Gaspar's life as well as the ways in which he sought to spread the devotion in his apostolic life.

Throughout the book Don Beniamino provides us with a rich selection of citations from the writings of Gaspar as well as the first-person witness of those who knew him well, like his protégé John Merlini, his spiritual director Biagio Valentini, and his friends Saints Vincenzo Strambi and Vincenzo Pallotti. (Unfortunately we have little written witness to the spiritual friendship between Gaspar and his mentor Don Francesco Albertini, who introduced the devotion to the Precious Blood to the young Canon del Bufalo.) All of these and other references are amply documented in the endnotes and provide us with primary sources for understanding Gaspar's spiritual development and apostolic zeal.

Fr. Conti, a member of the Italian Province, has had a lifelong dedication to research on the life of St. Gaspar and has been prolific in his publications. Among the many works to his credit, is the editing of the latest edition of the letters of St. Gaspar as well as four volumes of the early regulations of the Congregation and four volumes of the miscellaneous spiritual writings of Gaspar.

It would be appropriate to make a few remarks on the translation. First, where necessary I have inserted English translations of Italian and Latin words and phrases, using the model of the Modern Language Association and enclosing the English translation within single quotes following the foreign language. In translating the quotations from the Scriptures I have generally followed the Douay-Rheims version, since most quotations are from the Latin Vulgate and the Douay is a translation of the Vulgate. I have also supplied chapter

and verse references for the quotations; these are generally not found in the original texts.

For translations of the letters of Gaspar as well as several other Italian sources I have relied on the invaluable work of the late Fr. Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S., who translated nearly all of the close to four thousand extant letters into English. English translations of the letters as well as of the depositions of Merlini, Valentini, and Pallotti (also the work of Fr. Cera) are currently available only in digital form and have only been published in a looseleaf, photocopied edition.

Where English translations of source material exist I have given those references in addition to the references to the original Italian or Latin documents. Many of the citations come from sources that have not been translated. I have not provided English translations for these citations, believing that anyone wishing to pursue such a reference in an endnote would have some knowledge of the language in question.

In matters of capitalization and punctuation of quoted documents, I have adhered to the original text even if this does not conform to current form and style in English. For example, in many original texts we find words capitalized that would not be capitalized in modern English. Speaking of capitalization, modern Italian would usually capitalize the “Del” in Del Bufalo, although Gaspar himself used the lowercase form, “del.” This is the reason why both forms are found in contemporary Italian texts.

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Pauline Vokits, who formatted the text for printing, proofread the text with great diligence, and offered many helpful suggestions. Jean Giesige also read the translation and offered useful comments and is responsible for the new cover design for C.P.P.S. Resources which debuts with this volume. The image of St. Gaspar on the cover is used with permission of Fr. Jeffrey Finley, C.P.P.S., who commissioned the painting of the icon.

Translating this book has been a rewarding task and has given me the opportunity to become much better acquainted with Gaspar through the words of Fr. Conti who knows him so well. I hope that this work will be read by many, especially by members and Companions of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, so that all of us might come to know better this great Apostle of the Precious Blood. May we, too, be transformed by the fire of that divine love that Jesus came to bring to our world.

Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S.

July 1, 2008

Feast of the Most Precious Blood

INTRODUCTION

What are the distinctive features of the spirituality of St. Gaspar del Bufalo within the great company of saints venerated in the Church?

Witnesses to his life and his activity have given us ample descriptions of those features in their depositions for the canonical processes for his beatification and canonization. We find the features of his spirituality in his biographies and particularly in his writings. The precise and unmistakable characteristic, one that will be continually associated with him as a specific title, is described by the documents of the Church that marked the path to the solemn proclamation of his canonization.

Already in the decree *Benedictionibus Dulcedinis* (January 15, 1852), introducing the cause of the beatification,¹ St. Gaspar is presented as the founder of a Congregation of Missionaries under the title of the Most Precious Blood of the Divine Redeemer. This will be repeated in all future documents.² Moreover, he is recognized as having the honor of having given the Church, with this Institute, a new splendor in the service of the care of souls (“. . . *novo hoc instituto . . . , Ecclesia sponsa Christi ad uberrimum animarum lucrum decorate effulget*”).

The decree *Almae Huius Urbis*³ (May 29, 1904) that approved the two miracles for his beatification describes Gaspar as a herald of peace and salvation in the Divine Blood for his troubled times. Against the errors and vices of his contemporaries, Gaspar proposed the Blood of Christ, the Blood of Christ that was the force of his apostolate as well:

It is the signal splendor of this beloved city of Rome, source of all piety and devotion, to have given birth to a man who, in that very agitated period at the end of the 18th century, “*pacificans per Sanguinem Crucis ejus*” ‘making peace through the Blood of his Cross’ (Col 1: 20), kept the avenging hand of God from his people, fulfilling what the Apostle says: “*Justificati in sanguine Ipsius salvi erimus ab ira per Ipsum*” ‘justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him’ (Rom 5: 9).

Strengthened by the Blood, which became *his banner*, the Venerable Servant of God Gaspar del Bufalo exercised a very diverse apostolate, but one *sustained by a single ideal*: to promote the devotion to the Most Precious Blood with indomitable and ardent love.

He used this weapon against the errors and vices of his day. It was a weapon all the more powerful since it inwardly permeated the testimony of a life of great integrity. From the Blood he drew all the energy for his love, urging on people of whatever condition to faith in holiness.

The decree *Educta ex Christi* (June 24, 1904),⁴ declaring that the beatification could proceed, affirmed that while the fruit of Gaspar’s missionary work was “the salvation of people” (*salus populi*), he himself appeared in the Church, a field made fertile by the Divine Blood, as the one whom the Lord sent as an instrument of redemption: “*Dominus redemptionem misit populo suo*” ‘The Lord has sent redemption to his people’ (Ps 110: 9). He is also called an angel of the living God who had the mission of announcing the message of the Blood of the Lamb in the Church: “*Erit Sanguis Agni vobis in signum*” ‘And the Blood of the Lamb shall be a sign to you’ (cf. Ex 12: 13). Moreover, in this pontifical document and those following, the Institute of the

Adorers of the Blood of Christ is also linked to Gaspar's Congregation:

Flowing from the side of Christ, the Church, the mystical field made fertile by the Divine Blood, produced abundant and varied fruit, according to the various charisms of the gospel workers (*operai evangelici*) and according to the opportunity of the times, guided by the Providence of God. Among the holy workers in the vineyard of the Lord, the Venerable Servant of God Gaspar Del Bufalo, founder of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood, to which the Sisters who bear the same name are linked, *in a special way* has exercised his apostolate under the auspices of the same font of holiness and of salvation: [the Blood of Christ].

It seems that he is like that Angel bearing the '*signum Dei vivi*' 'a sign of the living God' [Rv 7: 2] with which is announced: '*Erit Sanguis Agni vobis in signum*' [cf. Ex 12: 13].

The image of St. Gaspar as the propagator and standard bearer of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood returns in the Apostolic Brief *Salutare Illud* (August 29, 1904),⁵ with which St. Pius X formally declares the beatification of Gaspar and grants the recital of the Divine Office and the celebration of Mass in his honor in the churches and oratories of the Missionaries and of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood and in the diocese of Rome.⁶

After the beatification, the pontifical documents that trace the spiritual physiognomy of Gaspar in the Church continue with the decree *Summa Romanorum*⁷ of July 22, 1949, summarizing the cause of Gaspar, which would come to a happy conclusion five years later. In this decree and in the following, *Christiano Sensu* of May 4, 1954,⁸ approving the miracles for canonization, Gaspar is presented only as the founder of a

Congregation of Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, to whom are connected the Sisters Adorers under the same title.

The final two documents, however, namely the decree *Beatus Gaspar* (May 8, 1954),⁹ affirming that the canonization could safely proceed, and the decretal letter *Sanguinis Pretiosissimi Laudes* (June 13, 1954),¹⁰ by which Gaspar could be accorded the honors due to saints, present Gaspar in a more solemn and complete way in the light of the mystery of the Divine Blood.

In the first document, Gaspar appears as the one who, absorbed and strengthened by the cry of the Blood of Jesus, presented it to the souls of his time and spread its cult, which will bring Blessed Pius IX to extend that devotion to the universal Church:

Blessed Gaspar Del Bufalo, the illustrious boast of the Roman Clergy, meditated deeply on how our Lord Jesus Christ willed to shed all of his Most Precious Blood for the redemption of the world, how he chose to undergo the most terrible torments and be condemned to a shameful death, so that men and women would not be deprived of this infinite treasure through sin and thus be punished with eternal condemnation. . . . He gave himself over to labor for the salvation of souls. Then . . . he founded a Congregation of Priests, so that they would evangelize the people under the banner of the Most Precious Blood . . . He himself, in the meantime, strengthened by the Divine Blood, dedicated himself to the ministry of the missions . . .

Finally, in order to spread the cult of the Most Precious Blood, fountain of salvation, among the faithful, [Gaspar] worked hard and with diligent zeal for the institution of the feast of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus

Christ, which was extended to the entire Church by Pope Pius IX.

As already noted, in this decree Gaspar is given credit for being promoter of the liturgical cult of the Divine Blood for the entire Church, even if in fact it was Don Giovanni Merlini, his faithful disciple and executor of his wishes, who obtained this from Blessed Pius IX on August 10, 1849.

The second document affirms that after Sts. Peter and Paul extolled in a special way the benefits of the Precious Blood there has never been lacking in the Church very holy persons who have spread the cult of the Divine Blood among the faithful. Nevertheless, the document recognizes that St. Gaspar in recent times enjoys a glorious preeminence with regard to this great mystery: "*Unus omnium nitet beatissimus Gaspar Del Bufalo*" 'One out of all of them shines brightly: the most blessed Gaspar Del Bufalo.'

The glories and efficacy of the Most Precious Blood, with which the Son of God bathed the hard wood of the Cross and the dry earth, were celebrated by no one with a more grateful affection than by the Apostle Paul.

Recalling the ancient sacrifices mandated among the Hebrews, he not only said that no remission of sins was possible without the shedding of blood, but also that the blood of Christ was immensely more powerful than the blood of goats and calves in expiating sins, since He Himself enjoys the unsurpassed dignity of the only-begotten Son of God and possesses the eternal priesthood.

Peter, the first leader and head of the Holy Church, admonished the band of Christians that they had not been redeemed by a large sum of gold or silver but by the crimson blood of

Christ, the most spotless and most holy Lamb of God.

There has been through the centuries no lack of very pious men and women who, moved by love of the divine Redeemer, have popularized among the people a devotion venerating His Blood. But *in this age*, among those whose love and devotion have been stirred up by the Blood and who, with vigilant attention and passionate zeal, eloquently preach the benefits of that Blood that was shed, the one who shines brightly, *alone among all*, is Gaspar Del Bufalo, whom today we have adorned with the crown of Saints.

This *unus omnium* attributes to Gaspar a particular excellence in spreading the cult of the Divine Blood. His *proper* title, thus, is to be that of *Apostle of the Most Precious Blood*, even though this is recognized as being limited to our age. One more step and every restriction will be withdrawn.

This happened with Blessed John XXIII, a pope very well disposed to the devotion to the Precious Blood. Blessed John described St. Gaspar as the “distinguished champion” (*assertore insigne*)¹¹ of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood and wrote that “the Most Precious Blood was the point of light of the apostolate of St. Gaspar Del Bufalo, the glory of Rome.”¹² But in the solemn allocution held in St. Peter’s Basilica on January 21, 1960, at the close of the Roman Synod, he recommended devotion to the Precious Blood in a special way to the priests and laity of Rome and hailed St. Gaspar as “the true and greatest apostle of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood in the world.”¹³

Again, in the apostolic letter *Inde a Primis* (June 30, 1960)¹⁴ he definitively bound the name of St. Gaspar to devotion to the Precious Blood, just as that of St. Bernardine of Siena was linked to the devotion to the

Holy Name and St. Margaret Mary Alacoque to devotion to the Heart of Jesus.

Following these testimonies of Blessed John XXIII, the figure of St. Gaspar leapt to the forefront in the history of Precious Blood devotion. He emerges as its *principal apostle* and as such he will pass into the history of the Church and of Christian spirituality.

Our work will be divided into two parts. In the first we will seek to study the development of this devotion in St. Gaspar and his apostolic ministry to spread the devotion. In the second, we will attempt to reconstruct his preaching on the devotion to the Precious Blood on the basis of his schematic writings. We will close this volume with an appendix with a collection of Gaspar's more important writings on the Blood of Christ. [*Translator's note*: only the first part and parts of the appendix are published in this volume. The second part will be published in a future volume.]

We nourish the hope that this modest research, in allowing us to understand better the relationship of St. Gaspar to the devotion to the Precious Blood, will encourage Gaspar's spiritual heirs—the Missionaries and the Adorers of the Blood of Christ and all devoted to him and to the Most Precious Blood—to mature with greater commitment in their Christian vocation in the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, in the phrase we rightly use today.

In reprinting this work thirty years after its original publication we acknowledge its substantial validity and publish it again without significant modifications. At the same time, following the publication of all the writings of St. Gaspar (letters, sermons, and rules) and above all in the light of the documents found in Tarquinia (Viterbo) in 1997 in the *Archivio della Società d'Arte e Storia*, we must correct some notes contained in previous editions¹⁵ (1970, 1978) and add a few others, especially with regard to the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, in

order to give a more complete and exact picture of St. Gaspar's activity for the devotion to the Blood of Christ.

Rome, October 21, 2002
Solemnity of St. Gaspar del Bufalo.

Don Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S

Abbreviations

<i>ASS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctae Sedis</i> (Rome, 1870–1909)
<i>AAS</i>	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i> (Rome, 1909–)
<i>AGCPPS</i>	General Archives of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, Rome
<i>AGASC</i>	General Archives of the Adorers of the Precious Blood, Rome
<i>AMP</i>	Archives of the Missionaries of Patrica-Frosinone
<i>ASVR</i>	Historical Archive of the Vicariate of Rome
<i>Compendio</i>	<i>Compendio della vita della Serva di Dio Maria De Mattias</i>
<i>MDM</i>	<i>Lettere della Beata Maria De Mattias</i>
<i>SF</i>	<i>Scritti del Fondatore</i> (23 volumes of manuscripts)
<i>Epistolario</i>	<i>Epistolario di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo</i> , vols. I–XI, Rome, 1986–2000
<i>Positio super virtutibus</i>	<i>Romana Beatificationis et Canonizationis Venerabilis Servi Dei Gasparis Del Bufalo Fundatoris Congregationis Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis D.N.J.C. Positio super virtutibus</i>

Regolamenti Gaspar Del Bufalo, *Regolamenti dei Missionari del Preziosissimo Sangue, I–III*, Rome, 1998–1999.

Scritti spirituali Gaspar Del Bufalo, *Scritti spirituali, I–IV*, Rome, 1995–1996

Summarium objectionale *Romana Beatificationis et Canonizationis Venerabilis Servi Dei Gasperis Del Bufalo Fundatoris Congregationis Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis D.N.J.C. Summarium objectionale*

Outline of the Life of Saint Gaspar del Bufalo

January 6, 1786	Birth of Gaspar in Rome
July 31, 1808	Ordination to the priesthood
December 8, 1808	Founding of the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood at San Nicola in Carcere, Rome
June 13, 1810	Gaspar refuses to take the oath to Napoleon
July 15, 1810	The exiled Gaspar arrives in Piacenza
December 1810	Gaspar is transferred to Bologna
October 20, 1811	Death of Gaspar's mother, Annunziata Quartieroni
January 12, 1813	Transfer to the prison of Imola
May 16, 1813	Transfer to the Rocca di Lugo
December 20, 1813	Arrival in Florence on the way to Corsica
February 1814	Return to Rome
September 1814	Pius VII commits Gaspar to the popular missions

August 15, 1815	Foundation of the C.PP.S at S. Felice, Giano dell'Umbria
December 27, 1817	Gaspar becomes director of the missions of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood
November 24, 1819	Death of Bishop Francesco Albertini
March 10–25, 1822	Mission in Vallecorsa (Frosinone)
mid-May 1830	Maria De Mattias seeks Gaspar's counsel regarding her vocation
October 31, 1831	Death of Gaspar's father, Antonio del Bufalo
March 4, 1834	Foundation of the Adorers of the Most Precious Blood in Acuto
December 28, 1837	Gaspar dies in Rome
January 3, 1838	Gaspar is buried in the Church of St. Paul, Albano Laziale
1861	Gaspar's body is moved to the Church of Santa Maria in Trivio, Rome
December 18, 1904	Beatification of Gaspar by St. Pius X
June 12, 1954	Canonization by Pope Pius XII
January 4, 1963	Visit of Blessed John XXIII to the tomb of St. Gaspar at Santa Maria in Trivio, Rome

Chapter One

The Blood of Christ and the Young Saint

Documents of the Church, as we have seen, present St. Gaspar to us as “the true and greatest apostle of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood in the world.”¹ This judgment clearly refers to the mature personality of Gaspar.

What place did the Blood of Christ have in the youthful spirituality of Gaspar? How did this defining characteristic of his spirituality begin and then develop? In this chapter and the following we will seek to answer these questions.

It would be tempting to believe that St. Gaspar was born with this devotion or, at least, that he practiced it from a very early age, especially under the tutelage of his holy mother, Annunziata Quartieronì (1761–1811). Reading the testimonies given during the canonical processes for Gaspar’s beatification would leave those of this opinion quite disappointed.

These testimonies repeatedly affirm that from his childhood Gaspar loved Jesus and the mysteries of redemption dearly. He was quite devoted to the Eucharist, to the Passion, to the Madonna, and in a special way to St. Francis Xavier and St. Aloysius Gonzaga, but the witnesses never speak of true devotion to the

Most Precious Blood. On the contrary, we can speak of an explicit contact with devotion to the Precious Blood in the early years of Gaspar's life (He was born in Rome on January 6, 1786.) only in 1808, at the age of twenty-two. On December 8 of that year he was invited by the canons of the Basilica of San Nicola in Carcere in Rome to preach some sermons on the occasion of the institution of the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood in the same church, where a relic of the Precious Blood had been kept since 1708.

Prior to this date we cannot properly speak of Gaspar's devotion to the Divine Blood. It would be historically false to assert this both because of the spiritual environment in which Gaspar grew up and, principally, because this contradicts all of the testimonies of his life and of his writings.

In fact, for a devotion to develop in the mind of the faithful—except for the case of particular revelations, which is not the case here—it must be a tradition present in an environment or it must be kept alive there by some kind of institution (congregations, pious unions, priests or other persons, church documents . . .).

In the case of the early years of Gaspar we cannot speak of *genuine* devotion to the Precious Blood *felt and practiced* in the universal Church, although we have a record of many confraternities or congregations and other minor institutions with the title of the "Most Precious Blood" scattered here and there, especially where a relic of the Blood of Jesus was venerated,² even though the liturgical celebration of the Precious Blood occurred in some dioceses and religious congregations.³

Even less can we speak of such a genuine devotion by the *faithful of Rome* or in a particular institution from which Gaspar could have derived spiritual nourishment prior to the year 1808.

We know that under the pontificate of Gregory XII, there was instituted in Rome "a Congregation or Confraternity of the Precious Blood, which even had the

approval of the very severe Pope Sixtus V.”⁴ The priests who were members of this society were responsible for taking care of the missions. Very quickly, however, this work disappeared and all memory of it has been lost.⁵

Only in 1808, as we have said and as we will see in the next chapter, would the canons of San Nicola in Carcere, at the urging of their colleague Don Francesco Albertini, promote devotion to the Precious Blood in their church. We are ahead of ourselves here, however.

We find complete confirmation for our point of view if we examine the testimonies from the canonical processes for determining the heroic virtue of Gaspar and from the spiritual writings that remain from his younger years.

In the canonical processes only Maria Tamini, his friend from infancy, testifies to the presence of “Precious Blood” in the spirituality of Gaspar the boy in two places. She asserts that he made the Precious Blood “an object of meditation from the time he was a boy,”⁶ especially meditation on the agony in Gethsemane, and when he would console his mother, worried about domestic affairs, he would say: “Mama . . . have hope in God and trust in the merits of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.”⁷ We have sought in vain for other explicit references to the Blood of Christ in the boyhood of Gaspar.

We arrive at the same conclusion in examining his writings. Although we have some discourses, for example on two saints to whom he was especially devoted, St. Francis Xavier and St. Aloysius, we have only a few traces of devotion to the Precious Blood in the transcriptions of Gaspar’s sermons by Monsignor Giovanni Baccolo. But if one takes into account the material dealing with the preaching of others and of the very nearly literal precision with which the young Gaspar was transcribing those discourses—something which made those same preachers marvel—it is evident that the paternity of such allusions are attributable to those preachers.

Had Gaspar been specifically devoted to the Precious Blood, it would be easy to find evidence of this, even if he did not mention the Precious Blood explicitly in his preaching. Such is the case of the fifteenth compendium of Lenten sermons given by Monsignor Giovanni Baccolo in the Church of the Gesù in 1804, where he speaks of “The Sacrifice of the Holy Mass.”⁸ How much more appropriate a subject for inserting some explicit references to the Divine Blood? All the more so because in reading these notes one gets the impression that the Blood remains rather in the wings and is not called to center stage.

Elsewhere, as we said, we have found only fleeting references to the Blood of Jesus.

The first, in an argument *a fortiori* in the ninth sermon, “On the respect owed to the holy temple of God,” is found in the same collection of compendiums which we referred to above:

If in the old Law a drop of that Blood which they used to offer could not fall except on virgin earth.

If they required a place very pure and clean for the ark . . . tell me, will not the Holy temple of God be Holy? Will not the precious vessels which enclose the entire Body, Blood, soul, etc., of Jesus be sacred?⁹

We find another brief note on the Blood of Jesus in the “Sermon on the Passion” (again from the compendium of sermons of Monsignor Baccolo) on the sweat of Blood in the Garden of Olives:

But what does it mean, you will say, that there in the Garden he sweats Blood and declines this Chalice,¹⁰ etc. But I ask you, did he not know of his sufferings before going to the Garden? Certainly he did! Thus he sweats Blood now, because he wants it this way, because he is the

beloved son of God, because he wants to suffer as the beloved son of God. He declines [the cup] because he sees that this Chalice will be of no use, etc., because he would long for, etc.¹¹

We refer to just one more text, found in the compendium of the twenty-first sermon, entitled: "On the Excellence of our Soul." The proof of the excellence of the soul is inferred from the fact that "a God would come down from Heaven to become human, to pour out all his blood, etc., *tradidit semetipsum pro nobis* 'he gave himself for us' [a reference to Eph 5: 2]¹² . . . *Nescit homo pretium ejus* 'humanity does not know its price.'¹³

Thus we can assert that prior to 1808, that is before his contact with the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood of San Nicola in Carcere, as we will see later on, the theme of the Blood of Christ is practically absent from the writings of St. Gaspar, while it will come more and more to the fore after that date.¹⁴

Although we know well that the argument from silence is often weak, nevertheless it seems impossible to assert that St. Gaspar had genuine devotion to the Divine Blood since childhood but that he did not speak or write of this or that it escaped the notice of those witnesses with whom he shared the most intimate sentiments of his spirit.

Must we conclude, therefore, that Gaspar from his childhood did not nurture *a true and proper devotion to the Precious Blood*? Must we close this chapter and abandon our investigation of the childhood years, years so fervid in the life of Gaspar? Can we not find some glimmers that predict a future splendor? Can we not find some seeds that will explain the luxuriant growth of later years?

We must investigate, because the personality of the mature person is rooted in his/her infancy and childhood. We can do this because we know the elements in which the devotion to the Most Precious Blood of St.

Gaspar will be expressed and thus it is easy to find these seeds in his childhood spirituality.

We could list many of these seeds. We group them under three categories:

1. The mystery of redemption.
2. Restorative penance (*penitenza riparatrice*) and the apostolate.
3. The mystery of the Eucharist.

The Mystery of Redemption

Sr. Maria Tamini tells us:

He used to speak to me, from his boyhood until he was older, of the mystery of the Unity and Trinity of God and of the Incarnation, *with fervor and a singular passion*, and he used to say to me many times: ‘When you make the sign of the Cross, do you think about the mystery of the Unity and Trinity of God and of the Incarnation which are contained in that act?’¹⁵

The persons who were near Gaspar in his infancy and childhood, especially the already mentioned Maria Tamini, who, under his influence, at the age of seventeen became a religious of the *Maestre Pie* at the Church of S. Tommaso in Parione, and the Basilian monk, Filippo Berga, agree in attributing to him a very tender devotion to the Passion of Jesus in his meditation, which often lasted several hours into the night. Tamini offers this testimony:

. . . His parents found him, late at night, saying his prayers on his knees before his little altar, and sometimes he would tell me that he had slept the entire night on the ground, almost always on the night preceding Friday . . . He would meditate during those hours . . . on the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, using the book called *Del cibo dell’anima*, and he confided

in me the good ideas and resolutions he made. He also told me that those hours of the night seemed to pass like a moment.¹⁶

Filippo Berga assures us that this kind of meditation practice was habitual from his first years:

From his first years he would make a brief meditation and I believe that this was on the passion of Jesus Christ, because he would often urge me to this practice (*perché questo inculcava bene spesso a me*).¹⁷

In meditating on the Passion “the prayer of the Garden used to move him in a special way”—he confided this to Tamini, as we have already said above—“because in all of the other episodes of the Passion the Lord *shed his Precious Blood* as a result of external violence, while in the prayer in the Garden of Olives he shed it out of an inner compassion of love, that is to say it was completely spontaneous.”¹⁸ This is a reflection that we find amazing in a boy and it gives us a glimpse at the kind of reaction provoked in Gaspar by that vital element that has always made an impression on the great and small: blood.

Since he was anxious about the welfare of others, he could hardly help but recommend to them the practice of meditating on the Passion, as Berga notes in his testimony already cited, so that they could obtain the same benefits that enriched his soul.¹⁹

This mysterious thirst of this spirit prompted him to have recourse often to “the specialists” of the Passion of Jesus: the sons of St. Paul of the Cross. Thus he is often on retreat with the Passionists at their retreat house of Sts. Giovanni e Paolo, where he struck up a friendship with St. Vincent Strambi, who will later become a collaborator with Gaspar in spreading the devotion to the Precious Blood.

Another place where he would come when deeply moved in his heart was the basilica of Santa Croce in

Gerusalemme. A maternal uncle lived in the adjacent Cistercian monastery, the monk, Don Eugenio Pechi, a spiritual man who had a great influence on the formation of young Gaspar. Besides, in that basilica, where are kept the relics of the Passion of our Lord, he could relive with more devotion, even sensible devotion, the sad drama of redemption.

Here Gaspar made a retreat of an entire month in preparation for receiving the first tonsure²⁰ at the age of fourteen, on Holy Saturday of 1800, the twelfth of April.

This retreat, in which he prepared himself for the act which would officially induct him into the clerical state, thus placing him in a particular way of following the Savior, must have filled him with the spirit of the cross of Jesus if, in receiving the tonsure, he had the sense of embracing the cross. This was a feeling he had every time that his tonsure was renewed (*si faceva la chierica*). He expressed these sentiments to Tamini, who gave the following testimony at the process for his beatification held in Albano:

. . . I remember that, having received the first tonsure, he told me that, while the bishop was cutting the hair in the front, he felt a rush of blood (*s'intese muovere tutto il sangue*) and he was afraid of falling, and when I asked him why this happened and what he thought about this, he replied that when he felt his hair being cut, *it seemed to be like embracing the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. He reminded me of this often when he would ask his mother to maintain the tonsure and to make it large, saying, 'I am not ashamed to wear it.' Then he used to turn to me and say: 'Every time the tonsure is renewed, I feel moved and happy in the same way that I felt the first time . . .'²¹

This mystical union of his spirit with the cross of Christ spurred him on to become more like Christ.

Filippo Berga says: “. . . *In order to become like the crucified Lord*, on Fridays he used to engage in particular mortifications.”²² The Crucified Christ²³ was his book and his teacher of the heart and of the mind: “One must reflect,” Berga asserts, “that he learned many things at the foot of Jesus Crucified in his mental prayer.”²⁴

In this “school” Gaspar arrived at the greatest expression of holiness: to give back one’s life for life. Thus the testimony of Maria Tamini:

. . . from his earliest years and likewise in those that followed, the Servant of God showed me that he wished to give himself to God through a life of withdrawal or even by dying as a martyr for Him . . .²⁵

If devotion to the Precious Blood is an impetus to conforming oneself with the Savior who sheds his Blood out of love for us, in the young Gaspar we must say that we find the spirit of this devotion.

Restorative Penance and the Apostolate

This desire for martyrdom was not simply a pious expression, but from his infancy was a genuine, almost superhuman force that impelled him to unite his feelings and sorrows to those of the Redeemer, who embraced suffering to expiate sin and to save humankind.

Every Christian is called to work with Jesus for the redemption of humanity. As the cross, that is to say, his freely given love “to the end,” was the sign of redemption for Jesus (Jn 13: 1), it is also the distinctive sign of the Christian. The cross of Jesus was for the remission of the sin of the world; the cross of the Christian should be the sign of sharing in the cross of Christ. This is the sense of the cross in Christianity; this explains martyrdom, suffering, and penance, accepted out of love and in union with Christ, into whose life is woven that of the pilgrim Church.

The Blood of Jesus, since it is “the highest note of the Redeeming Sacrifice,” according to an expression of Blessed John XXIII,²⁶ spontaneously invites us not only to meditate on the sacrifice of Jesus, but to continue it in ourselves, to make it our own, in its end and in its means. It is no wonder, therefore, that the spirituality of “Blood” is tinted with *blood*. No wonder that the apostle of the Precious Blood had to specialize in penance and in sacrifice, accepted out of love and in a spirit of reparation with Jesus. St. Catherine of Siena, the mystic of the Blood of Christ, rightly synthesizes this quite succinctly: “blood for blood.”²⁷

In the spirituality of young Gaspar we also find particularly this aspect of traditional Christian asceticism, which reveals another cornerstone of the future physiognomy of the “Apostle of the Precious Blood.”

Filippo Berga says that from the time he was very small, Gaspar was given to mortification and penance²⁸ and Maria Tamini tells us of the generosity of his heart:

He would confide in me that he *greatly* desired to suffer and do penance, which was moderated by the Director, and that he wanted him to be content with the merit of obedience.²⁹

He had a *great* tendency to penance and to scourge his body, taking as a model Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice, a compendium of whose life the Servant of God had written in his own hand. I suppose that he did this in order to moderate and combat his lively temperament. I know that he would have continued this austere method with himself, had he not been prevented from doing so by his spiritual director Abbot Giovanni Marchetti.³⁰

Why all this penance? Simply because he wanted to conform himself to Jesus Crucified. In the preceding paragraph we referred to a testimony of Filippo Berga, which attributed the penances of Gaspar to the goal of

“making himself like the Crucified,” that is absorbing his sentiments and, I would say, also his outward form.

But he gave himself to mortification also because he had an acute sense of sin. “From his boyhood, [Gaspar] would suddenly break the silence, jump about and, swinging his hands and his waist, would go about exclaiming through the house: ‘My love, my love, no more sins! Help, help!’”³¹

Gaspar could absolutely not bear to hear blasphemies or coarse language: they caused him genuine physical as well as spiritual distress.

We see this goal—penance for sin—already in the testimony of Don Biagio Valentini, later confessor of Gaspar and his successor in governing the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood. According to Valentini, in fact, Gaspar practiced those penances for the purpose of “fighting his lively temperament.” From the years of his infancy, according to the testimony of his contemporary D. Filippo Berga, one can affirm the same thing: “I have reached the age of reason (*età di peccato*) and thus I can also fast.” Thus Gaspar would respond to his mother who, concerned about the health of her son, used to tell him that he did not have the obligation of fasting because of his age.³²

Gaspar hated sin and fought it in himself and in others with prayer, advice, and action, as Berga testifies:

Coming with me to the Roman College, he would see some groups of persons of mixed sex which could be suspicious and he would cry out suddenly to God: ‘O Lord, save them from sin.’ Moreover, when talking with me, he used to say what a disgrace sin was for a Christian, and he urged me to always stay far from sin. He prayed that God would keep sin far from him. He would repeat all this with such feeling that showed how much he abhorred offense against God.³³

In giving alms to the poor, he would tell them “to have the fear of the Lord, that they should flee from sin and things like that.”³⁴

We refrain from referring to other facts and the various activities of his youth, already noted, that reveal to us in the soul of the young Gaspar an apostolic drive so lively that it was admired by those who knew him. Even in the midst of the concerns of study and of piety he found much time for the work of the apostolate. He was irresistibly drawn to fighting evil and to spreading good as much as possible.

These, therefore, are the other vital elements in young Gaspar—penance conformed to Christ, a profound sense of sin and apostolic zeal—on which one day will be grafted the devotion to the Most Precious Blood. In fact, immersing souls in the Blood of Christ in a “crucified apostolate” in order to purify them of sin and vivify them with supernatural life could be the synthesis of the life of St. Gaspar the apostle. We see him forming himself for this mission already in the years of his youth.

The Mystery of the Eucharist

Another factor of the spirituality of young Gaspar which will have a great influence on the life of the Apostle of the Most Precious Blood was his Eucharistic piety.

The Eucharistic mystery is at the center of devotion to the Divine Blood, because in it we have the memorial of the Passion and death of Jesus. From it we draw the fruits of redemption; by it we come into sacramental contact with the Precious Blood poured out for us and we become conformed to Christ: “The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him” (Jn 6: 56).

The witnesses to the early years of Gaspar’s life also describe his particular devotion to the Eucharist. While still small, “his mother used to take him to hear Mass every morning in the church of the Gesù, where he

would stand like a statue and his mother would have to pick him up and make him sit down out of compassion . . .”³⁵ When he learned to serve Mass, he volunteered to serve *more than he was able to*.³⁶

His communions, limited by the discipline of the time, were “seraphic” in the way in which he prepared himself, for the fervor that accompanied them and for the heavenly communications that God gave him. In the words of Maria Tamini:

. . . After his first Communion I saw him frequent holy Communion two or three times a week. He had great fervor in making them, and often he would tell me that God wanted everything for him . . . He showed me a chain for an undershirt that his own Director had given him and ordered that he should gird himself with this on the day of his Communion . . .”³⁷

The visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament was a daily practice. The goal of his afternoon walks was the churches which were having exposition for the Forty Hours Devotion. Moreover, speaking of the Forty Hours, Gaspar may be considered a pioneer for perpetual adoration:

Gaspar was friends with the monks of Sant’Alessio and found himself there for Forty Hours Devotion. He suggested to them that at night they should not put the Blessed Sacrament back in the tabernacle, showing himself willing to remain and urging me [Filippo Berga] to keep him company before the Blessed Sacrament the entire night. I complied with his wishes, and he suggested to me that I take a coffee instead of supper, as he did, and thus we could remain awake the entire night. [Gaspar] kept himself always in prayer and one knew well that he was completely united with

God. From time to time he turned to me and would offer a *fervorino* in order to inflame me with love for Christ Jesus. [He] was not yet a priest and Perpetual Adoration was not yet established in Rome, that is to say the night vigil before the Blessed Sacrament. This happened more times in Sant'Alessio and the same thing also took place in the Church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. ³⁸

In this testimony and in these facts we find painted the enterprising and fervid spirit of the young Gaspar regarding the Eucharistic mystery. The next step toward the devotion to the Most Precious Blood will be easier for him: to highlight in the Eucharistic mystery the sacrificial aspect of the Blood of Christ.

At the end of this rather brief research of ours on the youthful spirituality of St. Gaspar in relation to the Divine Blood, one could object that those elements that we have indicated as formative of the future Apostle of the Most Precious Blood are not really distinctive, but are the patrimony of holiness in general.

We do not deny this. On the other hand we must reflect that God does not prepare apostles for a specific mission in a generic manner. This preparation does not take place ordinarily in a single moment and in a manner that is uniquely supernatural.

Certainly we also have shown at the beginning of the chapter that one cannot properly speak of devotion to the Most Precious Blood in Gaspar's youth. Nevertheless, knowing of the successive developments of a spiritual formation and noting that those elements that we pointed out had a *particular accent* in his youthful spirituality (and the witnesses notice this often and we have emphasized it as well), we thus believed it opportune to highlight them as roots from which will develop abundantly the personality of the future Apostle of the Most Precious Blood.

Chapter Two

Formation in the Precious Blood

In the previous chapter we have seen that, at least from the documents we have, the youthful spirituality of Gaspar was not characterized by a devotion to the Precious Blood. Gaspar's devotion to the Blood of Christ will become much more evident later. In the present chapter we want to retrace the journey of Gaspar's explicit formation in Precious Blood spirituality.

In this journey we can identify four principal stages, the years 1808, 1810–1814, 1814, and 1817.

December 1808:

The Foundation of the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood in the Basilica of San Nicola in Carcere

The first stage along this spiritual path begins in 1808, the year of Gaspar's ordination to the priesthood. This event designated him not only as one who distributes the benefits of the redemption, but likewise the victim with Christ for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls.

Gaspar's first explicit encounter with the devotion to the Precious Blood took place on December 8, 1808, when he was invited by the canons of the chapter of the



San Nicola in Carcere.

At the far right of the photo one can glimpse part of the Teatro di Marcello where Gaspar maintained an apartment and in which he died.

Basilica of San Nicola in Carcere to give some short inspirational sermons on the Eucharist (*fervorini eucaristici*) and the official address for the inauguration of the “Pious Association of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, of the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Holy Souls in Purgatory” in the same basilica.

A relic of the Precious Blood that was mounted and sealed in a silver box, a gift of Prince Giulio Savelli, had been preserved in this very ancient basilica since 1708. It was engraved with the words, “*De aqua et Sanguine D.N.J.C. quae effluerunt ex ejus sacratissimo latere dum pendebat in Cruce*” ‘From the water and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ which flowed from his most sacred side while he hung on the Cross.’¹ According to the tradition of the noble Roman Savelli family, an ancestor was a Roman legionary present in Jerusalem at the death of the Savior who had possession of the garment sprinkled with a few drops of the Blood of Jesus. When he became a Christian the former legionary attached the part of the garment that was still red with

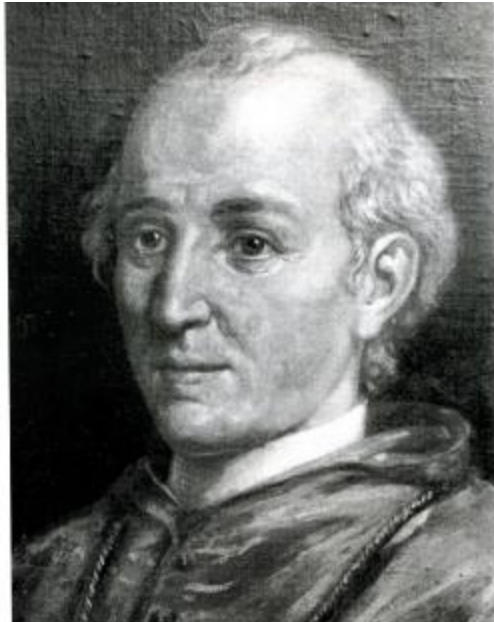
the Blood to his own garment and, upon returning to Rome, placed it in a precious reliquary, which was preserved and handed on with devotion for many centuries in the Savelli family.²

The chapter of the basilica, through a special privilege, used to celebrate the feast of the Precious Blood on the first Sunday of July with a proper Office and Mass, and already in 1808 used to expose and carry the relic in procession.³ In the same church was venerated a crucifix which, according to tradition, had spoken to St. Brigida.⁴ The crucifix and the relic were placed together at the same altar.

These sacred objects were apparently little venerated if the good canons were concerned about the religious apathy of the neighboring quarters of the city.⁵ However, a member of the chapter of that basilica was the learned and holy canon Don Francesco Albertini, a highly regarded spiritual director. He directed the servant of God Sr. Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato, of the monastery of the Paolotte (Sisters of St. Francis of Paola) in Rome. Sr. Maria Agnese

. . . after communion, would have certain rapturous experiences, during which she spoke of sublime matters. One morning, having received Communion . . . one of her usual ecstasies occurred. The nuns alerted the Canon [Albertini] of this, and he was attentive to hear what she was saying. He understood that she was speaking of the devotion of the Precious Blood, how this devotion would be spread, and similar matters regarding the devotion.⁶

From that moment, Albertini began to devote himself enthusiastically to spreading this devotion. This presented no difficulties for him at San Nicola, because the canons wanted to revive the Christian faith among the faithful of the area, and because they venerated the relic of the Precious Blood and the crucifix there—both



Don Francesco Albertini

of which were indispensable means for encouraging the devotion, especially among the simple people. In addition, the feast of the Precious Blood was already being celebrated with a proper Mass and Divine Office in the basilica. Albertini's intention was to foster devotion to the Blood of Christ and not to the relic, as we will see later.

Albertini argued for this holy cause so well that the chapter of the Basilica of San Nicola in Carcere engaged canons Mons. Francesco Maria Pittori, Don Gregorio Muccioli, and Albertini himself to work for the establishment of the "Pious Association of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, of the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Holy Souls in Purgatory." The official inauguration took place on December 8, 1808.

According to a memoir written by Albertini, the young and newly ordained Gaspar was called to preach for the event. (Gaspar had been ordained on July 31,

1808, with a dispensation from lack of canonical age.) Here is a description of Gaspar's role in the event taken from Albertini's memoir:

The feast of the Immaculate Conception was celebrated with a solemn General Communion, and countless people approached the Holy Table, since there were many Confessors in the Church as well as many Masses for the convenience of the Devoted who came. In the Mass of Communion there was organ music and Motets sung by the Musicians. From time to time the music was interrupted with moving and effective short sermons (*fervorini*) delivered by Don Gaspar del Bufalo, Canon of the Illustrious College [of Canons] of San Marco.

. . . After the Mass, the praiseworthy Canon del Bufalo offered a brief but energetic discourse directed to the Representatives, both Men and Women, in which explained to them the principal aim of the new Association that had been founded, and consequently the proper spirit and disposition of those who were to be its foundations. Gaspar animated and encouraged all to dedicate themselves entirely to this Work that gave such glory of God, that was of such spiritual advantage to one's fellow men and women, and of such suffrage for the souls of the Deceased. He finished the discourse with a fervent prayer to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to implore the abundance and fullness of heavenly Blessings upon the new Association which was to be born in only a few moments in the womb of the Holy Catholic Church so that it would bear very copious fruit.⁷

This pious association with its *Constitutions*⁸ was approved and canonically erected on February 27, 1809,

with a decree of the vicar of Rome, Cardinal Antonio Despuig y Dameto.

After the approval Albertini, named president of the *Pia Adunanza* 'Pious Association,' composed the Chaplet (or rosary) of the Precious Blood,⁹ which was approved by the Sacred Congregation of Rites on March 31, 1809,¹⁰ and then printed.

Albertini called on Gaspar to preach to the *Pia Adunanza* in 1809 and 1810 as well, as we find recorded in the above mentioned *Memorandum*:

The *Adunanza* introduced the practice of the Most Holy Rosary with *fevorini*, something which had not been the previous practice . . . And this was done on the feast of the Most Holy Rosary and during the Octave. On the feast of the Rosary the *fevorini* for the first part were preached by Abbot Giannoli, the second part by Canon del Bufalo, and the third by Abbot Marini. On the day of the Octave . . . Canon del Bufalo, already praised above, preached the *fevorini* only for the third part . . . on the day of the feast [of the Most Precious Blood], which fell on the first of July [1810], there was . . . General Communion, during which Canon del Bufalo gave *fevorini* with great force and earnestness (*unzione*).¹¹

This is the bare recounting of the facts that brought our saint to his first explicit contact with devotion to the Divine Blood. We are interested in knowing the reason this encounter took place and its repercussions in the soul of the young priest.

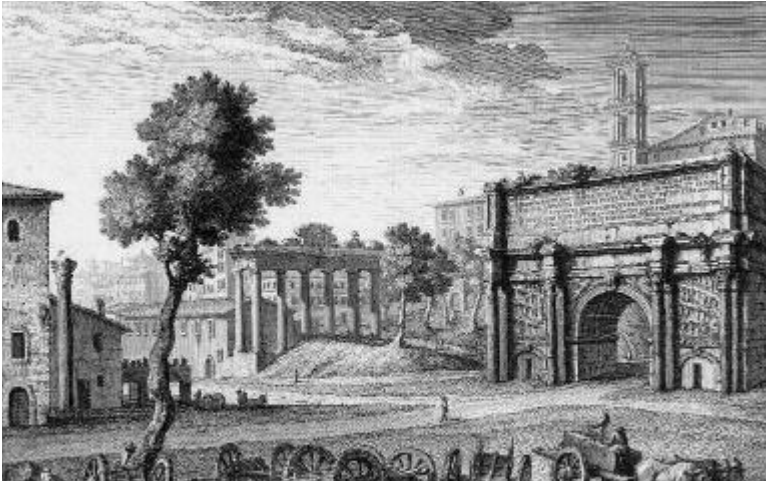
Why did the three canons in charge of the chapter at San Nicola in Carcere call on the twenty-three year old Don Gaspar, ordained only a few months, to take on such important preaching for the founding of the confraternity on December 8, 1808?



Santa Galla Hospice

It does not appear that the three canons called him because they noticed in Gaspar a particular zeal for the devotion to the Divine Blood. Nor does it seem that they asked this of the preacher, for at that moment the *Pia Adunanza* was also concerned with the holy rosary and the souls in purgatory. Besides, in light of what was said in the first chapter, devotion to the Precious Blood had not yet begun to grow in the youthful spirituality of Gaspar. Even though on that December 8, 1808, Gaspar “concluded the discourse with a fervent prayer to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ and to the Blessed Virgin Mary,” as we read in the already cited memoir, this does not mean that devotion to the Precious Blood was particularly prominent in his life, as it would come to be later. The closing prayer related to the topic of the sermon was customary for Gaspar as a conclusion to his preaching, as one can observe in other preaching of the same year.¹²

The reason for Gaspar being invited to undertake such important preaching was of a more general nature: it was the same reason why he was called to preach an official discourse on divine providence in the Basilica of



Roman Forum or Campo Vaccino

St. Peter in the Vatican for the exposition of the funeral pall (*coltre*) of the holy martyrs,¹³ namely, his fame as a great preacher and zealous apostle. The intense pastoral ministry of this young priest, which took place before their very eyes as he moved back and forth between the Santa Galla Hospice and the evening oratory of Santa Maria in Vincis (inaugurated on October 23, 1808¹⁴) could hardly escape their notice. They would have heard the opinions that were running through the entire populace of the area of the Campo Vaccino (the Roman Forum^a) on account of young Gaspar, canon of the neighboring Basilica of St. Mark in the Piazza Venezia: a truly zealous priest who could make one love God simply by being around him.

This twofold fame as a holy priest and an exceptional orator, therefore, was the reason for the invitation

^a*Translator's note:* The Campo Vaccino, literally “cow pasture,” was a popular name for the Roman Forum in Gaspar's day. At that time it had not been excavated and preserved as it is today and lay under several meters of debris. Prints from the era show cows and other animals grazing among the ruins that poked up through the pasture.

offered by the three canons to preach on December 8, 1808, in San Nicola in Carcere.

What kind of influence did Gaspar's first encounter with the devotion to the Precious Blood and with Albertini have on him?

For St. Gaspar this encounter with the devotion to the Precious Blood was not of great importance, because he had not yet become well aware of its doctrinal implications. On first contact with the devotion it would be difficult to distinguish it from devotion to the Jesus crucified, to the Passion, or to the Eucharist. Later, when he becomes aware of his vocation to propagate the devotion to the Precious Blood, Gaspar will apply himself to studying it, as St. Vincent Pallotti affirms in his deposition.¹⁵ D. Giovanni Merlini also notes:

To succeed even better in this regard [Gaspar] told me that he would apply himself diligently to the study of Scripture and the Church Fathers in order to amass as much as he could for his sermons on the Divine Blood.¹⁶

The meeting with Albertini was not important for Gaspar, except for those few contacts with Albertini and others that took place to coordinate the commitments of ministry that Gaspar was fulfilling at San Nicola in Carcere, especially after Albertini was named president of the *Pia Adunanza* of the Precious Blood by the chapter of San Nicola in Carcere. In addition, Gaspar was always involved in various pastoral ministries which fully absorbed his time. Gaspar also already had his spiritual director in Rome, the learned Mons. Giovanni Marchetti, rector of the Church of the Gesù, and so one must dismiss as without any foundation the notion that Albertini had begun the spiritual direction of St. Gaspar before the deportation.¹⁷ As a matter of fact, D. Giovanni Merlini, a well-informed witness, states in his deposition in the *Processo Ordinario di Albano*:

It is well to note that the Servant of God, as he himself told me, even though he already knew the celebrated Albertini in Rome by sight, had only greeted him and, if memory serves, had talked with him a few times. During his deportation, Gaspar, knowing his reputation as an excellent director of souls, placed himself under his direction, and I know that he never distanced himself from him.¹⁸

Professor Mariano Armellini, the archeologist who wrote a highly regarded biography of Gaspar, reaches the same conclusion: “Up until the day of his departure [for exile, in July 1810], Gaspar had only very infrequent contacts [with Albertini.]”¹⁹ These statements would be in error if Albertini had begun spiritual direction with St. Gaspar before the exile and had him in mind to collaborate with him in spreading his dear devotion.

1810–1814:

Gaspar Is to Be the Herald of the Precious Blood and Years of Luxuriant Growth

Rome, with its endless apostolic demands that absorbed all of Gaspar’s activity given the generous resonance they found in his zealous heart, would not have been the place suited for realizing the divine plan, according to which he was to be the Apostle of the Divine Blood. Just then God took him from his own surroundings, from his cherished and demanding apostolic works, and from his family. He called Gaspar to a land of martyrdom, where he began revealing to him his vocation in the Church.

Gaspar’s pilgrimage began with a summons by the French police, which reached the del Bufalo household in the Palazzo Altieri on June 12, 1810. The following day Gaspar had to present himself at the Palazzo Borromeo near the Church of St. Ignatius to take the oath of loyalty to Napoleon Bonaparte.

The French army had already occupied Rome on May 17, 1809, with the intention of bending Pope Pius VII to Napoleon's aims of dominating Europe and abolishing the temporal power of the pope, after having annexed the last two regions of the Papal States, Lazio and Umbria, to the French empire. On June 10, 1809, Pius VII issued a bull of excommunication for all responsible for the suppression of the patrimony of St. Peter. During the night of June 5–6, 1809, the aged and weak Pius VII was arrested at the Quirinal Palace by French police and was taken into exile, first to Grenoble, then to Savona, and finally to Fontainebleau.

News of this crime petrified the population of Rome. Added to this abuse was the imposition of the oath of loyalty to the established authority, that is, to the emperor, with the consequent approval of the deeds already done. Cardinals, bishops, prelates, and ecclesiastics who enjoyed benefices, such as pastors and canons, were obliged to take the oath. It was either loyalty to the emperor or deportation.

In two instructions of May 22 and August 30 of 1808, Pius VII declared such an oath illicit, notwithstanding the opposing opinions of some theologians and canon lawyers who had been manipulated into considering it legal. Gaspar made accurate copies, in his own hand, of the two papal instructions, and those copies are preserved among his writings.²⁰

Thus on that June 12, 1810, the order to take the oath arrived at the home of Gaspar, a canon of St. Mark's. The following day, accompanied by his father Antonio, Don Gaspar went before the commissioner prefect at the Palazzo Borromeo. Before the prefect he announced, instead of the prescribed formula for the oath, his decision: "I cannot, I must not, I will not," just as Pius VII had declared before General Radet, when, on the night of June 5–6, 1809, the latter had invited the pope to renounce his temporal sovereignty.²¹ Gaspar's deportation to Piacenza followed immediately.²²

During the first days of July he was on his way to Piacenza together with Albertini and two other canons of the Basilica of St. Mark: Francesco Gambini and Bernardino Filippo Marchetti.²³

The threads of the divine fabric began to come together. Out of sheer necessity Gaspar was to rub shoulders with the pioneer of the devotion to the Precious Blood and began to submit himself to his influence willingly.

Passing through Florence, Albertini used the opportunity to promote his dear devotion, stirring Abbot Consalvo Petrai to sufficient enthusiasm to have the Chaplet of the Precious Blood reprinted and distributed.²⁴ Monsignor Emidio Gentilucci, in his short biography of our saint, assures us that Gaspar also helped him in this work.²⁵

In Piacenza, Gaspar could not help but observe the zeal of Albertini in spreading devotion to the Precious Blood and the chaplet, which Albertini had translated into five languages.²⁶

However, the moment of revelation of the will of God had not yet arrived for Gaspar. This came about unexpectedly while he was in bed with a very serious illness in September 1810. The unhealthy air of Piacenza or “Dispiacenza,”^b as he jokingly refers to it in one letter,²⁷ had brought him near death. Even the physicians did not hide the seriousness of his case, and so Albertini celebrated the anointing of the sick with him. (In that period the sacrament was customarily administered only at the point of death.) While he was attending him, Albertini, with heart heavy with sorrow, gazed on the features of this young priest, transformed by the wrinkles of a premature old age.

^bThis is a play on words in Italian. *Piacere* means “to please” and *dispiacere* “to displease.”

On August 28 Gaspar wrote to Don Gaetano Bonanni²⁸ asking him for prayers to St. Francis Xavier for his health.²⁹ Even at that point—the first days of September of 1810—as Gaspar lay on his straw mattress near the point of death, he was invoking the help of his dear saint, to whom he was so devoted from his boyhood. Albertini did not let so much as a breath from the apparently dying Gaspar escape his notice; he observed everything. At one point, not so much to console Gaspar, inasmuch as he was sustained by an interior force, Albertini assured him that his cure was certain. Why this sudden change? Albertini had always kept in mind the prophetic words referring to Gaspar by the already noted Servant of God Sr. Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato:

You will recognize in the difficult times of the Church a young priest, zealous for the glory of God, and with him, in the face of oppression of enemies and in pain, you will form a spiritual friendship and you will be his Director. The distinctive characteristic of this priest will be the devotion to St. Francis Xavier. He will be destined to be an apostolic missionary and he will found a new congregation of missionary priests under the title of the Divine Blood, dedicated to reforming morals and for the salvation of souls, to promote the decorum of the secular clergy, to rouse the people from their indifference and unbelief, calling all back to the love of Jesus crucified.

He will be the founder of an institute of sisters, but he will not direct them. Finally, he will be the trumpet of the Divine Blood, in order to arouse sinners and sectarians in the difficult times of Christianity.³⁰

Albertini now entrusted these communications that he had kept in his heart to Gaspar, in order to explain

the categorical assertion that he would be cured, which in fact did occur.

The prophecy which Sr. Maria Agnese had received from God, in all probability during one of her habitual ecstasies after communion,³¹ and which she had communicated to Albertini, was explicit. It foretold that a young priest would be the apostolic missionary, founder of two congregations with the Divine Blood in their titles, to call back “all to the love of the Crucified One” and Apostle of the Blood of Christ.”

What weight did this prediction have for the soul of Albertini and that of Gaspar?

Albertini had to have been convinced of the truth of this prediction above all because he was familiar with her holiness. This holy woman and member of the Paolotte Sisters was born Barbara Schiavi on June 24, 1757. From childhood she was dedicated to prayer and penance

. . . in the humble condition of a lay sister, a state she voluntarily chose, and her life shone with the light of solid virtues. She was favored by God with great gifts of miracles, of prophecy, of counsel, of the knowledge of hearts . . . High ranking people, both clerical and lay, came to her for advice.³²

She enjoyed the esteem and veneration of St. Vincent Strambi, Passionist bishop and friend of Gaspar's, the Jesuit Giuseppe Maria Pignatelli, and of Venerable Clotilde di Savoia. After a very long illness, she died on the day she predicted, March 15, 1810, some months before Gaspar and his companions departed for exile.³³

The effect of this holy religious on the soul of Albertini was of no small importance if, as we already know, she persuaded him to propagate the devotion to the Precious Blood precisely because he heard her speak of this in an ecstasy.

Albertini, after fasting and prayer, was inspired to write the Chaplet of the Precious Blood and, after finishing it,

... considered taking it to Sister Maria Agnese ... with the intention of making some finishing touches later. Scarcely did the pious lay sister see her confessor that she spoke to him about what he had written, although he had not shown it to her. She was as happy as if she had received an ineffable gift, and said to him: 'You have the Chaplet of the Precious Blood! Do not change a thing. Leave it as the Lord has inspired it.'³⁴

Albertini followed her counsel to the letter.

For these and other reasons, known only to the holy canon through his special relationship to Sr. Maria Agnese, one must conclude that Albertini considered the prediction as a genuine divine message even before it was fulfilled. We say this because, already during the period of imprisonment, we see him working with Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi (1765–1826) for the establishment of the Institute of the "Daughters of the Precious Blood."³⁵ We say this because Gaspar wanted to enter the newly reestablished Society of Jesus upon returning to Rome after his imprisonment and Albertini did not try to stop him, assuring Gaspar that he would not be successful, which, in fact, was the case.³⁶

What kind of influence did that prediction have on Gaspar in September 1810?

The prophecy contained a beautiful message, but it was difficult for Gaspar to receive it enthusiastically. This was also part of the character of our saint: to be fearful in the face of the great responsibilities he was about to embrace until some sign manifested the will of God to him. This was the case at his priestly ordination: he needed the counsel of St. Vincent Strambi. It would

also be the case in his choice of vocation: he would need the call of Pius VII.

That prediction, therefore, certainly did not find an enthusiastic welcome in Gaspar. It left him perplexed, but it was not in vain, especially with the encouraging and enlightening presence of Albertini.³⁷

From September 1810 Gaspar will begin to work actively to enrich his soul with the beautiful devotion to the Most Precious Blood and to spreading that devotion, as we will see shortly. From being a simple assistant to Albertini, as he was in Rome, Florence, and Piacenza, he became more and more a genuine instrument of the Precious Blood through an interior desire, because already the vermilion sun of the Blood of Christ has appeared on the horizon of his life, making it more fruitful and bringing it gradually to full maturity.

All of Gaspar's life may be seen as continuing growth in his devotion to the Precious Blood, but I believe that the years of most luxuriant growth were those he spent in prison. It was there that he began to be directed by Albertini, whose personality held a strong attraction for him.³⁸ In prison his soul was formed not only by study and prayer but also by his accepting this martyrdom out of love for Jesus Christ and the Church.

First, we should describe the figure of Canon Francesco Albertini,³⁹ who was born in Rome on June 8, 1770 and who died on November 24, 1819. Given his importance in the life of Gaspar, we should take a closer look at his life. Albertini molded the soul of Gaspar for his great mission and their destinies appeared to be fused together into a single ideal and their souls burned with the same spirituality.⁴⁰

From the moment that he chose Albertini as his spiritual director during their deportation, Gaspar nurtured a growing admiration of the canon. Albertini prescribed a method for living and observed it exactly. Gaspar remained obedient to his director even after he died, following his counsels scrupulously.⁴¹ He used to

say: "I observe exactly what Monsignor Albertini prescribed for me and I don't stray from his rules . . . What a great director was Albertini! How hard it is to find one like him!"⁴² He often called him "the Saint,"⁴³ as one can easily see in his letters.

He truly was a holy man, very humble, given to sometimes incredible mortification. He was hard on himself so that he could control his fiery temperament. With others, however, he was gentle and loving to the point of reminding one of St. Francis de Sales, whose life and work he knew.⁴⁴

He was such an accomplished and wise spiritual director that after his death several works were published under his name: *Introduzione alla vita umile*, *Gabinetto mistico del proprio niente*,⁴⁵ and *Direttore diretto*.⁴⁶

Such is a brief sketch of Albertini who in 1819 was created bishop of Terracina, Sezze, and Priverno by Pius VII.

Albertini was extremely significant in the history of devotion to the Precious Blood. He was important not only for stirring up a devotion that would become universal in the Church, for having written the beloved Chaplet of the Precious Blood, for having formed and helped the "herald of the Divine Blood," but also for a heart that burned for the price of the redemption of humankind.

For this reason we will mention a few ideas of Albertini that we will find developed in Gaspar. After all, Albertini called Gaspar his "favorite son," so we should be able to discover some the father's characteristics in his spiritual offspring.

The mind (*animo*) of Albertini regarding the Blood of Christ may be found in a letter written from Bastia, Corsica, on July 11, 1812:

Long live the Most Precious Blood of my dear Redeemer. I am consecrated to that devotion

and wish to remain forever immersed in it, while he graciously gives me the necessary strength . . .⁴⁷

May the love of Jesus Christ always grow in (our) heart. Who will love, if we do not love our Divine Redeemer, who gave his Blood and his Life for us? He is the Master, the Sovereign, the King of (our) soul.⁴⁸

Quite significant is the insight into his spirit which he offers us in a letter he wrote to a nephew on January 11, 1812, seven days after his arrival in the awful prisons of Bastia:

See that I no longer write you from Bologna, but from Bastia, where I arrived on the fourth of this month . . . I did not want to let you know this earlier so that you would not be upset. Now that I have arrived at my destination and find myself in very good health, happy and calm and full of joy, I share all of this with you so that you can be united with me in thanking the Lord, who, through the merits of his Precious Blood has deigned to give me a share in this additional little suffering for his Divine Glory . . .⁴⁹

This consecration of his life to the glory of the Divine Blood spurred him to spread the devotion with great zeal:

I commend to you the devotion to the Most Precious Blood of our divine Redeemer, which is our true treasure.⁵⁰

Ah, long live the sweetest Blood of Jesus! This powerful devotion is becoming more widespread each day. Yes, to Him be honor and glory for all ages. Amen. And I am in the same Most Divine Blood your very devoted Servant [and the Servant] of all.⁵¹

He spread the devotion by means of letters of spiritual direction, the confessional and counsel, writings, preaching, publications, and especially the Chaplet of the Precious Blood, which he had translated into various languages. Was there an important decision to be made? He had recourse to the Divine Blood:

Regarding the advice you asked for in the matter of the coming election of a Superior, do what I tell you: first place the matter in the Most Precious Blood of our Redeemer. Then go before the Most Blessed Sacrament and ask Him for enlightenment . . .⁵²

Writing from prison in Bastia, for example, Albertini intervened in a conflict within the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood and pointed out that the Chaplet of the Precious Blood had been translated and printed in five languages and that the devotion was spreading. The devil, he says, is inimical to the spread of the devotion to the Blood, the source of the salvation of the world. He urges:

Be happy and affectionately devoted to the Most Precious Blood of our Redeemer Jesus, who is the only one who can placate the wrath of the Eternal Father, and who can obtain an abundance of all good things for us.⁵³

Here is an excerpt from a letter offering some points for meditation on the Blood of Christ, particularly during Holy Week:

Why does [Jesus] suffer? Out of love for these miserable and ungrateful creatures, who instead of returning to him, as each must do, offend him so many times with their faults and sins. Oh! Never has been found a model more expressive of solid patience, which confounds our delicacy, and self love, by which we do not

know how to suffer even a remark and a slight offense of our neighbor. Why does he suffer? To free men and women from their unhappy lot of damnation, into which they have voluntarily fallen. The incomprehensible Mystery of Mercy by which we are taught to be more compassionate toward our fellow men and women, and to give comfort with an open heart, insofar as possible, to others in their misery. Finally, up to what point does he suffer? He pours out the last drop of his Blood for our salvation. Oh, adorable school of love and of charity, in which he teaches us to love again without reserve the one who has sacrificed his entire being for us. Here, my dear Daughter, are some helpful thoughts, which should occupy your mind in these holy days.⁵⁴

Some of his expressions seem to show the mystical influence of St. Catherine of Siena when speaking of the Blood of Christ: "I leave you in the Precious side of Jesus Christ," or "immersing you in [his] Most Precious Blood."⁵⁵

These few quotes taken from his letters⁵⁶ are enough to provide us with a sense of the spiritual stature of the teacher of Gaspar, of his great love for the Blood of Jesus, which Albertini sought to instill subtly by the witness of his life in the heart of his disciple.

Albertini and Gaspar were transferred to Bologna on December 12, 1810. There Gaspar lived next to Albertini in the house of the Oratorians, attached to the Church of Santa Maria di Galliera, and then, in February 1811, in the quarters of the Countesses Marianna Spada Bentivoglio and Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi, her daughter. It was Albertini who sought lodging for himself and St. Gaspar with Caterina after he had been chosen to be her spiritual director. Since there was no place available in their house, in which several exiled



House of the Oratorians in Bologna

priests had already found lodging, they had him stay in the house of their servant Giuseppe Sarti and his wife Marianna Gressi, at Via Cartoleria Nuova, 618, present-day Via Domenico Guerazzi.⁵⁷

The year Gaspar spent with Albertini in Bologna—the latter was transferred to Corsica on December 28, 1811—was a time of great spiritual influence on the soul of St. Gaspar, especially through the intense apostolate for the devotion to the Precious Blood which Albertini was able to arouse in that city.

During these months in which Gaspar lived with Albertini, his zeal for the devotion to the Precious Blood had not waned, but 1811 was the year in which the zealous apostolic activity of Albertini was impressed even more deeply in the life of our saint.

Albertini's activity coincided with the enthusiasm in the region of Bologna, especially that of Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi, whose fervor for this devotion was roused by her spiritual director, Albertini. So great was her devotion that, as she herself writes in an autobiographical letter, in September 1811, that Albertini

. . . erected [in Bologna] a union of seven individuals, who honor the seven sheddings of the

Blood of our divine Redeemer, and he commissioned me to be their leader. This union was established on the day of the birth of our Lady and met on the last Sunday of the month.⁵⁸

This was the basis of the future Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood in the Church of San Domenico, which eventually merged with the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of San Nicola in Carcere in Rome on June 9, 1816. Just as Albertini had singled out Gaspar as the future Apostle of the Blood of Christ in Piacenza in September 1810, so in Bologna in 1811 he singled out the Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi to be the foundress of the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood. From that time on Albertini began to prepare her, along with some companions, for the founding of this institute, to be dedicated to caring for the sick in hospitals and in the home.⁵⁹ But we will speak of this later, when we describe Gaspar's commitment to founding the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood.

Now, however we must see what influence Albertini exercised on the soul of Gaspar during the year that they lived together in Bologna.

Until June 1811, Gaspar's letters provide no explicit witness to the devotion to the Precious Blood in his heart (*animo*). In Bologna the call to cultivate the devotion to the Precious Blood becomes apparent in his letters for the first time. This will be the principal refrain of his letters in future years.

We notice this first evidence in a letter written on June 18, 1811, to Countess Virginia Malaspina Caracciolo of Piacenza. Among other news, he speaks to her of the approaching feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus:

Oh, how happy I would be if I had always loved Jesus as I ought! At least you, please, love him for me and let us make every effort to be entirely his in this life so as to be with him for all

eternity. What beautiful thoughts come to me as I meditate now on our Redeemer, whose feast of the Most Sacred Heart we are about to celebrate very soon. That most Sacred Heart teaches us two truths in particular, that is, humility, as he says *discite* 'learn [from me, for I am meek and humble of heart],' etc. [Mt 11: 29] and holy love, symbolized in those flames surrounding the Sacred Divine Heart. *Ignem veni mittere* 'I have come to cast fire [on the earth],' etc. [Lk 12: 49]. So, let us then place ourselves before him and ask him to sanctify our hearts and supply us with all that we need.

Be mindful of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus and say often the *Te Ergo Quaesumus*; and I also ask you, at your convenience, to offer a novena to St. Xavier for me.⁶⁰

In another letter to the same Countess Caracciolo, Gaspar praises her for the zeal that she was showing in spreading the devotion to the Precious Blood in her city and he also describes to her the rapid spread of the devotion to the Blood of Christ in Bologna and in all of Romagna by means of the Chaplet of the Precious Blood. He asks her to have thousands of copies reprinted. Thus he writes her on September 19, 1811:

I am thoroughly edified by your work, especially for the zeal and Christian charity that you demonstrate by propagating anything that will redound to the greater glory of God. In particular, I am referring to the now well-known Chaplet which you, in your goodness, have begun to distribute to the nuns and other pious individuals. May you be blessed and may God shower his favors on all of your efforts and bring fulfillment to our hopes.

Here in Bologna, some women, on their own, and other people have become so interested in this devotion that at present it has spread throughout Romagna, throughout the Diocese of Bologna, etc. In many churches of Campagna, they are already using this devotion in public services. The same thing is occurring, at the present time, in only one of the churches in this city [the Basilica of San Domenico in Bologna], but becoming more and more widespread in other places. I mention all of this for your consolation.

One devoted person [Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi] had thousands and thousands of the booklets published which were then distributed into the hands of the seculars as well as private individuals, and little by little introduced into the churches. Thus, if devout people in Piacenza can be found who could join together to handle the publishing of some thousands of these booklets and passing them around privately, you will see that our good Jesus will take care of the rest.⁶¹

This news of the spread of the devotion to the Precious Blood in Bologna and in the whole diocese, in Romagna, and in the countryside is not an exaggeration, since Albertini and St. Gaspar had a strong friendship with the priests of the *Opera del B. Bartolomeo Dal Monte*,⁶² who dedicated themselves to preaching popular missions and who were committed to spreading devotion to the Precious Blood⁶³ by means of the recitation of the Chaplet of the Precious Blood. It is significant that Gaspar will propose writing to these very missionaries for a copy of their Rule in order to have “enlightenment” (*lumi*) when he is about to go to Giano in July 1815 to found the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.⁶⁴

The year 1811 was a year of great spiritual ferment for the Blood of Christ. The rest of Gaspar's time in prison, which ended in February of 1814, was an apprenticeship of intense pastoral and spiritual formation for the Apostle of the Blood of Christ, even when he was forced to be separated from his beloved Albertini on December 28, 1811, when the latter was deported to Corsica and Gaspar was transferred to the prisons of Imola (January 14, 1813) and Lugo (May 15–December 7, 1813). From Lugo he was sent to Florence (December 20, 1813) to await his transfer to Livorno, whence he was supposed to embark for Corsica. Fortunately this transfer did not take place because of the decree of freedom granted by Gioacchino Murat on January 26, 1814, to priests who had not sworn the oath. In this period St. Gaspar, although he was alone, committed himself to imitate Albertini in propagating devotion to the Precious Blood.

Having formed a friendship with the family of the noble Ginnasi family in Imola,⁶⁵ (specifically with the Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi) and with the priest Don Francesco Pollini,⁶⁶ spiritual director of those imprisoned, St. Gaspar took it upon himself to obtain for them the booklets of the Chaplet of the Precious Blood from Countess Caterina Bentivoglio. Thus he writes on February 11, 1813, to Monsignor Annibale Ginnasi:

I have thought also of writing a couple of lines to the Countess [Bentivoglio] to ask her help in a small matter that will have to be settled at Bologna (according to a letter from Rome which commissions me to it); on that occasion I will mention to her also the Booklets, etc.⁶⁷

In the letter of February 22, 1813, to Lucrezia Ginnasi, sister-in-law of Mons. Annibale Ginnasi, Gaspar assures them that the booklets requested had arrived from Bologna and that he was disposed to ask for

more, so that he could introduce the public recitation of the chaplet in Faenza and in other places.

If the Chaplet of the Blood of Christ could be publicly introduced also in Faenza or in some other place, I will see to it that other booklets are sent from Bologna and, as far as I am concerned, both now and always, I will never lose interest in the salvation of souls.⁶⁸

In fact, some letters of St. Gaspar from this period give us evidence of his interest in the devotion to the Precious Blood, as he obtains the booklets of the chaplet for his friends.⁶⁹ Of particular significance is the letter to Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi of May 10, 1813, telling her of the arrival of a large quantity of booklets of the chaplet. He writes her:

At the end of this month, we will have the booklets for the Chaplet, and today I wrote to Countess Bentivoglio who will send 500 of them: 300 for Fr. Pollini, who asked me to get them; 100 for you and 100 for me. I hope that the Lord will bless our pious intentions and, in the meantime, let us not cease offering the price of our redemption for the Holy Church and for the eternal salvation of our souls.⁷⁰

When St. Gaspar stopped in Florence at the end of December 1813 and in January 1814, awaiting transfer to Corsica to join Albertini, who had suffered for two years in the horrible "tombs" of Bastia, he undertook the spreading of the devotion to the Precious Blood in the monastery of the Montalvo Sisters.⁷¹

Why did St. Gaspar, lacking the support and guidance of Albertini, engage in spreading the devotion to the Precious Blood? Above all, it was because in these years of special participation in the cross of Christ out of love for the Church, with the guidance and splendid



Prison of Imola

witness of Albertini, he devoted himself to his own interior maturity in the spirituality of the Blood of Christ.

He did this in the first place by means of prayer. Don Pietro Del Frate, who was in prison with St. Gaspar for about eight months, tells us that he “had all of the hours assigned, some for prayer, some for the reading of Scripture and for the recitation of the Chaplet of the Precious Blood . . . ”⁷² On February 22, 1813, Gaspar wrote to Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi, suggesting to her a prayer of St. Francis Xavier, which had certainly also become his prayer.

The prayer that St. Francis Xavier was accustomed to recite in honor of the five wounds of Jesus Christ is the following:

Domine Jesu Christe, per quinque tua vulnera, quae tibi nostri amor in Cruce inflixit, tuis famulis subveni, quos pretioso Sanguine redemisti.

‘Lord Jesus Christ, I beg you, through the five wounds you suffered on the Cross out of love for us, help your servants whom you have redeemed at the price of your Precious Blood.’⁷³



Prison of Lugo

This loving contact with the Divine Blood in intimate prayer was strengthened and illuminated by his daily study of this great mystery. As noted above, Del Frate mentions that Gaspar applied himself to “Scripture readings.” St. Vincent Pallotti, who was later a friend and confidant of St. Gaspar, assures us that this study was precisely of the Precious Blood. During the canonical process for beatification he testified:

The Servant of God, himself, realized this divine vocation to which he was being called in the Church because of the vibrant faith which animated him. He occupied himself seriously in gaining knowledge through a study of the sacred words found in the holy books which pronounce the ineffable values of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, so that he might, with evermore growing love, be prepared to preach them more clearly and effectively to the people.⁷⁴

In addition to prayer and the study of the mystery of the Blood of Jesus, his joyful sharing in the cross of Christ out of love for the Church and of souls made the

youthful soul of Gaspar grow progressively in the mystery of the Precious Blood. We have clear testimony to this maturation in the letters that he wrote to his friends while he was in prison. For example:

Let us read more reflectively the great book of the Crucifix [*Translator's note*: the Italian *Crocifisso* can also mean 'the Crucified One.'] which is opened for all and, therein, let us learn lessons leading to eternal life, while repeating often each day as a short prayer, *Te ergo quæsumus tuis famulis subveni*, etc. 'We, therefore, beseech you help your servants, etc.' Oh how happy we would be if all people were to avail themselves of the price of our redemption! What a comfort this would be to the sweetest Heart of Jesus.⁷⁵

In his meditation on the mystery of the Blood of Christ he could not omit reflecting on the salvation of souls, for whom Jesus had poured out his Blood. Thus, St. Gaspar writes in various letters to Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi in 1813 in order to support her and "to animate her for the work . . . so advantageous for the souls redeemed with the Precious Blood of Jesus":

Oh, you souls who are still faithful to me, at least you should be interested in procuring glory for me, defending my honor, satisfying my desires. With resolve remove from the jaws of the demon the person who has been redeemed at the price of living blood; and, since you are aware of the malice of sin and the hurt it causes me, arm yourselves with holy zeal to prevent it and to remove it insofar as it is possible. I am saddened to see so many fall into ruin, for I would want them to share in my mercy and I am continuously at work, drawing them away from evil. For a single soul alone I would have

done all that I did for everyone; and from everything that I suffered, you can see the value of a single soul!⁷⁶

On the other hand, have no doubt about this . . . Jesus still loves you; and from the Cross, he says again: *Sitio*, I thirst for your soul and I seek nothing more than a sorrowful contrition, a sincere reform, an interior grieving based on true repentance. Oh soul, do you not see that I am on the cross with my arms opened out to take you in and that you can truly satisfy my burning desire for love? Do you not know that I went so far as to sweat blood in the garden solely because of the pain of seeing so many souls lost? I did not, in fact, say: Let this cup of suffering pass from me in a general meaning, but I did say: let this very bitter cup pass from me in a particular meaning in my heart, for I would that everyone be saved; I was alluding to the loss of so many souls. So, be courageous, for you have nothing to fear. Am I not that shepherd of the Gospel who went persistently in search of you; that father who arranged a great feast for the return of his wayward son; the Redeemer who even prayed for his crucifiers and promised heaven to the thief who converted? . . .

Oh what a feast there will be in heaven as you convert! Oh what joy I will feel in my heart! What a blessing will come down upon you! Is it possible that you would love sin, which is the cause of the loss of peace of conscience and makes you eligible to receive the greatest of chastisements? What more could I have done for you that I did not do, and all for your own good? Come now. Wash yourself in my Blood, for I indeed have prepared for you a splendid banquet which is the most holy sacrament of the

Eucharist and, thereafter, an eternity of joy in heaven. Everything turns out to be sweet in this world when you possess habitual grace and everything turns out to be insufferable when the soul is deprived of it.⁷⁷

Oh soul, redeemed by the Most Precious Blood of Jesus the Redeemer, at this point, lift up your thoughts and realize that this ineffable benefit and august mystery, together with the Incarnation of the Son of God, was a flaming outburst of love: *exinanivit semetipsum formam servi accipiens* 'he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant' [Phil 2: 7]. His submission to so many pains and trials was a flaming outburst of love, finally expiring in a sea of sorrows and on the infamous scaffold of Calvary. It was a flaming outburst of love to leave himself entirely in the Eucharistic banquet. It was a flaming outburst of love for him to find his delight in us miserable creatures: *deliciae meae cum filiis hominum* 'my delights were to be with the children of men' [Prv 8: 31] and that burning wish of his for our eternal salvation in the beloved homeland of heaven.

Oh soul, plunge yourself deeply into these moving thoughts and you cannot help but repeat with the Apostle: *Caritas Christi urget nos* 'the charity of Christ presses us' [2 Cor 5: 14]! It is not so much what Jesus suffered as it is the love that he demonstrated in his suffering for us that obliges us and even forces us to love him in return. Let us listen to what St. Francis de Sales says in this regard: 'Knowing that Jesus, true God, has loved us to the point of suffering death for us, even death on a cross, is this not the same as having our hearts put under a winepress and feeling its crushing force,

squeezing out love with a violence that is as gentle and loving as it is forceful?' Then he adds: 'So then why do we not cast ourselves onto Jesus Crucified, to die on the Cross with him who was willing to die out of love for us? We ought to say: I shall cling to him and I shall never abandon him; I will die with him and I shall burn in the flames of his love. One and the same flame will consume this divine Creator and his miserable creature. My Jesus gives all to me and I give my all to him. I shall live and lie on his breast; neither death nor life will ever separate me from him. Oh eternal love, my soul seeks you and chooses you for all eternity. Come, Holy Spirit, inflame our hearts with your love. To love or to die; to die to every other love so as to live in the love of Jesus. Oh Savior of our souls, allow us to chant forever: Hail to Jesus; love Jesus; hail to Jesus whom I love; I love Jesus who lives forever and ever.'

This love (says the Venerable John of Avila) is the kind that makes good souls go beyond themselves and leaves them in a state of amazement when they come to realize it. Then, a feeling of interior burning arises, a desire for martyrdom, happiness in suffering, an enjoyment of those things that the world fears, and an embracing of those things that the world abhors. St. Ambrose says that the soul that is wedded to Jesus Christ on the Cross considers nothing more glorious than to bear in itself the marks of the Crucified. Oh how, my beloved, can I repay you for your love? He deserves to have a compensation of blood for blood. See, here I am tinted with that blood and nailed to that Cross! Oh holy Cross, receive me unto thyself. Oh crown, loosen thyself so that I can place my head therein. Oh nails, release those innocent hands of my

Lord and pierce my heart with compassion and love. . . . Oh my most loving Lord, intoxicate our hearts with this wine, burn them with this flame, wound them with the arrows of your love.⁷⁸

[Souls] immerse themselves in the most tender meditation of everything that Jesus has done and suffered, reflecting on the fact that he, inasmuch as he was God, determined from all eternity his love for mankind. They fix their glance on the blessed eternity that awaits them and, submerged, shall we say, in that sea of consoling thoughts, they become marvelously ecstatic and allow themselves to be consumed by the divine fire of love.

St. Francis of Paola, viewing the Crucifix, would cry out: Oh love! Oh love! St. Francis de Sales used to say: 'With what love should we not be inflamed when we look upon the flames that burned in the breast of our Redeemer! And oh what a fortunate thing it would be for us to be able to burn with that same fire that burns in our God! What joy it would be to be united to God by the chains of love! Oh how many loving arrows issue from those wounds that strike even the hardest of hearts! Oh what flames come out from the burning heart of Jesus Christ, flames that warm the coldest of souls! Oh how many darts fly out from that pierced side which strike the most obstinate of sinners! Oh what an abyss of mystery lies in that very intense love which, like a flaming furnace, consumes the very life of the Savior! What a great act of kindness it was for us to be redeemed from servitude to the devil, to return to the possession of grace, to a claim to glory, to be children of God! However, Jesus could have

achieved that without undergoing so much suffering. I mean, without the total outpouring of his Blood. Jesus wanted to be the model for confessors and martyrs, for apostles and virgins, for hermits and contemplatives. Jesus wanted to be the universal master. Jesus wanted to nourish us with his very self; he wanted to die for us! Oh love! Oh love! Oh love! My dear Redeemer, grant that I may live only to love you. Amen.⁷⁹

These and many other expressions one encounters in his prison letters reveal a soul already grasped by Jesus, contemplated in the mystery of his Blood.

In February of 1814, Gaspar returned to Rome after four years of prison spent far from his homeland. He departed Florence with a heart full of sorrow because of the apostolic works he was leaving behind and because he was going home but would no longer find his beloved mother there. She had died while he was in exile.

He returns, however, bearing in his heart an immense treasure, acquired through the humble witness of his new spiritual director, Don Francesco Albertini, and through his generous participation in the mystery of the cross, faithfully following Christ, who was now showing him his face in the characteristic sign of his Precious Blood, shed with immense love and sorrow for the salvation of all.

Third Stage:

1814—Apostolic Missionary!

One would be tempted to think that the already heralded “Trumpet of the Divine Blood,” now so spiritually charged, free of the shackles of imprisonment and reunited with the father of his soul, Don Francesco Albertini, would begin to sound, gathering the faithful under the standard of the Blood of Christ.

This did not happen, however, because even though the fulfillment of the prophecy of Sr. Maria Agnese was

at hand, clouds of doubt were gathering in Gaspar's heart. So great were these that his old desire to leave the world and abandon himself "in a haven of faith and to hide myself in the Society of Jesus."⁸⁰ He felt himself "bound by a thousand ties" that were preventing him from making "an effective decision." He submitted himself to the will of God: "Enough; just let us pray and if it pleases the Lord, all will work out and we will adore the divine dispositions, since doing his will is what will make us saints."⁸¹ Thus he writes to the Countess Lucrezia Ginnasi on July 2, 1814.

Albertini was a great help in this matter of vocational discernment. Valentini, whom Gaspar chose as his spiritual director in 1820, writes of the resolution of the matter:

When the Servant of God returned from exile, he continued to consult with his spiritual director Monsignor Albertini who, likewise, had just returned from his period of exile. With clarity of conscience, he opened himself up wholeheartedly to him making known his own inclination to join the Company of Jesus.

That great spiritual master did not oppose his expressed desire but, reminding him of the things that had been spoken by that great Servant of God, Sister Maria Agnese of the Incarnate Word, he advised him not to pay too much attention to those words since such extraordinary things should not be the basis of governing one's life, neither of belief nor of action. Rather, basing one's life on the rules of faith and in adhering to the basic principles of action, one must move forward always in accordance with good counsel and prayer. In that way, one will discover the pure will of God and not make a mistake in regard to one's vocation upon which depends every fragment of the

mosaic of our lives, our predestination, our salvation (*da cui dipende tutta la tessera di nostra vita e di predestinazione e salute*). Completely satisfied with those fundamental principles, although still others were advanced for his well-being, the Servant of God did not cease tending toward joining the Company of Jesus. He even sought to be admitted there along with Fr. Carlo Odescalchi. However, the Lord, who had other things planned for him, as did Albertini also, though I am not able to say whether it was through the concern of Monsignor Cristaldi or through some other supernatural intervention that made the situation known, he was assured that even though he and Odescalchi had submitted their names to the aforementioned Company, they would not enter. And, as a matter of fact, around the following day, they received news by means of a short note that they had been summoned by the Supreme Pontiff Pius VII to an audience in order to assign them to mission work. The Servant of God bowed his head to this wish of the supreme authority and knew decisively from that moment on that it was the most holy will of God that he should accept the apostolic career of conducting missions.⁸²

Writing to the same Countess Ginnasi at the end of November 1814, Gaspar confides in her regarding his vocation:

In regard to the question of my joining the Jesuits, I have sought the advice of the most expert spiritual directors and the advice commonly given was that I should continue to do good work as a secular priest. But even so, let us continue to pray so that I will know how to recognize the will of God.⁸³

The papal commission to be an apostolic missionary engaged Gaspar to carry out this task in the most efficient way possible together with his companions of the Holy League, founded by Don Gaetano Bonanni on the feast of Corpus Christi in 1813. The League consisted of secular priests, called the Gospel Workers, who dedicated themselves to the popular missions while remaining in their own residences. While still in prison, Gaspar was also invited to participate in their work and he joined the group with enthusiasm, by means of a letter written from Florence on January 14, 1814, to the secretary of the Gospel Workers, Don Antonio Santelli.⁸⁴

The priests of the Holy League were preaching missions, but as it was conceived the League could not assure the stability of this ministry. Thus, Gaspar devoted himself not only to finding a stable location for the work with his companions and, above all, with Bonanni, but also to establishing a true and proper institute of secular priests living a common life and dedicated solely and permanently to the ministry of popular missions. In a letter of September 22, 1814, he writes to Bonanni “with holy liberty”:

So, let us follow once again the paths of that Providence which has already given and continues to give to our Works very manifest signs of approval . . . An Evangelical Worker for whom the way is opened to perpetuate such a praiseworthy institution, even after his death, must not abandon the undertaking to which he has committed himself, postponing it for some other goods whose stability is equally uncertain. . . . All I want is the will of the Lord.⁸⁵

Moreover, he did take the initiative. This is how Merlini describes the events:

He had the opportunity of going to Giano, in the diocese of Spoleto, with the illustrious

Monsignor Belisario Cristaldi who had the practice of taking with him each year an enthusiastic priest for preaching a short Mission in preparation for the feast of the most holy Madonna delle Grazie, celebrated in Giano on All Saints Day. In past years, Fr. Gaetano Bonanni had also taken part. There, together with Lawyer Paolucci, one of the principal landowners in Giano, they seriously discussed the new organization and it was mentioned that for such a purpose, most serviceable would be the church and monastery of San Felice, bishop and martyr, which had recently been surrendered and formally renounced by the Passionist Fathers.⁸⁶

When he returned to Rome, he spoke of this with Bonanni and his companions. Cristaldi pressed him to present the request for the convent and church of San Felice di Giano in the most reasonable way possible and on November 30, 1814, the rescript of Pius VII granting the request was ready.⁸⁷

In addition to concerning himself with bringing the foundation of the work to completion, along with Albertini and Cristaldi he saw to it that the foundation would have the name of the Divine Blood, as we will see in chapter four.

In December 1814, the Apostle of the Divine Blood made an auspicious beginning for this ministry of his with a mission at San Nicola in Carcere, the birthplace of the devotion destined to be spread throughout the world.⁸⁸

The prediction of Sr. Maria Agnese of the Incarnate Word was gradually being realized. Gaspar was also becoming more aware of the truth of the prophecy, with the result that he no longer had doubts about the plan. Thus, in 1825 he would write to Leo XII that his Institute was

. . . conceived during the time of exile, wonderfully developed immediately after the exile with

great advantage to souls, and, at the same time, to the anger of the devil who has never ceased nor does he now cease from waging a special war against this very expression: 'Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.'⁸⁹

Moreover, the testimonies given in the processes prior to Gaspar's beatification pass on to us this firm conviction.⁹⁰

After St. Gaspar founded the Congregation at San Felice in Giano on August 15, 1815, he continued to work with Albertini to expand the Confraternity and to enrich it with spiritual favors. A brief obtained from Pius VII on September 22, 1815, gave the Confraternity various indulgences. With another brief of September 26 it was elevated to the title of Archconfraternity.⁹¹

Shortly afterward Gaspar sought to have a plenary indulgence attached to the recitation of the chaplet for an entire month and for other indulgences for prayers to the Precious Blood, which was granted on October 18, 1815 by Pius VII.⁹²

Now Gaspar's soul has championed the cause of the Blood of Jesus and he will live single-mindedly for it.

The Fourth Stage:

1817—First Promoter and Missionary of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood

From this point on it seems impossible to be able to record, with specific dates, other movements of Gaspar's spirit toward the devotion to the Precious Blood. One must understand that he would continue to grow in this devotion until his death. How might one follow the intimate and intense activity that the Holy Spirit was unfolding within him? It is impossible for us, who understand his soul only through facts and testimony of those who knew him. Nevertheless we will attempt to do this in the following paragraphs.

We must take a final step, which permits us to contemplate the figure of Gaspar rising like a lone giant

within the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, accomplishing the third part of the prediction of Sr. Maria Agnese: "He will be *the Trumpet* of the Divine Blood," not just a trumpet, for he will be *the Apostle* of the Precious Blood, and not just an apostle.

We now come to 1817, the fifth stage we have determined in the mystical spiritual journey of our Apostle of the Blood of Christ. Gaspar continued to spread the devotion through the ten missions he preached this year and in June he preached the "Great Month" of the Precious Blood in San Nicola in Carcere,⁹³ a practice he had initiated in 1815, in the same church, in imitation of the Marian month.⁹⁴

I single out this year mainly because it was then that those responsible for the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood recognized Gaspar as having a special excellence in his devotion to the Precious Blood. Here is how the events unfolded.

One must remember that Albertini founded the Pious Union of the Precious Blood as an association of the laity. Then, in his desire to assure the spread of the devotion to the Precious Blood, especially by means of the preaching of popular missions, he enlarged the project, instituting as an integral part of the lay association the group of Missionaries of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. Secular priests, as well as religious and bishops, were able to join. The first to join this group in 1817, following the suggestion of Albertini, was St. Gaspar,⁹⁵ and after him his missionary companions joined.⁹⁶ These "were confirmed in the Constitutions of the Archconfraternity and declared as the principal brothers and propagators of the devotion of the Precious Blood."⁹⁷

Now that Gaspar had become a member, it was hardly a surprise that, at a meeting of the officers of the Archconfraternity held on December 27, 1817, he would be elected general director of the missions of the

Archconfraternity as well as “First Promoter and Missionary of the Precious Blood.”

The following day the secretary of the Archconfraternity, Sig. Pietro Zucchetti, communicated the news with these words:

Since your most reverend lordship has been elected by a significant number of votes as the First Promoter and Missionary for stirring up (*eccitare*) devotion to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, the primary title of our Archconfraternity erected at the altar of the most holy Crucifix in the basilica of San Nicola in Carcere, the undersigned secretary, in carrying out the directions of our Congregation, hereby informs you of the decision made last night and has the honor of kissing your hands.⁹⁸

The choice could not have fallen to a person more worthy or more prepared. In this event, we see the point of convergence of the divine plan with human collaboration. Gaspar, from this moment, is the Apostle of the Precious Blood, not just out of a personal impetus, but also by means of an obligation received and accepted. In order to carry out this commitment with greater merit, he makes a vow to spread the devotion to the Divine Blood to the point of sacrifice.⁹⁹

This vow marks the highest summit Gaspar reached in his formative journey to becoming the Apostle of the Blood of Christ—and acknowledgment of this role on the part of others. His future life would be an uninterrupted implementation of this vow until his death on December 28, 1837.

Chapter Three

Devoted to a New Mission

“Trust in the Divine Blood! All of us together must dedicate our hearts, our zeal to this devotion.”¹ This encouragement addressed to Missionary Don Carlo Gazola could be the call to action of Gaspar’s apostolate of spreading the devotion to the Precious Blood.²

Zeal and Joy in Spreading the Devotion

How deeply interested I am in this devotion. I must confess what lies within me with all my limitations, namely, that I shall put myself out completely for this very great work! This is the price of our Redemption, this is the reason for my confidence in being saved; to this devotion, I wish to consecrate my life; for this am I a priest, to apply the Divine Blood.³

The . . . devotion to the Most Precious Blood (which ‘called forth delight from his heart’⁴) continuously nourished Gaspar’s love for God and served as a very powerful stimulus for him to love in return the one who had done so much and suffered so much for us, and thus he often

repeated these words: 'The love of Christ compels us' [2 Cor 5: 14].⁵

The devotion also nurtured and stimulated his apostolic zeal, because it spoke to him of the Redeemer's thirst for souls and because divine blessings were attached to it.

In Gaspar's day, a period of a profound moral poverty, the devotion was "the weapon"⁶ for combating the demon; it was the "truce"⁷ granted by divine mercy before calling into action punitive justice.

Aware of this mission entrusted by God to the devotion to the Precious Blood, Gaspar gave himself body and soul to spreading it among the faithful. Among the various "objects of the glory of the Lord," this was for him "primary."⁸

He sought to communicate the ardor of his heart with others: "let us promote the devotion to the Divine Blood;"⁹ "be tireless in promoting and spreading our devotion to the Divine Blood;"¹⁰ "do not cease propagating the great devotion to the Divine Blood."¹¹ Phrases like this are continual refrains in practically all of his letters.

A variety of circumstances offered him the chance to instill his beloved devotion and he was quick to use an opportunity. He writes to Camillo Possenti of Fabriano, who was very helpful to him in his ministry and in other ways: "Oh how devoted to the Divine Blood was S. Camillus."¹² "You, who bear the name of a saint who was so devoted to the Divine Blood—St. Camillus—must be the definite promoter of this work, overcoming any and all obstacles that Lucifer might offer . . ."¹³

To a religious inquiring about the choice of a name, Gaspar suggested "Maria Saveria del Preziosissimo Sangue,"¹⁴ a name that offered a striking synthesis of the fundamental lines of his spirituality: the Precious Blood, the Blessed Virgin, and St. Francis Xavier.

When he hears of progress in the devotion among the faithful, he is very pleased. Thus he writes to



Cardinal Belisario Cristaldi

Vincenzo Adriani of Perugia: “I note from your most appreciated letter the propagation there of the greatly important devotion of the Divine Blood. May praise be given to the Lord, and may you, in particular, be granted endless blessings. I assure you, I could not have received more consoling news.”¹⁵ To strengthen him in fulfilling his ministry, he tells him that “the Holy Father has shown a special sign of approval for the propagation of this very great devotion.”¹⁶

Missionary Don Giovanni Battista Pedini, an eyewitness, assures us in the canonical processes that Gaspar was also interested in the spread of the devotion outside of Italy. When he became aware that others on their own initiative were spreading the devotion, he could not keep his joy to himself. “His Eminence Giustiniani has propagated our most important devotion in Spain,”¹⁷ he writes to Cristaldi on July 31, 1827, with the happiness of a child who has received the gift he longed for.

Amid the often unbearable sufferings and calumnies he endured in the course of his ministry, the awareness that he was following the will of God and the news about the progress of his beloved devotion were his strength and consolation.

Preaching on the Devotion

“I would like to have a thousand tongues to soften every heart to the Precious Blood of Jesus.”¹⁸

The breadth of this desire is evidenced by the continuous use that Gaspar makes of the ministry of the word for spreading the devotion to the Precious Blood. Canon Adriano Maria Tarulli noted that “he was so on fire and he spoke of it constantly, from the stage, [the platform used in preaching missions] in private and in public.”¹⁹

His letters often begin and end with references to the Precious Blood: “*Christus dilexit nos et lavit nos in Sanguine suo!*” ‘Christ loved us and washed us in his Blood!’ [Rv 1: 5]; “*Viva il Sanguine di Gesù Cristo!*” ‘Long live the Blood of Jesus Christ!’ “Long live the Blood of Jesus Christ”: these are the first words that he writes to the recipient of a letter. The closing is a wish in the Precious Blood: “I wish you all every blessing, through the merits of the Blood of Jesus Christ”;²⁰ “while awaiting a prompt reply from you, believe me to be, in Jesus Christ *qui suo nos redemit Sanguine . . .*” ‘who has redeemed us in his Blood’;²¹ “*sum tuus ex corde in Corde Jesu Christi Crucifixi qui suo nos redemit Sanguine* ‘I am yours from the heart in the Heart of Jesus Christ crucified who redeemed us in his Blood.’”²²

“There was never a mission during which he would not preach on the passion, and sometimes he would insert a sermon on the Blood shed by our Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes, on the other hand, he preached on the Blood shed on another day.”²³ In the *Method for the Missions* Gaspar had prescribed: “One must give . . .

never omit . . . the preaching on the passion and the Most Precious Blood.”²⁴

Preaching on the Precious Blood was accomplished quite movingly and solemnly on the arrival of the coffin of the dead Christ, taken down from the cross. The coffin, covered with red damask and adorned with flowers, was carried by the priests vested in red tunics.

With this touching exercise, animated further by the visit of the Sorrowful Mother . . . the people are moved to kiss in spirit the sacred Wounds, those sources and wellsprings of eternal life, to remember tenderly the sorrows of Mary, and to find peace and healing in such noble and delightful (*grati*) objects.²⁵

While he was singing the glories of the price of our redemption, “there flowed from him such energy and a force that one could call supernatural and superior to physical forces.”²⁶ With fervent words of love, which reminded each person of the infinite love of Jesus,

he would so penetrate the heart of the one who was listening, that one would see souls who had been cold and frozen in the love of God, change completely, until they became the most outstanding sacrifices,²⁷

or else they would break into continuous weeping, as happened in Albano in 1830, during the devotion of the seven bloodsheddings.²⁸

In addition, there was a special exterior posture in such preaching:

he never sat down and only preached standing up . . .; he would preach the seven bloodsheddings on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament with such fervor and zeal that he was like a seraph of love . . .²⁹

Gaspar spoke of the Precious Blood not only in such specific preaching, but in nearly every discourse or meditation he would offer some appropriate thought on his favorite topic.

Don Ferdinando Angelici, abbot of Matelica, had this to say about Gaspar's preaching:

When he gave the spiritual exercises, in all the conferences (never fewer than eighteen) he would offer a sublime and tender thought about his *favorite topic*, but he always gave an appropriate conference . . . He said such sublime and beautiful things, that he resembled one of those elders who stand in heaven around the throne of the Lamb singing *Redemisti*.³⁰

Canon Antonio Santelli, contemporary and friend of St. Gaspar, confirms that this was his habitual practice: "In nearly every conversation with me he spoke about this devotion as the devotion of the time and that this devotion will save us from the punishment for our sins that God was about to visit upon us."³¹

The preaching that was most dear to his heart was the *Gran Mese* 'Great Month,' at that time celebrated in the month of June, in preparation for the feast of the Most Precious Blood. The great poet of the Blood, during an entire month, in mobilizing all of his interior resources, would enrich himself and others with the new strength of love for the Divine Blood. For this reason he would speak of the "extreme consolation of the month of preparation for the great feast" and would spread the practice everywhere. Among many letters, one excerpt of a letter to Signora Emidia Santucci of Matelica reveals those sentiments of his to us:

I do give thanks to God for the zeal that I note in your efforts, especially in promoting the glories of the Divine Blood. You can be certain that this will be for you the source of every blessing!

Furthermore, I am exceedingly consoled by your making preparations for our great feast, and I hope that this year you will attempt to propagate it everywhere, along with the yearly recitation of the Chaplet. Expressing our love for Jesus is never sufficiently said. So, if you should have need of some booklets in order that our month will be observed in other parishes, I shall be as helpful as I possibly can. Despite the many, many devotions used to show glory to the Lord, I can say that this one is, for me, primary. From this you can see that I would not only wish to be there, but I would even rush to preach our month there.³²

How very happy he was to speak always of the Blood of Jesus “and always with new and loving topics,”³³ extremely well prepared for this through study and meditation. He wished that others, especially his Missionaries, would have the same zeal and the same preparation.

“Hold nothing back with regard to the devotion to the Precious Blood”³⁴ he wrote to Don Angelo Primavera, inviting him to preach the month of June.

If someone would try to fend off his requests with the excuse that the Blood of Jesus was sterile material for an entire month, Gaspar, flushed in the face (*acceso nel volto*), would correct him immediately. Don Domenico Silvestri was witness to one such occasion that happened with one of the Missionaries. “So the month of the Divine Blood is sterile material!” Gaspar replied and then

he spoke for more than a half hour, running through many texts of scripture, of the Fathers, of examples, of illustrations . . . presenting material ample enough to make not just one but a hundred or a thousand months on the topic of the glories of the Most Precious Blood.

Coming back to the present, he added:

Let them say no more . . . that speaking of the Blood of Christ is sterile material; from all of the sacred books, in every page one finds material abundant enough to preach the glories of the Divine Blood forever.³⁵

Nevertheless, recognizing humbly that the Lord supplied him “with such beautiful ideas” on the Most Precious Blood, he sought to form his Missionaries for this special preaching and often helped them, sending them outlines for preaching, as he did for Don Michele Palombi and Don Luigi Mosconi. Urging on Don Mattia Cardillo to prepare the sermons for the month of the Most Precious Blood, he promised him “some outlines.”³⁶ He did the same for many others.

He gave this advice to Don Pasquale Virgili, a Missionary living in Vallecorsa, when he asked him to go to preach the month of the Most Precious Blood in Frosinone: “By following the book for the Month and by preparing yourself with a thought developed with a narration of an example, the task will be manageable.”³⁷

Where the spoken word could not come to inflame the hearts toward the Blood of Christ, the written word was necessary.

Even though Gaspar did not publish anything or write very much on the Divine Blood, nevertheless he did his best and advised others to publish works on this material.

Such is the case of St. Vinenzo Maria Strambi,³⁸ who published *Il mese santificato con divote considerazioni ed affetti sopra il Sangue Preziosissimo di Gesù Cristo, per infiammare i cuori dei fedeli all'amore del nostro Divin Redentore* “The month made holy with devout considerations and affections of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, to inflame the hearts of the faithful to the love of our Divine Redeemer.” This was the title of the first edition printed in Fabriano in 1820.³⁹ Gaspar used

this little treasure of a book a great deal in his preaching, often taking thoughts and examples from it. He promoted it widely and was very happy to see it reprinted several times and in 1829 he prepared an edition at the expense of the Institute.

Gaspar took note of the great gifts of Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi as an author of spiritual treatises and, in a letter of January 24, 1823, while Bentivoglio was in Frosinone, he asked her to write a little work of monthly meditations on the Most Precious Blood of Jesus:

Even if we will soon see one another there, where I hope to do much good, even so it is worthwhile to start before then in order to encourage you to begin writing a little work of monthly devotional meditations on the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. The title will be 'The Soul, Adorer of the Mystery of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.' Always write after Communion, especially on Fridays . . . This little work will also help those who make the Hour of the Most Precious Blood.⁴⁰

Canon Niccola Palma di Teramo, urged on by our saint, wrote a pamphlet entitled: *L'anima invitata alla contemplazione dei misteri del Sangue di N.S. G. C. in 31 meditazioni* 'The Soul Invited to Contemplation of the Mysteries of the Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ in 31 Meditations' (Aquila 1830), dedicating it to Gaspar, who wished that it would be dedicated to the King of Naples.⁴¹

To Don Ferdinando Angelici, who had vowed "to write a little work pertaining to the devotion . . .," Gaspar suggested to call it either *Selva Predicabile sulla divozione del Divin Sangue* 'A Collection of Preaching Material on the Devotion of the Divine Blood' in imitation of St. Alphonsus Liguori,^a or else *La divozione del*

^a*Translator's note:* The title of the work of St. Alphonsus is: *Selva di materie predicabili ed istruttive per dare gli esercizi a'*

Divin Sangue riformatrice dell'uomo 'The Devotion of the Divine Blood, Reformer of Humankind.' He adds:

Just what decision you should make in this regard I am not able to say: either option is laudable. Through prayer, God will enlighten you to make your decision. I advise only that in assuming the second title, it would be necessary for you to hold to the idea of discourses or meditations; and, in both cases, you might include a colloquium intended to stimulate one's affections.⁴²

Already he had counseled him:

. . . why do you not work it out with some printer, for example the one in Fabriano, to bring out as a devotional book the one that you have prepared to the glory of the Divine Blood, a devotion that must always afford the greatest delight to your heart?⁴³

In addition to these worthwhile written works, Gaspar wanted to make known the beauty of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood by means of the works of the Fathers of the Church, but he had to take into account the scarce resources of his Institute. He laments this fact to Leo XII:

. . . would that we were given the means of reproducing, through the public press, the glories of this inestimable treasure of our souls, along with the noble compositions of the Fathers of the Church for the understanding of the sacred text; and especially so, since, in our

preti ed anche per uso di lezione privata a proprio profitto 'A Collection of material for preaching and instruction for giving the [spiritual] exercises for priests and also for private reading for individual profit' that was published in 1760.

days, generally speaking, this is not sufficiently known.

Gaspar always shows himself to be confident, adding “. . . the Lord will reproduce [these compositions] in human memory.”⁴⁴

Meditation on the Divine Blood

The spoken or written word that illuminated the mind with the values of the Divine Blood had as its aim stimulating in the hearts of the faithful a loving response to the love of Jesus. This happened primarily in meditation, by means of which truths already known become the substantial food of the soul, the vital force of the apostolate.

Accustomed to regular meditation since his youth, Gaspar did not stop this practice as an adult. He recommended it to others, instructing them in practicing it. Bartolomeo Panzini, the servant who accompanied Gaspar on the missions for many years (1821–1837), testified that in his apostolic journeys Gaspar and his companions would meditate every day for a good half hour on the

passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and especially on the prayer in the garden or on the scourging or some other sorrowful mystery. He would meditate on these mysteries with pleasure and in calling to mind the Blood shed by our Lord Jesus Christ he would be encouraged (*si animava*) ever more in the hope of obtaining eternal life and the means to achieve it by the merits of this Blood.⁴⁵

To his Missionaries

during Holy Week he used to say . . . almost in ecstasy that in the office of that week there were so many beautiful things related to the

passion and to the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ that could be the basis of many sermons.⁴⁶

He would recommend the *Storia della Passione di Gesù Cristo* by the Jesuit Fr. Giovanni Francesco Durazzo and he himself had it reprinted, saying that “it is a precious work for the preachers of our devotion and for everyone.”⁴⁷

The maturation of the devotion to the Divine Blood in his soul had led him to make this mystery evident in his daily meditation. We have recalled above the witness of his servant Bartolomeo Panzini. Another brother, Filippo Fausti, offers us another witness to the meditation of St. Gaspar in Rome, in his apartment in the Teatro Marcello, at night between Thursday and Friday:

His devotion to the Most Precious Blood was quite striking . . . and I recall that in Rome, while I was sleeping next to the wall of his room, on Fridays, at night, I would hear him awoken about three or four hours before dawn, and then I believed that he had begun to meditate, because after getting out of bed, I did not hear him moving about and, when daybreak came, I knocked on his door and we went together to the Church of San Nicola in Carcere.⁴⁸

This continuing contact with the Blood of Jesus was for St. Gaspar

. . . a continuing nourishment by the love of God which strongly moved him to return the love of the one who had done so much and suffered so much for us. For this reason he would often repeat these words: ‘*Charitas Christi urget nos*’ ‘the love of Christ presses us’ [2 Cor 5: 14].⁴⁹

When he would consider the mystery of the Most Precious Blood shed by our Lord, he

seemed to be completely elevated mentally to God and it was as if he was ecstatic in contemplation. This succeeded in edifying us greatly, even though he tried to hide and to cover up his activity.⁵⁰

Even during the day the contact with the Divine Blood was continuous, because “it was his practice to repeat *very often* one of his ejaculations, in which the Blood of Jesus Christ is offered to the Eternal Father,”⁵¹ or the *Te ergo quaesumus*, an invocation that he would recommend that others say often as well.⁵²

The most beautiful meditations on the Most Precious Blood, other than before the tabernacle, would be made at the foot of the crucifix. For Gaspar this was a living book in which he could rediscover the sad account of the sheddings of the Blood and all the sentiments that moved Jesus to offer his life. From the Crucified One he would see flowing immense benefits for all of humankind.

Oh what a great book for us is the Cross! It is a summarization of the apologetics of our faith, a practical knowledge for our moral life, and the most tender lessons of love that the Lord has shown.⁵³

Let us encourage each other evermore toward the pursuit of perfection and let us not cease studying the great book of the Crucifix [or ‘Crucified One’]. From that book, we learn profound humility, indomitable patience and gentle, industrious charity so that we are able to attract souls to his love.⁵⁴

Kneeling before the crucifix, “the mystical stairway to heaven, seat of truth, tree of life,”⁵⁵ he would pass the most precious moments of recollection and of comfort.

At those unfortunately frequent times when the cross pressed more heavily on his shoulders, he liked “to

occupy the time in penitential union with [his] Crucified Lord.”⁵⁶

He would make his preparation for Mass and for preaching in his room, “kneeling before the Crucifix and immobile.”⁵⁷ His faithful servant Bartolomeo Panzini, who, as we know, was at his side for the greater part of his missionary life, often found him in a similar posture, “as if ecstatic,” in such a state that Gaspar would not hear him come in, but had to be shaken.⁵⁸

The explanation for such an attraction to the cross is that in it our saint found sustenance for the devotion to the Most Precious Blood: “From this book, every soul is encouraged to promote evermore the most important devotion to the Divine Blood . . .”⁵⁹ It is for this reason that he wanted the crucifix as the distinct, “inseparable companion and witness of [his] actions”⁶⁰ and those of his Missionaries. Thus the goal of his apostolate was to “inspire in all the love of the Crucified Lord,”⁶¹ carrying “everyone to the foot of the Cross and making all living images of the Crucified One.”⁶²

Promoting the Devotion

“God has wanted me out in the field to propagate the great devotion to the Divine Blood.”⁶³ Gaspar was quite clear about his mission. To carry this out he must use mind, heart, body, and goods: his mind for “pondering the mysteries of love ” of the Blood of Jesus; “[his] heart to love its application”; his body “to present its triumphs”⁶⁴ in ongoing ministries; his goods for the means of spreading it.

Indeed, even his already slender purse was emptied in service of the devotion. He himself confirms this many times: “I must confess what lies within me with all my limitations, namely, that I shall put myself out completely for this very great work!”⁶⁵ In order to help the faithful in their devotion, he had pamphlets of prayers to the Most Precious Blood printed and distributed, containing, for example, the chaplet and the Seven

Offerings, entrusting these to the care of the most zealous.

With regard to the Seven Offerings which are presently being printed, I am leaving them *all* with you so that you can distribute them, wherever possible, for public and private recitation, and especially anywhere that we have conducted our Missions. In that way, you are working together with us in making permanent the holy fruits of the divine word.⁶⁶

We encounter similar quotations frequently in his letters.

Particularly in those places where his inspiring preaching would not be heard, this was the ordinary means of spreading the devotion. It was a method that he had found efficacious during the time of his deportation with Albertini.⁶⁷ Thus he writes to Don Anacleto Gigliucci in Ancona on October 21, 1819:

To propagate this devotion in proper fashion, it is necessary first to introduce the recitation of the Chaplet, or at least the Offerings. Later, you must find priests who wish to become aggregators . . .⁶⁸

If he found a person ready to give him a little help, he was not ashamed to press him or her a bit, because “pamphlets should fall like snowflakes everywhere.” Cardinal Giacomo Filippo Fransoni gives us his beautiful testimony in relating his personal experience:

I remember that he had a great zeal for spreading the devotion to the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he pressed me to join in spreading the devotion. To this end he used to distribute the pamphlets in which were printed the Offerings of the Most Precious Blood of the Divine Son to the Eternal Father for the

sake of sinners. He encouraged me further to purchase some copies, saying that he wished that these pamphlets would fall like snowflakes everywhere, because he judged this devotion to be very useful . . .⁶⁹

The second step in the orderly propagation of the devotion consisted, as already noted above, in finding “priest aggregators,” that is priests whose duty it was to inscribe the faithful in the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood, because they could participate in the spiritual favors which Gaspar was gradually obtaining. Gaspar sent many reports (*pagelle*) so that they could put together an accurate list to send to Rome. He did not withhold praise from the most zealous: “Joyfully did I note the concern you have shown in increasing the number of the adorers of the Divine Blood. Oh how many blessings you will receive from the Lord!”⁷⁰

The search for priests to spread the devotion, something simple and at the same time sublime, takes up several pages of “*fioretti*” ‘stories or tales.’ The search grew out of unforeseen circumstances, which Gaspar knew how to use effectively.

One day he found himself with Don Beniamino Romani at the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, waiting to be received by the secretary. Romani recounts that as Gaspar’s turn for an audience came, he saw

. . . a priest dressed in oriental style, with a long beard. Instead of passing the priest, Gaspar quickly and anxiously approached him asking if perhaps he would be leaving for the foreign missions, and if he were acquainted with the devotion to the Most Precious Blood and other things which I would not be able to say and which I did not understand, as he accompanied him to the stairway.⁷¹

Another time he had gone to visit his uncle Don Eugenio Pechi, at the monastery of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, together with the missionary Don Antonio Lipparelli. When he found out that one of the Cistercian monks had to leave for the foreign missions, “he recommended to him the devotion to the Most Precious Blood and provided him with Chaplets and the faculties pertaining to this devotion.”⁷²

A Multitude of Adorers

Gaspar obtained the most abundant harvest of devotees of the Most Precious Blood by means of the missions, because it was precisely in that milieu that he had a way of expanding the devotion to the Divine Blood.⁷³ Among all the means of spreading the devotion, this was the most effective.

We have already made note of the preaching on the Most Precious Blood and of the “triumphal procession”; we recall the morning Mass of the Chaplet, prayers, hymns in honor of the Blood of Jesus, and invitations (*richiami*) of various kinds: a true planting of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood.

Every sower looks to a fruitful and stable harvest and thus it was with Gaspar. On the missions “he would aggregate to the Archconfraternity (of the Most Precious Blood) the organizations (*compagnie*) that already existed, making a precise note of this to the President . . . in Rome.”⁷⁴ He founded local pious unions to keep alive the devotion of the Precious Blood and he instituted a solid network of associations called “*ristretti*,” whose members were given guidance on gaining personal holiness and helping others to the same through the spirituality of the Divine Blood; they were to be the adorers and apostles of this Blood. No category of persons could escape his apostolic zeal.

The most important association was the *Ristretto degli Apostoli*, made up of the most fervent and pious priests of the place. These had the principal obligation of

“seeing to it that the fruit . . . gathered [from the missions would be] stable and permanent.”⁷⁵ He recommended the effectiveness of these associations in his letters:

The main reason for this letter is to beg you urgently to revive the Association of the Apostles upon which depends the immediate renewal of the other pious organizations.⁷⁶

They, in fact, were to be vigilant in seeing that every association observed its proper statutes and carried out its religious practices, “but especially meditation and the recitation at the end of the Seven Offerings of the Most Precious Blood.”⁷⁷

Gaspar made use of them for “promoting the devotion to the Divine Blood and the public recitation of the Chaplet.”⁷⁸

The spiritual life of the “Apostles” was to be modeled on the teaching that came from the Divine Blood, drawing from it the zeal, constancy, and patience for the sanctification of souls.

Do not regret suffering for the sake of souls and precious are the words of the Apostle: ‘I am overjoyed in all our affliction’ (2 Cor 7: 4); ‘I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off . . . for the sake of my own people’ (Rom 9: 3). Let our whole life be used for the love of that God who loves us so much, that he sent a Redeemer and victim of love for us: ‘who loves us and washes us in his blood’ (Rv 1: 5). See how we will apply effectively this healing balm of the Blood of the Savior, repeating with the Apostle: ‘I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions’ (Col 1: 24). Let us always withdraw in spirit into the Holy Wounds of Jesus Christ Our Lord, and there may we find our rest and our peace.⁷⁹

The Congregazione del Ceto Primario dell'uno e dell'altro sesso 'The Congregation of the Upper Class of the one and the other sex' (or *dei Signori e delle Signore* 'of the gentlemen and ladies,' as written in the *Regolamenti* printed in 1819) had as its principal object "visiting Hospitals according to gender."⁸⁰ The members, on the first or on the fourth Fridays of each month, would gather together, men and women separately, "in holy recollection of spirit" in order to "gain the knowledge of the Crucified One."⁸¹ The recitation of the chaplet and the obligation to

. . . promote the devotion of the Most Precious Blood, in order that souls might know at what great price they are redeemed, and animate the rest of the people, with their example they will indeed enable the faithful to apply the merits of the Savior to their spiritual advantage.⁸²

The *evening oratory* for men was modeled on the oratory Fr. Caravita⁸³ instituted in Rome. Gaspar attached great importance to this, because he knew of its benefits through his experience in the oratory of Santa Maria in Vincis as a young priest. In fact, he writes:

One cannot express in words how useful the Holy Oratory is. It saves so many from occasions of sin and useless entertainments; it provides a place for confessions for many men, who would not be able to confess during the day or who had been ashamed to confess. In the quiet and silence, O, how much is the holy name of our Lord God glorified and to honor that name how tireless must be the hardworking charity of the Gospel Ministers.⁸⁴

Opposition to such a good work meant great suffering for him. In the matter of the oratory of Teramo, erected during the mission of 1822 and then suppressed by Bishop Giuseppe Maria Pezzella, Gaspar expressed

his sorrow thus: "I instituted the Oratory, that is quite true, but I did so with the approval of both authorities. I heard of its suppression, and in the presence of God I wept because of it; I have not ceased praying."⁸⁵

The spiritual formation of those who participated in the oratory was centered on the mystery of redemption.

The crucifix was the standard of the association, and with it they would visit the most frequented places of the town or city to call the men. In the oratory, Gaspar had decreed, the crucifix "will always be outside the presbyterium and positioned in such a way as to be easily kissed by the brethren."⁸⁶

The practices of piety during the week were the Way of the Cross (Monday), the Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows of Mary Most Holy (Wednesday), and the Chaplet of the Most Precious Blood (Friday). One could not skip Eucharistic devotion (Thursday) and Marian devotion (Saturday). Meditation on the eternal maxims (*Je m'assime eterne*) (Tuesday) and a moral discourse (Sunday) served to remind everyone of the fundamentals of Christianity.

There, by means of confession, men had the opportunity "to apply the Blood of Jesus Christ to themselves."⁸⁷

Thus, removed from occasions of sin and kept to the practice and awareness of the good, they were roused to an intense Christian life, to find fulfillment "especially [by means of] devotion to the Most Precious Blood,"⁸⁸ to which all things had to be attributed.

"Let the devotion to the Most Precious Blood be inculcated,"⁸⁹ he had recommended to the *Ristretto dell' Immacolata Concezione di Maria Santissima e di S. Luigi Gonzaga* 'The Ristretto of the Immaculate Conception of Mary Most Holy and of St. Aloysius Gonzaga,' an association which gathered young men of various ages, and to the association of the *Figlie di Maria* 'Daughters of Mary,' which was for the young women. He wanted to bring the eagerness of youthful

hearts, so capable of an extraordinary power of love, into contact with the Blood of Jesus.

Three other *ristretti* merit a mention: the *Fratelli di S. Francesco Saverio* ‘Brothers of St. Francis Xavier,’ dedicated (*ascritti*) to the devotion of the Most Precious Blood, the *Sorelle della carità del Preziosissimo Sangue* ‘Sisters of Charity of the Most Precious Blood’ and the *Congregazione dei Contadini* ‘Association (or Congregation) of Farm Workers.’ We gather the respective regulations from the edition printed in Fabriano by Crocetti in 1836.

The *Ristretto di S. Francesco Saverio* was “made up of a certain number of Brothers already dedicated to the devotion of the Most Precious Blood.”⁹⁰

Besides “applying themselves in a special way to the cultivation of a proper spirit,”⁹¹ they were “considered to be apostles devoted to sanctify their neighbors in those matters that concern them,”⁹² and more than just that of a “simple Brother of the Oratory.”⁹³ In fact, one of their main tasks was to help the missionaries or secular priests in “promoting the Evening Oratory every evening”⁹⁴ in the places where it had been established.

Gaspar wanted them to have a marked devotion to the Divine Blood. Their unique uniform drew attention to this commitment: a bag, a black pilgrim’s staff, and the coat of arms of St. Francis Xavier trimmed in red. They also had a red sash “which held up the Crucifix hanging from the neck . . . and the Crown of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ on the side . . .”⁹⁵

The practices of piety that they were to carry out in the course of the day, beyond those that took place in the oratory in the evening were varied, although without a special burden of conscience, among which were the “seven *Gloria Patri* in memory of the principal sheddings of the Most Precious Blood,”⁹⁶ the examination of conscience, meditation and, possibly, the Mass.

Then, of course, the usual advice: their director “will particularly exhort everyone to have a tender devotion to

the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, price of our Redemption.”⁹⁷

The *Ristretto delle Sorelle della carità*, was made up of “widows and married women of the higher class, and also of the second class, if it should be thought expedient,”⁹⁸ whose purpose was to perform the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, especially among the sick. Beyond performing the same practices of piety as the *Fratelli di S. Francesco Saverio*, they were tasked with promoting the “Chaplet of the Most Precious Blood and the practice of the Month of June, in order that devotion to the Price of our salvation be ever increased,”⁹⁹ as well as to celebrate most solemnly the Feast of the Most Precious Blood.

The *Short Rules (Brevi Regolamenti)* printed in Rieti in 1823¹⁰⁰ prescribe that the *Sorelle* had “to be most dedicated . . . in promoting the tender devotion to the Most Precious Blood shed for our Salvation”¹⁰¹ and to “the public recitation of the Chaplet . . . on Fridays and feasts, but it would be desirable if they could promote it to be said every day at the time of the Mass.”¹⁰² Every sister had to take “the Hour of Prayer during the year in order to adore the mysteries of our Redemption.”¹⁰³

The *Association of Farm Workers* was especially interesting. It was instituted for the first time at San Felice in Giano in order to assist in spirit “those who tire themselves in the cultivation of the fields, and who are subjected to extraordinary trials.”¹⁰⁴ It is interesting, not for the usual practices of piety in honor of the Most Precious Blood and the inscription in the Pious Union, but for the method of the spiritual life that is suggested for the farm workers during the course of the day. In describing the method there is a point that we could describe as the “living Chaplet.”

As they walk in the direction of the place of work, they should think of the journey Jesus, drenched in blood, made to Calvary, carrying

the Cross on his shoulders. They will become accustomed to deriving sentiments of the spirit from everything. For example, if they see thorns in the countryside, they will think of Jesus crowned with thorns . . .¹⁰⁵

Their entire life of work in the fields had to be for them a call to the mystery of salvation: "When one meets a shepherd guiding his flock, one calls to mind Jesus, shepherd of our souls, and we his sheep; when cultivating the earth, one reflects that the soul will not produce fruit unless it is cultivated."¹⁰⁶

Thus those simple folk were aided to carry out their daily tasks in a supernatural way, by means of continuous prayer. One was not to undervalue this method of life, as Gaspar goes on to say:

The Director insists in explaining so many things and making their practice easier, each one grateful to have had Jesus himself use such parables or similitudes, to aid in the understanding of holy things.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

The few pages of this chapter embrace the activity of about twenty years of the apostolate of St. Gaspar. We have not made reference to everything that he did or wrote on behalf of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood. This material by itself would fill a large volume; we have only presented a panoramic view of his apostolate, which would permit us to make some judgment about the way in which he fulfilled his consecration to the Divine Blood.

Gaspar appeared as a fire of love for the Most Precious Blood of Jesus, completely intent on kindling a great blaze of that love in the Church for the benefit of souls and for the praise, honor, glory, and power of Him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb that was slain (cf. Rv 5: 13).

Chapter Four

The New Congregation

Gaspar would have stood out in the history of the devotion to the Most Precious Blood even if his apostolic activity had ended with his death. His special place in this history would be more than merited by his pioneering work in awakening and promoting the devotion in the universal Church, by organizing practices of piety devoted to the Precious Blood, and by making the devotion accessible to all the faithful by means of instituting various associations.

All of these accomplishments acquire a new glory and strength when one considers that Gaspar, according to the documents which marked the journey toward his canonization, founded two religious families with the aim of making his apostolate for the glory of the Blood of Jesus permanent in the Church. He wanted a Congregation of Missionaries with the title of the Precious Blood and he defended the existence of this title even against the opposition of three ill-informed popes. He was also committed to founding a congregation of women imprinted with the same spirit, a goal he finally reached with St. Maria De Mattias. In this chapter we will speak of the Congregations of Missionaries of the

Most Precious Blood (hereafter simply: Missionaries of the Precious Blood).

Gaspar, Founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood

We know that Gaspar, shortly after returning from prison and after the failed attempt to enter the Society of Jesus, was concerned with founding the institute predicted by Sr. Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato. How hard he had to work to bring this congregation to life and keep it going!

The works of God are like the mustard seed which, when planted in the earth, continues to grow in such a way that it very soon becomes a robust plant which spreads its branches out in a marvelous way and sets its roots deeply into the bowels of the earth. O my beloved confreres in Jesus Christ, that also is what our holy Institute is.¹

A little seed, then a little plant “and this plant gradually grew with the continued assistance of the Venerable [Gaspar] and came to that maturity to which God wanted to bring it”—so adds Merlini.²

This progressive growth of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood to the maturity desired by God is to be found both in the conception of the Work in itself—but this is not of interest for our purposes—and in the attribution of the title.

We have already noted that in September 1810 Albertini had seen in Gaspar not only the person whom Sr. Agnese del Verbo Incarnato had predicted would be the trumpet of the Divine Blood, but also the founder of a new congregation of missionary priests under the title of the Most Precious Blood (*sotto l'invocazione del Preziosissimo Sangue*).³ We also noted that the prediction had not had an effect on Gaspar's heart at the time. While Gaspar was in Florence waiting to be transferred

to harsher imprisonment in Corsica, he was invited to be part of the *Santa Lega degli Operai Evangelici* “The Holy League of the Gospel Workers’ that Don Gaetano Bonanni and his fellow priests had founded on the feast of Corpus Christi in 1813, but this organization had not yet gotten off the ground since it lacked a location for its headquarters. We know that Gaspar, enthusiastic for all initiatives for the good—in particular for such an undertaking that was dedicated to the missions, to which he felt drawn—replied on January 14, 1814, happily accepting the invitation. We have also indicated in another place that after Pius VII designated him an apostolic missionary, Gaspar’s role in carrying out this ministry was not secondary, but decisive, even if because of his age and his virtue he gave Bonanni prominence.⁴

In all of this Albertini saw God’s plans being fulfilled, but still in need of complete realization: Gaspar had to found an institute, but it had to be under the title of the Divine Blood. This was very much the heart’s desire of the pious Canon Albertini, who would have found certain and effective propagators for his devotion to the Precious Blood by means of the popular missions and spiritual exercises, to which the Gospel Workers were dedicated. But how was he to insert himself into the internal affairs of the Work, without provoking an understandable refusal on the part of Bonanni, since it was not his own idea? The only one capable of realizing the project was Gaspar, not because he could impose his will over the others—he was too young—but because, in the internal life of the Work, he was the one who stood out because of his devotion to the Blood of Jesus.

One must proceed with prudence, which was certainly not lacking in the Canon. He began to link the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood to the Gospel Workers, having them preach a mission in San Nicola in Carcere in December 1814, under the direction of Gaspar.⁵ A felicitous way of acquainting the Gospel Workers with the devotion was in the turnout of the

people, the ordering of the functions, the spiritual atmosphere of this devotion, the impassioned preaching of Gaspar.

In addition, Albertini sought the mediation of Cristaldi to persuade Bonanni, the head of the Work (i.e., the Gospel Workers) to place that organization under the title of the Most Precious Blood. But Cristaldi, whether he did not wish to impose his authority on Bonanni or for other reasons, thought that there would be no better patron to carry this out than Gaspar. Thus Gaspar was called again to center stage and sought to complete the mission entrusted to him. On March 1, 1815, he wrote Bonanni, who was preaching in Sutri, the following:

Msgr. Cristaldi has been begging me to put our community under the title of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus. He makes this observation with every good reason. The Evangelical Workers labor so that the Blood of Jesus will be applied to the salvation of souls, and this they must offer continually, asking for pardon for sinners; if other Institutes assume the charge of propagating the one or the other devotion, this one of the Missions must be intent on the propagation of that devotion which incorporates all the others, that of the Price of our Redemption. *Per sanguinem salvi facti sumus* 'through blood we are saved.' I could do nothing but praise the intentions of this Prelate, and making his principles my own, from now on our community is committed to the merits of the Blood of Jesus.⁶

One should not think that Gaspar was acting only because he was urged on by others. In fact, in responding to Cristaldi, he openly makes known his desires, which are the same as those of Albertini.

I will attend to the memorandum of our Don Gaetano. *I will do what I can.* Help me with

your prayers. *Meanwhile I warn you that the desire of the good Canon Albertini would be mine*, that is, that the union or Congregation of the Missionaries be erected under the title of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus, which takes away sins, the Blood that saves souls, the Blood that will give strength to the words of the Missionaries and will make them efficacious in gaining the fruit of their Missions.⁷

What was Bonanni's response? For the moment he was not enthusiastic; quite probably Gaspar had to insist again and again, if he could write the following to Cristaldi on July 5, 1815:

Finally, with regard to the title of the Most Precious Blood etc., I believe that this too must also be a declaration *ab alto* 'from above.' The other day, Bonanni assured me that he had propagated this devotion. Everything, in short, has been completed in the month of the Most Precious Blood *per quem salvati et liberati sumus*, etc., 'through which we have been saved and freed.'⁸

Here it appears clear that only at the beginning of July 1815, just before the founding of the new Institute on August 15, 1815, did Bonanni agree with the proposal of Gaspar, that is, to give the title of Most Precious Blood to the Work, and at the same time assuring his collaboration in spreading the devotion to the Blood of Jesus.

Scarcely had he completed this first step, Gaspar, perhaps foreseeing the attacks on the Institute on account of its title, was concerned that the title be assigned *ab alto*, that is, that it would have juridical recognition, because in the official acts conceding the first house to the Congregation, the Work was called only "Pious Institute" or "Society of secular

Missionaries”⁹ or even “Pious Institute of Missionary Priests.”¹⁰ But the hoped for assignment of the title “from above” did not come for the time being, and he had to maneuver quite a bit to have the title recognized in some way as a matter of public right (*di pubblico diritto*).

Gaspar’s activity was also indispensable for accomplishing this aim. The path that led to this was his joining the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood which took place, as we already know, in 1817. “[Gaspar] also inscribed others of his companions in this Archconfraternity and thus imperceptibly the title was created”¹¹ and “those who had first been called ‘Gospel Workers’ in the association of Rome and ‘Apostolic Missionaries’ when sent on the missions by His Holiness [Pius VII] were [eventually] called Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, according to Bonanni.”¹² More precisely, we should say that they were called “Missionaries of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood.” This is also to be found in the *Metodo delle Sante Missioni* ‘Method of the Holy Missions’ printed in Rome in 1819, by Lino Contedini, with this heading: *Metodo delle Sante Missioni fatto stampare dalla Ven. Archiconfraternita del Preziosissimo Sangue del N. S. Gesù Cristo per uso dei suoi Missionari e di tutti quelli che vorranno approfittarsene. Si aggiungono le brevi Regole delle Opere Pie che sogliono stabilirsi in tempo di Missione* “The Method of the Holy Missions printed by the Venerable Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of O.L. Jesus Christ, for the use of its Missionaries and of all those who wish to make use of it. Added are the short Rules of the Pious Works that are established at the time of the Mission.”¹³ The members of the Work were called by the title “Missionaries of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood” until 1831,¹⁴ when Gaspar suppressed the word *Archconfraternity* by pasting a piece of paper on which had been printed *Institute* over it, thus obtaining the

new title: "Missionaries of the Institute of the Most Precious Blood," a title which he left in place very definitely in September 1835 when he revised the booklets of the rules of the Congregation.¹⁵

What were Gaspar's reasons for taking this step? The witnesses at the canonical processes for beatification listed many, but the main reasons, in my view, are three:

1) Gaspar knew well that his Missionaries, even if members of the Archconfraternity, were distinct as an institution from the priest members of that organization.

2) By this time he had passed the most critical moment of persecution of the Institute by Leo XII and Pius VIII. During that period, the union of "the Work" of Gaspar with the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood, which had canonical recognition, permitted the defense of the title of the Congregation.

3) Already in the Bull of Installation of the Jesuits in Spoleto (July 4, 1826), Leo XII called the Work of Gaspar with the title Society "*cui nomen a pretiosissimo sanguine*" 'whose name is most precious blood.'¹⁶

Even if Gaspar wanted to show that his Congregation was distinct from the Archconfraternity by deleting that word from its title, his relationship with the Archconfraternity remained very good, both because he retained "the spiritual union by which there is devotion and indulgences"¹⁷ and because he kept the president of the Archconfraternity informed through ongoing correspondence, requesting faculties from him and communicating the names of those who had been inscribed, as noted in his letters after 1831. It will be Giovanni Merlini who on July 29, 1851, would obtain from Pius IX the brief for erecting the Primary Pious Union of the Most Precious Blood, independent of the Archconfraternity of San Nicola in Carcere and which was given "all the faculties, privileges, and indulgences present and future of the same."¹⁸

What is of interest to us here is to note the troubled journey that the title “Most Precious Blood” had to endure before it became the banner of the new Institute. More important, we note the central role and definitive action that Gaspar took to reach this goal. Truly it was principally due to him that the first family under the title of the Divine Blood was born into the Church.

Gaspar, Defending his Congregation, Defends the Devotion to the Most Precious Blood

If Gaspar had to work very hard to give his Congregation the name of Most Precious Blood, he had to work even harder to defend the existence of the Institute because of its title. It was the hardest trial of his life, a trial that produced terrible distress in 1825 with Leo XII, in 1829 with Pius VIII, and in 1831 with Gregory XVI. We name these three pontiffs not merely for historical reference, but because they were the principal protagonists in his spiritual martyrdom.

This martyrdom possibly reached its peak with Leo XII. Testimony to this is given in various letters written to Monsignor Cristaldi and they constitute one of the better parts of the correspondence of Gaspar on account of the openness of heart with which he turned to Cristaldi for every need, following the counsel of Albertini.¹⁹ On June 29, 1825, while he was still unaware of the tempest that began swirling about him, Gaspar wrote to Cristaldi these prophetic words:

My dearest Monsignor, up to now we have carried the cross as far as Mount Calvary. Now it will be necessary to climb that mountain and then die with Jesus Crucified at the top of that same mountain of myrrh and bitterness.²⁰

Leo XII had, in fact, first been a friend and sincere admirer of Gaspar.²¹ He had been badly informed by Mons. Giovanni Antonio Benvenuti,²² apostolic delegate of Frosinone and by other lay authorities of the Province

of Marittima and Campagna, and had put faith in the many calumnies spread about the Missionaries and their founder regarding the apostolate they had carried out at the mandate of Pius VII in that province infested with brigandage.²³

Beyond this, the enemies of the Institute began to take offense at the title, hiding their ill intent under a mask of zealous piety for the Blood of Jesus. They declared themselves scandalized that a human institution would dare to carry such a sacred title. The spokesman against this presumed scandal before Leo XII was his privy chamberlain, Monsignor Giovanni Soglia.²⁴ He had such a negative influence on the heart of Leo XII that the latter deleted with his own hand the words "of the Most Precious Blood" for the title of the Institute, substituting "of the Most Holy Redeemer" for them.

In 1825 the Missionaries petitioned Leo XII to obtain the Office and Mass in honor of St. Francis Xavier, patron of the Congregation, for March 12. They obtained a favorable reply but not without some pain. Following custom, they had written using the title "Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood" but when the pope read the title, he deleted the words "Most Precious Blood" instead substituted "Most Holy Redeemer."²⁵

In similar fashion the same pontiff substituted "Divine Redeemer" for "Most Precious Blood" in another petition, in which the Missionaries of the Archconfraternity asked him to accept the dedication of a little ascetical work compiled by St. Gaspar based on the writings of Mons. Francesco Albertini, titled *Direttore diretto*.²⁶

The author and bearer of this and the other petition (for the concession of the Mass and Office in honor of St. Francis Xavier) was Don Innocenzo Betti, who delivered them to Leo XII in an audience held on June 29, 1825, and who, through Mons. Belisario Cristaldi, quickly

revised them to be resubmitted with the corrections of the pope.²⁷

As soon as Gaspar was apprised of this fact by Betti, he vented his feelings with his friend Mons. Cristaldi, writing him on July 8, 1825, from Frosinone. In a letter which reveals a profound bitterness of heart, but at the same time his decision to defend the works of God against human malice and weakness:

Canon Betti has sent me one of your letters along with some rescripts issued by the Holy Father. I give thanks to God that, because of certain works of the ministry, he has not gone out on the Missions and has considered no other trip than the one for the greater advancement of our Institute, since some reports about our Society have caused in my human weakness certain feelings that are not in the least pleasant. Yet, as far as my spirit is concerned, this has not alienated me from due resignation to the divine will, for that is what I truly wish and what our religion and our faith call for.

So, you are obliged, and God is with you, to remind the Holy Father that, except for *ex cathedra* definitions, all other things call for examination, peaceful discussion and both practical and theoretical evaluation. All of the saints have given us these directions. It is not something new in the Church for the Pontiffs to reject for the Church this or that society, and then, after examination, have to recognize that it is from God. If this whole situation were to be concerned with me alone who is writing this letter, you can be quite certain that I would never bother you to read these pages. But, this is a question *de re gravissima*, namely, the prevention of our being looked upon as impostors and false teachers; and also the acceptance of a title

which the Roman See is presently seeking to disapprove. Consequently, out of love for the Pontiff, I point out the following details:

1. Pope Pius VII, who had so many discussions with the now deceased Monsignor Albertini, erected an Archconfraternity *sub hoc titulo Pretiosissimi Sanguinis* evident in the Apostolic Briefs. Even before Pope Pius VII, Sixtus V had already erected one in Ferrara, more precisely [Santa Maria] in Vado. I add nothing further.

2. The Archconfraternity needs to have Missionaries who are capable of propagating this very important devotion, which is the price of redemption and of salvation. . . . I am speaking of the Divine Blood, and also of propagating what is clearly proposed in its Constitutions.

3. It is a fact that the Congregation of Rites itself has granted certain privileges to us, as Missionaries of the Archconfraternity mentioned above.

4. It is also factual that the Church, by approving the Mass and the Office of the Divine Blood, has recognized that title as one that is fitting. The question raised here is not concerned with the word "Missionary," but the additional characterization: of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood, a title, I repeat, which is canonical not only because of present day acceptance but even *ab antiquo*. Now that the present Holy Father has crossed off that title, in my opinion, that was not a good decision, based on the application of the customary rules, but rather one that was produced through the vile intervention of someone close to his Holiness, whom you know very well, and who was seeking to meddle into the situation. I excuse in everyone their intentions; I regard

lovingly even the private opinions of our Holy Father; I am ready to submit, but, because of the decorum of Church History, the decorum of the Holy See, because of the rescripts that have been granted, because of the Pious Unions that have been established by the bishops and aggregated to the Archconfraternity in Rome, I must, with tears, bring this matter to his attention.²⁸

While declaring that he was disposed to obeying the pope, St. Gaspar, “for the sake of the decorum of Church History,” suggests to Cristaldi to propose to the pope, “before he takes any further action,” that he would consent “to have on his desk an historical and defensive memorandum on the Institute.” Thus he continues in his letter:

If his Holiness will permit me, I, with your intervention before he takes any further action, will see that very quickly he will have on his desk an historical and defensive memorandum regarding the Institute which I, trusting in God’s help, will draw up immediately. I said historical and defensive so that he will come to know the origin of our Society, the goal that it has set for itself, and the reason why this particular title was adopted. After he has read that memorandum, having first offered prayers, he will come to the judgment that he sees fit. Since I am an obedient child and one who prefers to be silent rather than to speak, I shall do absolutely nothing until the Holy Father, through your intervention, authorizes me to proceed with the writing of this memorandum. Then, after having read it, if he remains firm in his conviction, nevertheless it would still be necessary to determine the manner of procedure, so as to maintain the decorum of Rome, of the Institute, of the members; and, not give the libertines

further weapons for impeding the work of the ministry. Anything more concerning this situation I reserve to say to Jesus Crucified in the sacred recesses of his wounds where I now leave you, most reverend Excellency, with the usual esteem and respect.²⁹

In his stream of ideas Gaspar forgot to insert an argument which was of particular significance for Leo XII; he adds this in a postscript, along with other arguments:

His Holiness, as Cardinal Vicar, erected in Rome a congregation for women, under the title of the Divine Blood, and it was directed, in fact, by Fr. Andrea Butirroni. I have read the printed decree with my own eyes. I am aware of the disturbance aroused by the enemy, and I am sorry. But then, how about what was said at first about the titles: Passionist, Jesuit, Nuns of the Blessed Sacrament etc.? History speaks to us. So, every individual program of religion deserves some consideration; that is the usual, sensible response, and the Church confirms its decisions with the yearly festive celebrations.³⁰

For all the excellent arguments and the proposal for dialogue that was more than wise, all the more did the pope persist in his contempt for the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, demonstrated at times even in public audiences. Here is Merlini's deposition in the canonical processes for Gaspar's beatification:

While the Servant of God was enduring these afflictions, still another was added which I think it would be good to mention here likewise. Fr. Francesco Pierantoni, around the date of July 19, 1825, wrote to the Servant of God, saying:

‘If I rejoiced greatly, some time ago, in being assured by a person worthy of belief that His Holiness has the highest opinion of our Institute and for you especially because of your reluctance to accept honors and dignities, still I experienced displeasure this past week in learning of the amazing behavior that His Holiness displayed. Here is what happened. An outstanding, zealous priest, closely associated with our Institute and a missionary *in auxilium*, approached the Pope with the usual feeling of confidence and, among other things, asked for the permission to enjoy all the privileges accorded to the Missionaries of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood. The Pope replied: ‘Is that, perhaps, to eat meat on Fridays and Saturdays, as Del Bufalo has requested? That is really something surprising in one who preaches penance! If a medical statement had been submitted that might justify it . . .’

On the outside of this letter which the Servant of God sent to Cristaldi, one can note in the Servant of God’s own handwriting: ‘You may enjoy reading this and then burn it, like all our other pages.’³¹

Gaspar sent this letter to Cristaldi, as Merlini tells us at the end of the deposition just cited, along with the letter of July 20, 1825, which he wrote to him from Veroli, where he was preaching a series of spiritual exercises at the seminary:

May you keep this most humble letter of mine *in communicatione spiritus* ‘in the communication of the spirit’ with the greatest secrecy. Please read the enclosed matter. The person who wrote me this is very, very dear to me. I do not add anything further. Please do me the favor of telling the Holy Father that perhaps he,

one day, will realize what he does not presently see. I am not speaking about myself but about the Society. He will weep for having used during an audience a procedure which was not in accordance with God. Only God knows whether I shall survive all of the bitter things that have occurred. I have not lost sight of my conformity to his divine will, for doing his most lovable divine will is my total pursuit.

However, I am not made of iron or of bronze. To face continuous, baseless rebukes and invectives, without due process, both of my conduct and that of others, is a very bitter chalice to drink. All of this, however, is very little, considering my own demerits. Still, I glory in being a son of the Church and, wretched though I may be, I have not lost my faith. Excuse this outburst of mine which is meant for you alone, for I am besieged with sadness, yet I have not allowed any of this to leak out even to my companions, realizing that the war that is being waged is brought on by the enemy, and in the most despicable way. They referred to a Mission during which I am supposed to have eaten meat on Friday or Saturday. With the help of divine mercy, they will discover what is the real confession of the truth. Have his Holiness question the bishops and the pastors, etc.

I am writing from Veroli where I am presently conducting a series of retreats, while at the same time being assailed by a thousand bitter things, all of which have their origin in what has been explained, without saying anything further about temporalities. Nevertheless, the spiritual work being accomplished is immense. It is God who is doing the work. We are nothing more than wretchedness itself. Yet, it is his good will that, with regard to these accusations,

the Holy Father should make his judgment and his inaccurate knowledge be given illumination. I pardon the intentions of everyone. My only true regret is the detriment that is being caused to the honor of God. I am the real culprit, so why does he not reprimand me, condemn me? But the ministry . . . the Missions . . . oh God . . . Priests who have left their own homes, their possessions, their small comforts and have joined a society where, except for their daily living, they have nothing more . . . how can anyone say they have no spirit? This business about one of our Missionaries in Albano going around requesting silver table settings is truly a hoax. I am well acquainted with the members who are appointed there and I have checked with them. Oh God, my beloved Monsignor, what utter darkness! We are in very bad times. Nevertheless, we place our trust in God. I am consoled that *cum ipso sum in tribulatione*, etc. 'I am with him in tribulation, etc.' I shall be awaiting a line or so from you to Frosinone from where I shall have to depart, if you consider it a good idea, to conduct some Missions. The requests are varied—in Umbria—in the Marche—in Benevento—in the Kingdom where, if it pleases God, a foundation will be established.

My Monsignor, what can I say or do? Give me your counsel and remember that Monsignor Albertini told me over and over again that after God, I should look for no one else but you with regard to the Society. Also, he said that I should never be fearful because of the extreme trials that the Society would face, for they would be signs that the Society is from God. For a bit of quiet, I would like to withdraw to S. Felice. But, my will does not allow me to do that. Try to find a moment here or there to send me your reply. I

do not deserve it, I know, and I am quite aware of my nothingness. Nevertheless, the glory of God, the defense of innocence and of truth are the beautiful causes to be dealt with here.

The list of faculties which you had the Holy Father confirm *ad annum* 'for a year' is the same that goes back to the time of the good Father Filippo Fortuna. It was he who, for his own peace of mind, obtained the dispensation concerning the use of oil and milk products on Fridays. I told him that it would not be needed. But, at that time, I was no more than a caretaker in the Missions. He spoke to the Holy Father, Pius VII, about this matter and, with paternal concern the Holy Father took all of us into consideration, and, in order to remove any feelings of scrupulosity, he granted it for all. It seems to me, however, that no one really made use of it, as Canon Muccioli³² will recall very well (but it is a good idea to keep this between ourselves). I, indeed, can declare before heaven and earth, that I, myself, never made use of this privilege. The present Pontiff saw this article and he made the deletion. When I went to have a meeting with him, he said nothing to me. Monsignor, pray for me who, while recommending myself to your prayers . . .³³

Cristaldi replied immediately to Gaspar, inviting him to go to Rome, because he intended to obtain an audience with the Holy Father. Gaspar responded quickly on July 25, 1825, from Frosinone, as soon as he returned from preaching in Veroli:

I have just returned from Veroli and I am sending an immediate reply to your most appreciated letter for which I am so obliged to you! I feared that you might not be well since I had not received news from you. I shall come quickly to

Rome during these days, as you advise me, and as soon as it becomes possible for me. I humbly pray to God, the Giver of every good gift, that he will bless my steps. Tomorrow I shall begin by the application of holy Mass for this very important intention and, in order to obtain the assistance of very great advocates in heaven, I shall apply it for the holy souls in Purgatory, a devotion that is so close to us. I acknowledge my own insufficiency in handling a matter as grave as this and, from this very moment, I ask for your well known charity, most reverend excellency, to beseech the Holy Father to grant me an audience that is convenient and without disturbance to him and, in addition, your own most assiduous recourse to the throne of divine clemency.

Just how deep is my feeling of gratitude to you for so many, many outstanding favors, you yourself can better conceive in your own mind than I could ever indicate to you in words. I trust, through my devotion to the Divine Blood, to Mary most holy and to St. Francis Xavier, as well as in your prayers, that everything will turn out successfully to our mutual consolation.³⁴

Unfortunately, he had scarcely reached Rome on July 26 when he learned that Leo XII had again been speaking ill of the Missionaries in his audiences. On July 27 he confided in Cristaldi, as usual, asking him to obtain an audience with the Holy Father quickly. In the case that this audience had to be delayed, he would go to speak with Mons. Soglia:

Yesterday I met with a very pious prelate and he told me that when he spoke to the Holy Father in a favorable manner concerning our Society, the Pope gave him a sort of reply which, from the connotations (although he did not say

it outright, it implied the name of Monsignor Benvenuti) one could conclude that Monsignor Benvenuti has a certain opposition to our Society. This conversation came up accidentally without my inviting it any motivation. However, he did ask me to promise that, in the event that I might use this reserved information, I would never reveal the particular source. All this for the sake of the records. The entire province is resounding with the glory of God, and despite that, *videntes non vident* 'seeing they do not see.' Full of respect for Monsignor Benvenuti, I realize that there is nothing else to cling to than prayer.

I shall delay my visit with Monsignor Soglia so that, this morning, you can petition an appointment with him for me. I feel that there is an urgency to speed up this matter so that the Pope does not go into audiences speaking ill about our people. So, upon getting in to see the Holy Father, I will not fail to give my thanks to Monsignor Soglia, and, I shall carry out everything else that I spoke of yesterday. If, from your reply, I learn that the audience with the Pope is being delayed, I can go to see Monsignor Soglia tomorrow. I am given to understand that anyone who is suffering from bias can be put in his place by a precautionary word from Monsignor Soglia, persuading the Holy Father with respect to our Society. I shall be awaiting a line or two from you, in your charity, today after the noon meal.³⁵

On the afternoon of the same July 27 Cristaldi probably communicated with St. Gaspar that he could not assure him of an audience with the pope on such short notice, because St. Gaspar, as he had planned, went to the Vatican on the morning of July 28 to meet with

Mons. Giovanni Soglia. Immediately upon returning home, he wrote Cristaldi:

Here I am giving you a report of my visit to the Vatican, where, upon my arrival, I was told that Monsignor Soglia was with His Holiness. Their discussion was quite long so I had the time to make my usual meditation. Then, I went into his office with him, and after the topic was introduced by being questioned concerning Canon Betti, gradually and quite peacefully we entered into the matter. I spoke at great length about our Institute and of the good work that it was accomplishing, etc., etc. He, on his own, asked me about our title and he confided to me that there were some who had presented papers to him in opposition to that title, but he did not mention their names to me. At this point (I can tell you) I felt a higher strength coming down upon me and so much so that Monsignor Soglia was almost in tears as I delved into the theological motives, etc., etc., and, I might say that I, too, without wanting to, also began to weep along with him. Let all of this be kept in secret as a usual communication between ourselves. And, oh how blessed I would be if only I had on a sheet of paper just what I said on this topic for I was afraid that it might be forgotten. I reflected that I should not be forgetful of your very wise directions in which, and I say this with all my heart, I decisively recognize the will of God, especially in the results that follow, with the Lord disposing even more. He admitted to me that he was with the Holy Father when he deleted the title, and everything else related to the question. If the hour had not been so late, I would have come speedily to you in person, but circumstances forced me to supply with this most humble page of mine.

With regard to the audience, he told me that on Saturday he would work things out with you. You manage things as God inspires you to do. I shall come to inconvenience you next Sunday morning after you have been in church. Indeed, in this regard, pray a lot for me for on the morning of the feast of St. Ignatius, through a rescript, I was ordained priest in the choir of the Fathers of the Mission. I shall offer my Mass on that day for you, to whom I owe so very much. Tomorrow, I shall offer it for Monsignor Soglia so that he will receive great illumination concerning our Society, as I realize that all could be entirely dependent upon him.

If you choose to speak to the Holy Father about me, you might use the occasion for asking him to be kind enough to reduce the number of visits during the Holy Year for gaining the holy indulgences, and then next Sunday you can give me the results. *Oremus ad invicem* 'Let us pray for one another.' I would appreciate a line from you so that I would know at what time I can come to inconvenience you next Sunday morning.

If your discussion with the Holy Father goes along smoothly, try to ask him for an extraordinary subsidy. I shall pray to God that he will see its urgency; Monsignor Soglia would like me to put all of this in writing. I shall set myself to doing so tomorrow. Tomorrow, at the Ave Maria hour, I shall send everything to your most reverend excellency, so that after you have read the material, if you please, you can then pass these pages on to the aforementioned Monsignor, Saturday morning . . .

P. S. As for any other matters, more when we see each other in person. Take good care of

yourself [underlined three times in the original letter] and pray for me.³⁶

As he had promised Cristaldi, on July 29 St. Gaspar set himself to write three memoranda, in accord with the wish of Mons. Soglia: one on the Institute and on the regimen of life of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, one on the title, and one on the privileges granted by the Holy See, so that Cristaldi could deliver them to Mons. Soglia in the meeting with the latter which was to take place on Saturday, July 30. On the evening of July 29, Gaspar, as he had promised, sent the three memoranda to Cristaldi, accompanied with the following note:

I am sending you three documents: one regards the general idea of our Institute; the second deals with the title; the third, a few privileges obtained up to now. I recommend this intention to your zeal which will bring you special blessings from the Lord. Pray to the Lord for me . . .³⁷

Even if we now go on at some length in reconstructing these events, we quote these documents here as they appeared in the first draft sent to Cristaldi³⁸ out of a desire to offer our readers something that they will appreciate. The final and stylistically improved version which was presented to Leo XII, can be found elsewhere.³⁹

The General Idea of the Work

Here is the first memorandum on the “General Idea of the Work,” that is, on the Congregation of Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, as it came directly from St. Gaspar’s pen, and which Cristaldi subsequently corrected:

In these times of upheaval, which it has pleased God to reserve for us, there is a great need for a reform of the people. The Lord, *in misericordia*

dives 'rich in mercy' [Eph 2: 4], wished to provide an effective means for curbing the torrent of iniquity and for restoring order in the hearts of the people by furnishing them with helps that are most suitable for the sanctification of their souls and for their continuous and lasting improvement. One such means is the establishing of more Mission and Spiritual Retreat Houses for the secular clergy, to revive in them a sense of dignity, of good example, as well as an eagerness for study and holiness, all of which is in line with the spirit of that ancient discipline in which community living of ecclesiastics was eagerly fostered.

St. Augustine, the Doctor of Grace, treated this matter in a special way. St. Charles Borromeo also followed a program such as this when he founded the Oblates, and the same can be said for St. Philip Neri when he instituted his congregation. The institution that we are discussing here, however, differs from that of the Filippini Fathers [the Oratorians] only because it adds to their most praiseworthy objectives, the practice of giving Missions and Spiritual Retreats, either by doing their preaching to the people in a very public way as well as (in the Retreats) by a very private approach in the respective Houses that have been founded.

This expansion of good work was not undertaken by the apostle of Rome, St. Philip Neri, for he limited the work of his congregation to those devout programs for which his sacred institute is so well known. It differs from that of the Oblates of St. Charles insofar as they are required to assume bonds that hold them in conscience and, as a consequence it is not easy for them to engage in a rapid and necessary propagation of the faith. It likewise differs from the

Missionaries of St. Vincent de Paul, because they too are bound by the sacred vows and, abstracting from the apostolate of the Missions and other pious works undertaken by their foundations, they do not have the flexibility to put into practice what shall be described in detail in these pages, not ordinarily making use of a public church for each of the sexes, so that all of the souls are given an equal portion of nourishment of the divine Word through which the faith has been promoted among peoples, and through which we can look forward to a renewal: '*fides ex auditu, auditus autem per verbum Christi*' 'faith comes from hearing, but hearing through the word of Christ [Rom 10: 17].'

One must now also cast a glance at the foundation of the Liguori Fathers [the Passionists]. For the sake of brevity and in order to point out that this congregation in the Papal State does not engage in an extensive propagation, it, too, excludes those programs that make the Society that we are discussing here plausible. The Houses of Study for priests, immediately subject to the Holy See and hence to the respective bishops, began spreading, more or less, having an even much broader idea of the apostolate than the spirit of the now deceased Doctor Bartolomeo del [sic] Monte and the now deceased Marchese Imperiale, particularly with respect to the secular clergy who were devoid of any bond of sacred vows.

In the case of the latter, the Gospel Ministers, adhering to their pious legacies, contemplated the giving of Missions. But in our present foundations, we are taking into consideration, as a whole, everything that could be needed by the pastors in the respective dioceses, so that we can be of immediate help to the

urgent needs of the people to effect the reform of their daily lives.

While other institutes, such as the Fathers of the Company of Jesus [the Jesuits], have as their primary objective the education of youth, our Mission and Retreat Houses offer whatever is necessary to bring about, with the greatest possible rapidity, the conversion of souls, good example from the grown-ups, and, in short, an apostolate directed towards every sort of grouping of people in the various dioceses which will then evaluate, facilitate and consolidate the education given. There will be no fear that the clergy will fall into a state of inertia, for, excluding the pastors, the canons and other sacred ministers necessary for the respective places, the other clergy will gradually be brought together into a union bonded by dedication to the ministry and they will activate this apostolate which is so very necessary for the greater glory of God. Their own personal affairs will not deter them, since we do not forbid proper ecclesiastical assistance.

Nor can being advanced in age make them at times fearful of the fulfillment of their sacred duties, since those who are more vigorous will apply themselves to the giving of Missions and those who are not so strong in health can take care of the internal forum, thus enjoying that peace which the Houses of our foundation can offer. In these Houses, in a special way, the soul is lifted to God in prayer. Also, ignorance, at times, may be the cause of complaints, but even with all that, one moves ahead by the provision of scholarly conferences which, in a way, make up for the past and eventually prepare them for whatever may be relevant.

So, we conclude that in these foundations, already put into motion by the now deceased Supreme Pontiff Pope Pius VII, the clergy find a haven and the longed for reform of the clergy itself is promoted so that they can become a beacon of holiness for the people. The seminaries, in preparing new plants for the Church of Jesus Christ, are effecting a certain graduated scale by which, through mutual assistance, they will bring about a certain equilibrium in the clergy. Eventually, with this mystical growth being supported, they will produce the noble fruit of vocations to the Missions of the Propaganda Fide. The evangelical workers, who will be well fortified in solid virtue, in adequate learning, in detachment from everything, will go forth. The glory of God will be wondrously promoted. Still completely available to those souls who prefer the sacred vows will be those other institutes which they can embrace, whichever one they may be called to. However, that step must be the fruit of mature advice and of a true spirit of vocation.

Finally, in our Houses of Study, there is offered a compensation for the present shortage of Regulars insofar as the people will have outside confessors to go to. Furthermore, the bishops are afforded a means whereby, even after the completion of the course of studies in the seminaries, the new priests will have the opportunity to be further developed in their vocation so as to be equipped for parochial work or other areas in the priestly ministry. All of this is merely a general presentation of the idea of our Institute. If necessary, more details can be given at another time.⁴⁰

The Title of the Congregation

In the preceding document St. Gaspar spoke of his Missionaries as “Gospel Workers” (*Operai Evangelici*); he spoke of the “Mission and Retreat Houses,” but he did not speak of the title of the Institute. Here, then, is the second memorandum, on the title:

Now, we turn to the question of the title which adorns these foundations, as is evident from various documents, it was the Supreme Pontiff Pius VII who considered it, as a matter of fact, a good idea to take it from the Archconfraternity having the august title of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, of the most holy Mary, Help of Christians and assigned to it as special protector the glorious apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier. This title does not present anything novel, since it flows from what we see in the sacred scriptures: *‘Redemisti nos Domine in Sanguine tuo, et fecisti nos Deo nostro regnum et sacerdotes’* ‘You have redeemed us, O Lord, in your Blood and have made us for our God a kingdom and priests’ [Rv 5: 9–10]. We priests, therefore, are marked with the sacerdotal character in order to apply the divine Blood to souls. It is his Blood that is offered in the divine Sacrifice; it is his Blood that is applied in the sacraments; it is his Blood that is the price of redemption. This is what we can present to the heavenly Father for the reconciliation of sinners: *‘Te ergo quaesumus tuis famulis subveni quos pretioso Sanguine redemisti’* ‘We, therefore, beseech you help your servants whom you have redeemed by your precious Blood.’ Whereas the devil would like all to be the victims of justice, we ministers of the sanctuary must make known the depths of God’s mercy so that *justificati in Sanguine ipsius salvi simus*

ab ira per ipsum ‘justified by his Blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him’ [Rom 5: 9]. In this devotion, we have the treasures of wisdom and holiness; in it we find comfort, peace and salvation.

Indeed, it is an essential devotion in Christianity, venerated by our mother, the Church ‘*quam acquisivit sanguine suo*’ ‘which he acquired by his blood’ [Acts 20: 28]. The Mass, the Office of the Most Precious Blood are already in practical usage in the church militant. Even from most ancient history, for example, we note that God, indeed, prescribed that the Hebrews in Egypt should taint their doorways with blood so as to be freed from the avenging sword, alluding to that means of eternal salvation by which our souls would be liberated from the slavery of hell. Add to this, what the apostle states: ‘*si sanguis hircorum et vitulorum inquinatos santificat, quanto magis Sanguis Christi emundabit conscientiam nostram ab operibus mortuis?*’ ‘If the blood of goats and bulls sanctifies those who are defiled, how much more will the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanse our consciences from dead works?’ [Heb 9: 11–12]. One should read the precious little booklet entitled *Il mese di Giugno* ‘The Month of June’ dedicated to the devotion of the mysteries of the Divine Blood. It contains the documents supporting this important devotion. Sufficient for now is to conclude with the words of St. Bernard [Ep. 7]: ‘*Sanguis Christi ut tuba clamat*’ ‘The Blood of Christ calls out like a trumpet’ or, the words of St. Thomas (Opusc. 15a): ‘*Sanguis Christi clavis paradisi*’ ‘The Blood of Christ is the key to paradise.’

But, to sum up everything briefly, one must not omit listening to what St. Paul observes in

Col 1: *'Pacificans per Sanguinem suum sive quae in terris sive quae in coelis sunt* 'Making peace through the Blood of his cross whether for what is in heaven or on earth.' Our times demand that we carry out what is proposed in that quotation. It is, therefore, the divine Blood that will placate the divine eternal Father, that will purify our hearts and will inebriate us with love for Jesus who *dilexit nos, et lavit nos in Sanguine suo* 'loved us and washed us in his Blood' [Rv 1: 5].⁴¹

In order to integrate the two preceding documents, St. Gaspar also wrote a document called the *Regime dell'Istituto* 'The Form of Government of the Institute' which is reproduced in the first volume of the *Regolamenti*.⁴² We say that it forms a part of the two preceding documents, because in the volume found in the General Archives of the Congregation, which gathers the two documents on the Institute and its title (*Scritti del Fondatore* XII, 48–50), the document on "The Form of Government of the Institute" follows immediately (*Scritti del Fondatore*, XII, 51–56), as an integrating section and also Cristaldi made some corrections to this document, as he did to the preceding, above all noting the place most opportune for inserting the material the document was treating. Here, then, is the document on "The Form of Government of the Institute":

1. There is a President for the observance (*Presidente sull'osservanza*), and he is one of the more mature Missionaries who, without being in charge of the house and in the spirit of the rules of St. Charles is only concerned with seeing to it that all takes place as it should.
2. There is the Local Superior whose duty it is to ring the bell for the observance, to give the private talks to the lay brothers, and to

communicate with them the Knowledge of the Saints, that they may grow daily in virtue and see to their own sanctification.

3. There is the Vice Superior who fills in during the absence of the Superior, and who is also Secretary and Archivist of the House.

4. In addition there is the Director of the Missions whose duty is the correspondence and administration of this very important matter.

5. There is the Director of the Spiritual Exercises whose duty is to watch over those who are making the exercises and to give them salutary reminders to persevere always in their good intentions.

6. There is the Prefect of the Church and Sacristy, and he directs the Sacred functions, maintains the silence of the Sacristy, and sees to it that all goes according to the rule.

7. Finally there is the *Economo* 'treasurer' who takes care of the temporal affairs of the House.

Everything is done in common, and according to the spirit of the Institute which is very similar to what is practiced by the Oratorian Fathers (*Padri Filippini*) in the House Meetings (*Congressi*) of the Congregation.

Food follows the norms for Seminaries. Other clarifications are omitted as not being necessary for the moment, since these pages are a general overview of the Institute.

At the beginning of new foundations, one individual, for example, will have two responsibilities. As there are more members, these responsibilities will be given to others.

The Work would seek now the more solemn approbation *ad instar dei Filippini* 'following

[that] of the Oratorians,' beyond that which has been obtained under the past Pontificate, making the necessary endowments.

It is to be immediately subject to the Holy See and to the respective Bishops because the Institute also has in mind the Foreign Missions. The primary House will be founded in Rome, God willing, and this will provide a stable support to these various pious Works entrusted to the Secular Clergy. Doubtful questions from the other houses are to be referred to this house because it is *prope Romanum Pontificem* 'near the Roman Pontiff.' This house will be concerned with the proper regulations for changes of assignments (*cambiamenti delle voci*) in preaching the respective subjects of different foundations, and also giving a change of venue to someone who feels that he is experiencing some harm from being in a certain climate, and similar situations. The circular letters for the foreign Missions will subsequently be sent from Rome. Every year one of the more mature Workers from the respective Provinces will be appointed to listen to the wishes of the Bishops as well as those of the Confreres, so that, in customary regularities of prudence, to provide for their needs, and always with the decorum of ministry, and thus good order and a regulated system of observance will be maintained. With moderation it is permitted to see one's own relatives, and other matters similar to the spirit of the Oratorian Fathers.

Each foundation will send a yearly summary (*transunto*) of the good that has been accomplished to the primary House of Rome, and it will be called *l'Annuale* for public edification and it will promote a competition in good works in the sense of the Apostle: *aemulamini*

charismata meliora 'be zealous for the better gifts' [1 Cor 12: 31]. [*Translator's note:* The revised Vulgate has *maiora* for *meliora*.]

The Work had its beginning in the area of Giano in the Diocese of Spoleto. It hopes to be strengthened under Pope Leo XII, whom the Lord preserve for a long life, and from whom it humbly asks the Pontifical blessing.

Method of Life of the Missionaries

In the Mission Houses silence is observed also in the case of those who are making the Exercises, and outside of the customary hours of honest Ecclesiastic recreation they seek to maintain union with God through silence.

In the evening there is the Meditation in common. At table there is always spiritual reading in the morning from Rodriguez (in addition to the text from the Scriptures) and in the evenings there are readings on the lives of Apostolic Men in order to have both sacred theory and examples to imitate.

Before going to bed there is the examination of Conscience in Chapel and other pious prayers.

Every month now, on different days, one or the other Missionary takes a day of retreat in preparation for death, doing this privately.

Every year in the novena in honor of St. Francis Xavier there are the spiritual Exercises, directed by the Missionaries alone.

They never go out by themselves and they are never out of the House for lunch. They are always dressed suitably for ministry.

In short . . . *in all ministry the rules of the Jesuit Fathers are followed, except for the vows and the educational ministry.*

On ordinary days there are conferences an hour and a half before midday. The priests from the various areas who wish to profit from them attend these, and the topics are Dogmatics, Moral Theology, Liturgy, Sacred Scripture, Ascetical Theology, etc. The authors chosen are those used by the Jesuits.

Yearly Functions

The public Exercises for the special feasts of Christmas, and the Catechisms before Easter are not neglected; also, the Three Hours of the Agony in memory of the last three Hours in which Jesus suffered on the Cross, serve to animate a tender love toward our most loving Redeemer.

In the month of May the exercise of the Marian month is observed and in June people are animated to meditate on the mysteries of the love of Jesus who has redeemed us with the inestimable price of His Divine Blood.

We have not spoken of other good works which are promoted according to the respective localities and the needs of the people.

Monthly Functions

There is the general Communion in the form of a retreat in preparation for death; it follows the norm practiced in the Oratorio of Fr. Caravita.⁴³

Catechism for the soldiers, Prisoners, and other subjects of ministry according to the respective locales is not neglected, such as preaching to the neighboring people and spreading there the pious institutions that we are treating, so that the sermons continue in a wonderful way to have an effect for the greater divine glory.

One Friday each month they assist at the meeting of the Gentlemen and Ladies, to give them their respective duties and to animate them to piety and to give good example. On one Friday after lunch and at least monthly there is the institution intended for the Clerics, according to the practice of the Union of Saint Paul, to express briefly to the various classes of Persons who present themselves for ministry and one seeks to spread the flock in accordance with the divine word. Nor is there omitted each month a conference for the Sisters of Charity, whose foundation is guided by the norm of the rules given in the various Congregations which have been erected elsewhere.

Weekly Functions

In addition to the duty of the Missions and that of admitting various classes of retreatants, every week on Sunday a public Catechism is held, after which there is the exercise for a happy death. Where the Pastors request it, the Missionaries also help out with Christian Doctrine for the adults in the respective Churches.

On Thursdays there is the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in memory of the Institution of this august mystery.

On Fridays there is the Exercise of the Way of the Cross.

On Saturdays there is the Example in honor of Mary most holy and the Litanies.

We add that in all feasts there is not omitted the Congregation of the young people under the title of Mary Most Holy and Immaculate and of St. Aloysius Gonzaga.

Daily Functions

At dawn there is the Mass before the people go to work, and at the time of the Mass the Christian acts (*gli atti cristiani*) are said with the people. The Mass ends with a salutary Reminder for making holy the day for the greater glory of God.

Every evening there is the Oratory for the men according to the practice of the Oratory of Father Caravita.

On Fridays and Sundays the community assists with Confession, usually hearing the confessions of the men first, and then the women. On the other days they take turns in the Confessional, so that they have time at the desk for the duties of ministry.⁴⁴

Privileges Granted by the Holy See to the Congregation of Missionaries

The third document that St. Gaspar sent to Cristaldi in the afternoon of July 29 concerned the privileges granted to the Congregation by the Holy See through July 1825. Here is the text of the document:

“Copy of the grant of the privilege for the Divine Office
and other privileges obtained, etc.”

Petition

Most blessed Father

The Missionaries of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ request, etc., for the sake of uniformity in the Divine Office, adapting themselves to the Roman calendar, etc.

Rescript

From the audience of July 28, His Holiness kindly agreed to the favor for the private recitation of the Divine Office, etc.

Other rescripts obtained from the now deceased Pius VII have been omitted and in the installation of the Houses, preserved in the respective curias, as well as other privileges.

*Those of the Sacred [Congregation of]
Rites are reported here.*

In behalf of the Confraternity of the Missionary Priests aggregated to the Confraternity under the invocation of the Most Precious Blood, our Holy Father, Pope Leo XII, kindly assenting to the prayers of the priests who devote their efforts to the missions under the invocation of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, with respect to the report to me, signed below, of the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, has agreed that the Offices of the Mysteries and Instruments of the Lord's Passion can for the future be recited by them annually in a major double rite, safeguarding the rubrics according to the order given below, namely, etc., etc.

Even before this, under the pontificate of Pius VII, there was likewise granted by the Sacred Congregation of Rites the Office and the Mass of the Most Precious Blood on the first Sunday in July; and the same is evident in the Decree, namely:

To the Confraternity of Missionary Priests aggregated to the Confraternity under the invocation of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, etc.

The same is true of another decree relating to the rite or a double of the second class, assigned for December 3rd, the feast of St. Francis Xavier, special protector of the Missions of the Archconfraternity.

Finally, our most Holy Lord Pope Leo XII granted, through a decree from that same Congregation and with the same declaration, the privilege of adding to the prayers on semi doubles, that of St. Francis Xavier.

So, the history of the Church of Jesus Christ, of which the Roman Pontiff is the head since he is the vicar of Jesus Christ and successor to St. Peter, calls for the continuation of these privileges and favors for the greater expansion of the Institute which was conceived during the time of exile, wonderfully developed immediately after the exile with great advantage to souls, and, at the same time, to the anger of the devil who has never ceased nor does he now cease from waging a special war against this very expression: 'Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.'⁴⁵

Defense of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood

With these documents, St. Gaspar not only committed himself to the defense of his Congregation and of the title that he had given it, but also worked with the president of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood, Monsignor Gregorio Muccioli, so that he also would commit himself to defending the title of the Archconfraternity. This was needed because in the two documents that Don Innocenzo Betti had presented in the audience of June 19, 1825, the pope had himself deleted the title "of the Most Precious Blood" that had come after "Archconfraternity," substituting "of the most Holy Savior."⁴⁶

Because of this, on the day after his return to Rome from Frosinone, that is July 27, 1825, Gaspar wrote Mons. Muccioli a letter which to date has not found a secure position among the *Letters* of St. Gaspar,⁴⁷ but which had to be written from Rome the same July 27,

1825,⁴⁸ sending with it a document entitled: “*Rispettose avvertenze sull’Archconfraternita del Preziosissimo Sangue di N.S.G.C.*” ‘Respectful Observations on the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood.’ First we present the letter to Mons. Muccioli and then the document sent to him in defense of the Archconfraternity.

Letter of St. Gaspar to Mons. Gregorio Muccioli

In this letter St. Gaspar advises Mons. Muccioli of “our bitterest tribulation” prompted by the deletion of the title “Most Precious Blood” from the phrase “Archconfraternity.” He asks him to forward to the pope, in his name, the document which he is sending for the defense of the Archconfraternity, in case it were not possible to present it to him in a private audience.

On the very day of the feast of the Divine Blood, the Lord has given me an inspiration with regard to our bitterest tribulation. ‘*Ecce in pace*,’ but, ‘*amaritudo*,’ etc. ‘Behold in peace’ but ‘bitterness,’ etc.

1) Beware of the devil when you read this page; *in terminis* ‘in the end’ it is definitely the will of God, to whom I have recommended myself.

2) I have not made a copy of it for myself, but you can take a copy of it for yourself, at most modifying a word, here and there, either in the spelling, the terminology or the sentence structure, *salvo in omnibus* ‘safeguarding all those things’ substantial. I request, however, that you send the enclosed back to me, when you have made your copy of it.

3) If some word or other should not be clear, bring it up to me next Saturday for our consideration.

4) We have reached the point when we must have a talk, *soluta oratione* ‘with free speech,’

being certain of the Divine good will and assistance.

5) We will discuss things further in person, realizing that we can omit nothing that is known to us, since everything has a bearing. The Saints give us the example of the apostolic and respectful way by which we must conduct ourselves defensively for God's cause.

I think that it would be prudentially better for you to handle everything after our meeting on Saturday, preparing a folder for His Holiness in which you make known to him that, because of the difficulty of getting an audience, you intend to fulfill your duties in this way, always ready, however, to present yourself whenever requested. Meanwhile, time: in my opinion the matter will be passed over; and, until we get a better opportunity, we will forget about making petitions for the time being. We shall make progress by keeping hold of ourselves and navigating the best we can. Work this matter out at the foot of the Crucifix. If you want me to make a copy of the page in my own handwriting, I will have no difficulty. And if it should be necessary to identify it as my own, I am perfectly happy to do so, when the glory of God demands it thus. Otherwise, I prefer not to have my name mentioned.

I am in *Xti Sanguine* 'in the Blood of Christ'
 . . .⁴⁹

Notes on the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood

Here is the document that St. Gaspar sent to Mons. Muccioli with the preceding letter.

*Respectful observations concerning the
Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of
our Lord Jesus Christ*

It cannot be denied that the Lord, always rich in mercy, has provided powerful means in every age capable of drawing souls to a consideration of the Crucified Lord and thus seeing in them the application of the redemption through his Divine Blood.

Setting aside the first centuries in the Church, centuries that produced martyrs, in the following epochs which history records for us, we note how one or the other dogma was attacked, how sacred things were subjected to scorn in one or the other part of the Catholic world. In our miserable times, the crisis among the people is a general one, with indescribable perversion of basic principles and of proper living so as to hurl an insult at the redemptive act and, through human malice, to frustrate the application of the merits of Jesus Christ who has redeemed us by the price of his Blood.

Now, Most Holy Father, is it not necessary to rekindle apostolic zeal and follow the inspirations of soul that are so favored by God so that we can revive in the memories of these people the inestimable price of our redemption and attempt to stir them to repentance and to tears? Is it not also a fact that Sacred Scripture itself gives us the steps to take for a reform? *Pacificans per Sanguinem Crucis eius sive quae in coelis sive quae in terris sunt* 'making peace through the Blood of his Cross, both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven' [Col 1: 20]. Do we ourselves not know that *Christus dilexit ecclesiam tradidit semetipsum pro ea . . .* 'Christ loved the church, and

delivered himself up for it . . .’ [Eph 5: 25]. *Acquisivit sanguine suo* ‘he purchased [it] with his own blood’ [Acts 20: 28]. Does not Divine Wisdom tell us that *justificati in Sanguine salvi erimus ab ira per ipsum* ‘justified by his Blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him’ [Rom 5: 9]. It is not sufficient simply to utter the name of the Lord to be saved: *Non qui dixerit Domine Domine hic salvus erit ma* [sic] *qui fecerit voluntatem Patris mei hic salvus erit* ‘Not everyone who will say to me, Lord, Lord, will be saved, but the one who will do the will of my father will be saved.’ [*Translator’s note*: Gaspar seems to paraphrase Mt 7: 21 here. The Vulgate text differs, but the sense is the same.] Therefore, there are two things that must necessarily be done nowadays. The first is to find a way of placating the Divine Eternal Father; and that we have in the merits of the Divine Blood: *Calicem salutaris accipiam* ‘I will take the chalice of salvation’ [Ps 115: 13]. The other is to try to find a way of effectively applying those merits to souls, and this can be done particularly through holy Missions and Spiritual Retreats, as well as other pious programs that are proportionately salubrious for our times.

In fact, these are the very same reasons that motivated the holy Pontiff Pius VII to erect the Archconfraternity, bearing this most august title of the Divine Blood. Sinners continue to be horrendously abusive and the Lord, in the transports of his love, keeps crying out: ‘*Quae utilitas in Sanguine meo?*’ ‘What profit is there in my Blood?’ [Ps 30: 10]. So, is there not anyone who will, through this sacred, solemn cult, procure adoration in compensation, and preach to the people its glories, bringing to their attention that in this devotion we have a compendium of

faith itself; that is why, in the consecration of the chalice, we say: “*mysterium fidei*” ‘the mystery of faith’ and, consequently therein lies the salvation of souls.

In fact, it is to this that the prophetic oracles, the predictions, the symbols, the figures, the sacrifices of the old covenant have their focus. As we read in Genesis: “*Lavabit in vino stolam suam et in sanguine uvae pallium suum*” ‘He shall wash his robe in wine, and his garment in the blood of the grape’ [Gen 49: 11]. The Hebrews were ordered to mark their doorposts with the blood of the lamb in order to be freed from their chastisements in Egypt, a symbol of the liberation of our souls from diabolical servitude Without saying too much further, what did Moses do for his people? “*Accipiens librum aspersit Sanguine dicens . . . hic sanguis testamenti quod mandavit ad vos Deus . . . Omnia in sanguine mundantur, et sine sanguinis effusione not fit remissio*” “Taking the book he sprinkled it with Blood, saying . . . this is the blood of the testament [covenant] that God has enjoined on you . . . all things . . . are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission’ [Hb 9: 19–22]. Hear, now, what the apostle says: “*Si sanguis hircorum et vitulorum inquinatos san[c]tificat, quanto magis Sanguis Jesu Christi emundabit conscientias nostras?*” ‘For if the blood of goats . . . and of young bulls . . . sanctify such as are defiled, how much more shall the Blood of Christ . . . cleanse our conscience from dead works?’ [Hb 9: 11–12]. [Translator’s note: Gaspar does not appear to quote the Vulgate text exactly here.]

Without saying everything that could be said, the divine Scriptures are loaded with sacred citations “*Quare rubrum est*

indumentum tuum” ‘Why is your apparel red?’ [Is 63: 2] “. . . *Vestitus erat veste aspersa sanguine*” ‘And he was clothed with a garment sprinkled with blood’ [Rv 19: 13]. One should add only that by means of this devotion the remembrance of our baptism, through which our souls were purged, is revived; we are reminded of penance and the other sacraments and when asked why, we conclude that it was because: “*redemisti in Sanguine fecisti nos Deo nostrum regnum et sacerdotes*” ‘you have redeemed [us] in [your] Blood . . . , [and] you have made us to our God a kingdom and priests’ [Rv 5: 9–10].

Other devotions are all means for facilitating Catholic piety, but this devotion is the basis, the sustenance, the essence of all. Other devotions, coming forth at various times, signal a period of time, ever holy, ever praiseworthy, but this devotion of ours is so antique that it goes back to the very moment when Adam sinned; that is why Jesus was called the “*agnus occisus a constitutione mundi*” ‘the lamb slain from the beginning of the world’ [Rv 13: 8]. [*Translator’s note*: The current text of the Vulgate has *origine* instead of *constitutione*. Also, in the original text Gaspar used the Italian *costituzione* instead of the Latin *constitutione*.] And it was because of this that we were given the means of reproducing, through the public press, the glories of this inestimable treasure of our souls, along with the noble compositions of the Fathers of the Church for the understanding of the sacred text; and especially so, since, in our days, generally speaking, this is not sufficiently known. However, the Lord will regenerate them in the hearts of people!

Indeed, St. Thomas says: *Sanguis Christi clavis paradisi* 'the Blood of Christ is the key to paradise.' St. John Chrysostom: *Sanguis Christi salus animarum . . . bonum aurum Sanguis Christi* 'The Blood of Christ is the salvation of souls . . . the Blood of Christ is fine gold.' One should read the small work composed by the outstanding member of the Missionaries of the Archconfraternity, that is to say, the now deceased bishop Monsignor [Vincenzo Maria] Strambi who, in giving his final retreats to all the Roman clergy, had them meditate on this very devotion. One could consult with the present bishop of Assisi [Francesco Maria Giampè], well known for his theological knowledge, or also the bishop of Nocera [Luigi Pervisani], not to mention others, and one will discover the interest that everyone should have in diffusing and spreading the glories of the Archconfraternity of the Divine Blood, glories that already are evident in the establishment of the Mission and Spiritual Retreat Houses under the direction of its Missionaries; they make available those means for fulfilling its objective . . . the glories that are evident in the many, many confraternities erected everywhere in the Catholic world, etc., etc., etc.

How could it ever have been possible for the very respectable bishops, among whom we include his Eminence [Cardinal] Severoli [1757–1824], to give their consent to the diffusion of this good work if there had been the least disagreement with the principles or the practices of the Church? How could it be that the now-deceased Pontiff Pius VII should issue a number of briefs for the erection of that Archconfraternity, and the Congregation of Rites⁵⁰ should recognize its title by the granting

of privileges, in particular, to the Mission and Spiritual Retreat Houses where the clergy have been reclaimed for the apostolate, for pursuing studies, for attaining holiness? Even your Holiness himself, with the revision of the Chaplet for use by that same Archconfraternity, has increased its privileges through the organ of that same Congregation of Rites, and, at the time when you were Cardinal Vicar of Rome, established some sisters of charity (under the direction of Butirroni) who had this same most august title.⁵¹

In these miserable times in which we live, one must point out, would the procedure of the Roman Curia not be subjected to derision? In fact, it is because of this that evildoers are led to criticize other titles, thus multiplying the number of enemies, while supposing that they are doing something good by suppressing a title which is the glory of redemption. This is the language of truth, and it is a well known fact that hell itself trembles at the very mention of "Divine Blood."⁵² Furthermore, because of this mental confusion, good people get the wrong idea and then disturb the peace of your Holiness's magnanimous heart.

So, in view of the fact that there is nothing involved here which is contrary to good Catholic interpretation, why, then, now change something that has been canonically established? The Pontiffs Paul III and Paul IV, the Pontiff Gregory XIII and Pope Sixtus V (who confirmed it with a brief of May 8, 1586), were these not all men who, in S. Maria in Vado,⁵³ erected and promoted the same good work which is now being done by the confraternity erected there under the title of the Divine Blood and which

presently has the most intimate connection with the Archconfraternity?

Most Holy Father, these are the intrinsic reasons as well as arguments from the history of the Church . . . But using such a title would be a case of becoming overly familiar! This was the same difficulty proposed when the Company of Jesus, in particular, emerged. Was it to be given that name, the name of Jesus before which *omne genuflectatur* ‘every knee should bow’ [The revised Vulgate of Phil 2: 10 has: ‘*omne genu flectat.*’] so that it would be on the lips of everyone and adored by all? And what was the answer given? The religious titles are all very praiseworthy. Any abuse of it would be due to the person who, through his own malice, would create it, but the Church’s intention is a holy one (so says Fr. Suarez in *De mysteriis vitae Jesu Christi*) insofar as a distinct veneration is shown toward the sacrosanct mysteries of the Savior.

Nor would it be a valid argument for one to say: There will be someone who will abuse this title, so let us get rid of it. . . . Well, there will also be someone who, as a matter of fact, will do the same thing with the name of religion, so therefore. . . . Oh my, to what consequences would this not lead. In keeping with the bases and principles explained, we have the establishment of Confraternities of the most holy Trinity, of the most Blessed Sacrament, etc. Finally, it would be good to point out that as an agent (or procurator) says: “Alms for the Confraternity of the most Blessed Sacrament,” in our [Archconfraternity] there should accordingly be a similar provision. But, *transeat* ‘let pass’ this last remark which was produced only to put the mind of your Holiness at ease.



St. Gaspar

We conclude by saying that the adherence to basic principles, the observance of fundamentals, the welfare of our times, the glory given to the Redemption as well as the scorn that hell itself will receive—all demand that your Holiness, rather than derogating and removing this most august title, should be in it and promote it throughout the entire Catholic World with a solemn decree, extending the use of the Mass and the Office of the Price of our Redemption. May what happened to Blessed Giacomo di Bevagna,⁵³ with regard to the Divine Blood, encourage your soul to do what, in all humility, has been proposed to you for the pure glory of God.⁵⁵

Up until now it was believed that this document, the “*Rispettose avvertenze*, etc.” written by St. Gaspar in the same period of the three preceding documents on the idea and form of government of the Institute of the Missionaries, its title and the privileges obtained from the Holy See, was submitted to Leo XII by Gaspar himself through Cristaldi, as were the other documents.

In 1998, however, we found a document in the historical archives of the Vicariate of Rome (ASVR), a copy of this same document made by Mons. Gregorio Muccioli. The more important discovery made at that time was that Muccioli, toward the end of July 1825, personally presented this document to Leo XII as his own work, with the following request, according to the suggestions given him by St. Gaspar in the letter of July 17:

Most Holy Father,

The Bishop of Agatopoli Gregorio Muccioli, President in perpetuity of the Archconfraternity instituted by the holy memory of Pius VII under the Title of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Church of S. Niccolò [sic] in Carcere, having heard after a delay of 24 days

the sentiments of your Holiness regarding the Title of this Archconfraternity, and always disposed to be submissive to the Orders of your Beatitude in this matter, believes that it is his unavoidable duty to seek and to obtain, without further delay, a Personal Audience. Meanwhile, he humbly offers to Your Holiness some very respectful reflections on the matter, so that everything that would help to bring about a balanced judgment on the matter, for the greater glory of God, might be considered in the clarity of your wise counsel . . .⁵⁶

St. Gaspar and the Audience with Leo XII

We do not know if Mons. Muccioli had the audience he requested with Leo XII, but an audience for St. Gaspar was certainly assured, according to the agreement reached by Cristaldi with Mons. Soglia on July 20,⁵⁷ even if the exact date was not determined.

In waiting for the audience St. Gaspar, wanting to make his Institute better known to the Holy Father, let Cristaldi know that he had sent to Mons. Soglia other documentation, e.g., the *Transunto*, the first rule of the Congregation, published in 1822.⁵⁸ Thus he writes to Cristaldi on August 5, 1825:

This morning I went to the Vatican and I recommended myself unworthily to our most beloved Mother for a successful outcome. However, I waited for Monsignor Soglia in vain. While I was hoping to speak with him, the Holy Father came into St. Peter's, and, since it was noontime, every effort was useless. I resorted to writing a respectful note in Monsignor Soglia's office and I also enclosed a printed resume of our rule, along with a page of information calculated to make him understand the correct concept of the Work of God [the Congregation].⁵⁹

But beyond furnishing documents intended to prepare for the audience, St. Gaspar was making an intense spiritual preparation. A letter to Cristaldi of August 13, 1825 bears witness to this. In the letter St. Gaspar expresses his intense desire that the audience with the Holy Father take place on August 15, "ten years after the opening of the House in San Felice." After having recommended to Cristaldi a request of Don Biagio Valentini for the sanctuary of San Felice, to present to the Holy Father in the audience which he would have to have had on the same morning of August 13, he continues:

On the feast of the Assumption, ten years will have passed since the opening of the House in S. Felice, the fruit of your zeal and that of the excellent lawyer Paolucci. Oh, I wholeheartedly beseech Mary most holy to bless me and the Work [the Congregation] on that occasion. I shall apply my Mass on the feast of the Assumption for your soul, asking that your tender love for Jesus will be evermore increased and for all those helps that are necessary for you to fulfill the work that has begun and entrusted to you by the Lord. If the Holy Father should find it convenient, you might speak to him of the usual extraordinary subsidy which, if at all times it was of pressing need, now, that my expenses from day to day grow larger, you can imagine how even more urgent this matter is for me. God watches over you. He will bless your words.

Pray very, very much for me, and, since on the feast of the Assumption St. Stanislaus departed heavenward, I shall ask this great saint to be my mediator so that I will obtain the desired admission to the presence of his Holiness.⁶⁰

The papal audience certainly took place, but in the biographies of St. Gaspar there is some disagreement on the precise date, either August 15 or 16, 1825.

Very probably the papal audience took place on August 15. In the audience it seems that the pope did not touch on the argument regarding the title of the Institute. Perhaps the memoranda presented and the intervention of Mons. Soglia had been sufficient to change the opinion of the pontiff.

St. Gaspar did not discuss the matter further in his letters to Cristaldi after the audience. Instead, the issue that was in the forefront was making the pope aware of the letters and commendations on the part of bishops regarding the ministry of his Missionaries, because at that time the pope was receiving many complaints about religious orders and religious institutes, so much so that even St. Gaspar felt the need to have some suggestions about the reform of religious presented to the Holy Father through Cristaldi.⁶¹ In his deposition at the process for beatification of St. Gaspar, Valentini affirmed that the opposition to the Congregation of St. Gaspar on the part of Leo XII after his elevation to the papacy came from

complaints made to him, as to every new pontiff, from accomplices (*manutengoli*) . . . and factions in the provinces. They sought to avail themselves of the benefits of the papal court, under the guise of doing the right thing. Precisely in this epoch, Leo XII, in a rather long audience with Gaspar, revealed that he was inclined to suppress the new Institute for which there was no need at all in the Church of God, taking as his motivation the case of so many institutes and ancient orders that were not well ordered spiritually or temporally.⁶²

Therefore, the first great difficulty that the pontiff expressed to Gaspar was that his Institute was of no use

to the Church. This explains why Gaspar, on August 16, went to Cristaldi to speak to him about the good that his [Gaspar's] Institute had done and was continuing to do.⁶³ On August 17 he sent Cristaldi a letter stating that he grasps fully the Holy Father's just concerns, but in which he begins to describe to him rather abruptly—a sign that the discourse had already begun the day before in a personal meeting—the request for ministries already made to the various communities. He asks him to make clear to the pope, in the audience that Cristaldi must have had on the morning of August 17, the complete willingness of St. Gaspar and his companions to disengage themselves from ministerial commitments that the pope might request of them and finally he tells him to add that Cristaldi himself had read letters and notes in which the ministry carried out by the Missionaries had been praised.⁶⁴ Here is the letter of August 17:

Enclosed are the various appointments for the ministry in keeping with the requests: Benevento, Rimini, Umbria, the March (*Marca*), Kingdom of Naples. Benevento could offer the possibility of a closer letter correspondence with the bishops of the Kingdom with reference to foundations, as well as to arrange other Missions for the Kingdom. Rimini: that foundation will give strength to the ministry, and since there are requests made for other dioceses in Romagna, in this way that province, which I believe is in great need, will be given a bit of attention. The Missions of the March would support those that have already been given and would be useful for the foundation in Pievetorina. Then, information concerning the glory of God in Umbria should come to the attention of the Holy Father, especially of Spoleto, where, because of that question of

arrear payments we have not been too welcome, as though, by seeking to collect that money, we had done some uncalled for act.

In November, I expect to be in the area of S. Salvatore Maggiore at his Eminence Ercolani's seminary, if God will preserve him until that time, etc. I have made my selections in keeping with the desires of the Holy Father, and have thus directed my other companion groups, one of which is still laboring in the vast dioceses of Penne and Atri. I say nothing about the Province of Marittima and Campagna where I, too, would gladly return to carry out the ministry, if it would so please the Lord. I felt that I should give this information so as to show, in keeping with your advice, that the ever lovable will of the Lord is made clearly manifest.

Today at the 21st hour, I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again. Miserable thing that I am, I recommended, at this morning's Mass, the audience which you will have with our Holy Father.

And since your conclusions were truly convincing in the totality of your apologetical discourse with the Holy Father, then, do not cease indicating to him, if you think it is a good thing, my very, very deep concern: Assure him that everyone in the Society will always be praying for his Holiness, and, add anything else that the Lord inspires in you. As the opportunity offers itself, you might include that you yourself have read letters and reports in which praise was given to our ministry; these are the letters which I, content only that the good work be known by God, would never have sent to you if the urgency of the situation did not demand it

...

P. S. Take care of yourself and do not overwork. You might also mention to the Holy Father that you yourself are acquainted with many of the members of our Society, etc. Even though you do not need these reminders, nevertheless, in order not to repeat what I have hazardedly written, I shall leave this letter just as it is.⁶⁵

If the subject of the validity of his Institute that was handled in the papal audience was that which was of greater concern to St. Gaspar, there was another topic that touched Gaspar personally and which he did not reveal to Cristaldi either in the meeting he had with him on August 16, after the audience of the previous day, or in the letter of August 17 after the papal audience that morning. In the audience of August 15 the pope made it very clear to Gaspar that he, the pope, wanted to promote him . . . But let us hear from Gaspar himself, as he himself writes to Cristaldi:

Even though I am fully resigned to accept peacefully the crosses that God sends me, still, to bring peace to my soul which cannot help but be disturbed, I put together the enclosed memorandum [the following letter, no. 1229] which I submit for your scrutiny. Although I am sending it on to you, next Friday morning [probably August 19] we shall discuss it in person, along with another matter which I did not have time to tell you about during our last meeting because of the disturbance and confusion in which I am presently engulfed. I said nothing else to the Holy Father than that, with his blessing, I would like to continue in the ministry; he said, . . . 'Well, are you always to remain a missionary?' I answered what I could, indicating to him the extreme consolation that I

have in being in the Congregation [*nell'Opera*], and I then recommended it to him again.

However, I confess that I noticed that my response to him did not go down so well, since he interrupted me and went on to something else.

Oh how close to my heart is our Institute! Miserable thing that I am, I pray that God will be propitious toward me. You must help me both with your prayers and with your counsel. I find myself confronted with a great responsibility both toward my beloved companions as well as to so many other things that in every regard have been accomplished up to now with divine grace and with your most efficacious mediation.

In that letter, I wrote that another member could be selected who would direct the Institute, thus allowing the Holy Father the opportunity of appointing whomever he judged best to preside over the Congregation [*all'Opera*], since I fear that it is my own inadequacy that retards ever greater blessings. I simply do not know what else I can do. It seems to me that a very clear discussion with the Holy Father in regard to how much our Congregation [Opera] means to you, would, in my opinion, be reason to expect victory. May God bring it about that what I said to him will have made an impression.

I asked the Holy Father whether he had read the reports that were submitted to him previously, and I noted that he had perhaps mislaid them. I asked him whether he would like new ones prepared, and he gave me neither a yes nor a no reply. Excuse me if I have annoyed you. Recommend me often to God . . .⁶⁶

The “enclosed memorandum” of which he speaks in this letter, is a request to Leo XII, that he not be

removed from his apostolic ministry, even if he is willing to leave the administration of the Institute to a confrere whom the pope designates:

Most blessed Father

Canon Gaspar del Bufalo, Apostolic missionary and most humble petitioner of your Holiness, for the sake of peace of mind, makes bold to suggest the following.

In the recent audience, which your Holiness deigned to grant him as a distinct grace and favor, while he was asking for an apostolic blessing on the Society, he intended only to strengthen the apostolic ministry using the holy means that our religion provides for us. However, noting that your Holiness was planning perhaps to remove him from the career which he has assumed, he now petitions you to allow him to quietly remain in its fulfillment. It would be quite sufficient for the petitioner to remain as an individual member of the Institute so that he can continue to promote the awakening of enthusiasm among the clergy as well as priestly decorum.

He is completely ready to surrender the direction of the Society to whomever you may judge opportune and capable for achieving its advancement. Kissing your foot, he does not cease begging for the help of your prayers; that, etc.⁶⁷

Finally, toward the end of August, St. Gaspar, with the permission of Cristaldi, was able to leave Rome and go to San Felice di Giano. There he returned to the two topics dealt with in the papal audience: the defense of his Institute and his promotion.

On September 1, 1825 he sent Leo XII some letters of commendation that were promoting the Missionaries of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood,

bringing together the arguments against the Institute and its title:

I believe that it is my duty to humbly place before the eyes of your Holiness a few letters relating to the good work that is being promoted by the Missionaries of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that you will come to know even better the truth of things that pertain to the glory of the Lord.

The holy Missions and Retreats, as well as other pious works, which are currently being accomplished by the Congregation [*dall'Opera*] are surely the principal bases for the reform. Whereas other institutes cultivate young people, the apostolate which our ministry is providing takes care of the needs of the people in general and outstanding good example is given by adults, who have been educated, to the young people who comprise the future most concerned objective of our loving mother, the Church.

Herein lies the glory of the priesthood, instituted for applying the price of redemption to souls, so that the Divine Blood will not have been shed in vain, due to our own fault, as we note in the Holy Scriptures: "*Quae utilitas in Sanguine meo? . . . Sanguis Jesu Christi emundabit conscientias nostras ab operibus mortuis*" 'What profit is there in my Blood? . . . The Blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse our consciences of dead works' [Ps 30: 10 . . . Heb 9: 12].

I am writing this page most humbly from our House of S. Felice in Giano where we have one of our houses of study for priests, namely, for those young men who have already completed their seminary courses and now, in silence and holy recollection of spirit, are preparing themselves for the ministries in the Church and for

various fields of the apostolate, in keeping with the most lovable will of God. I cannot tell you, most blessed Father, what a reason for joy such a beautiful undertaking brings with it.

May your Holiness not cease to bless and protect this holy institute in which I pray incessantly that God will allow me to complete the short number of days that remain for me in this miserable world. While kissing your most holy feet, I have the consolation of declaring my profound obeisance to and veneration of your Beatitude.⁶⁸

On the same day, September 1, 1825, prior to his reentry into the active apostolate and after more than a month of suffering (*calvario*) brought on by the disputes of the curia, St. Gaspar wrote this very beautiful letter to Cristaldi. We present only a few selections of particular interest:

Before leaving this place of solitude that is so very dear to me, allow me to write to you about those things that are pressing for the glory of God, which we must incessantly promote. When one is out in the ministry, one is necessarily forced to be brief.

1. In accordance with our fundamental principles to make use of all means for defending God's Society from diabolical attacks, I am enclosing a packet of papers which, if you think it is a good idea, you could have his Holiness read, pointing out to him that we did not preserve a lot of documents which might have been very opportune for this present situation. Never would I have imagined that such troubles could have arisen. But, then, recalling the statements of our Monsignor Albertini, I reflected that he would often say to me: 'You will suffer a great deal, but from it all you will come back with a

victory.' And, on another occasion, he assured me that you would be the promoter and defender of the Institute and that this was the will of God. So, I pray to the Lord that he will give you courage to speak out in holy liberty to the Holy Father, without perplexity of spirit, so as to win him over to our side.

You probably have received already the only copies of the printings for the Mission in Ascoli and Teramo. In Rome, I spoke with Monsignor Marchetti and I warmly urged him to speak in favor of our Society. I did the same with Monsignor Filonardi, but I did not go into details, since prudence demands that we keep things to ourselves. I spoke to him so convincingly that he ended up by saying: 'This is really the basis for reform. . . . I thank God for having come to know about the spirit of such a holy institute.' Various people have been asking for a prospectus of the Society and I am doing everything I can to avoid scrupulosity for my lack of providing it. Oh, if I had the means of doing so, I would immediately have a description of the Institute printed and I would see that copies of it would be circulated everywhere. But, even in this regard, God humbles us, and may he nevertheless be blessed . . .

2. In my opinion, after reflecting quietly in my mind, my meeting with the Holy Father, in some way, seemed to have gone along quite well, having brought the situation out into the open air, etc. and surely God must have illumined the Holy Father to better discern the importance of our Institute. Now, if one seeks not to overlook the reason for the success of our aim, we can say: '*Deo autem gratias qui dedit nobis victoriam per Dominum Jesum Christum*' 'But thanks be to God, who has given us the

victory through [our] Lord Jesus Christ' [1 Cor 15:-57]. . . .

4. Finally, I am intending not to return ever to Rome, or, if I do return, not to go to the Holy Father in person; that, because, in one's own case, someone else must act as apologist; also, I do not like to go through all those antechambers etc., etc., giving them the chance to say what is not so. *Ama nesciri, et pro nihilo reputari* 'Love to be ignored and to be considered as nothing.' I do not care to hear about dignities, positions, nor any other embarrassing thing. I love the Missions, the ministry, etc. You, in particular, must help me with your prayers. When I return to the Province of Campagna, I shall pass through the walls. This is what I am planning to do, and I pray that it will be blessed by God. O what holy solitude here in S. Felice, etc.

P. S. You, who have read many pages that I have submitted to you at various times and have come to know personally many of our members, can say quite a bit to the Holy Father. The spirit of the Lord will descend upon you, etc. That is my hope. Do not forget about the garden for Rimini and a small subsidy for Pievetorina in the Marches. Oh how many obligations I have to you! '*Dominus retribuet pro[pter] me, etc.*' 'The Lord will repay me' [Ps 137: 8]. Look after the matter in Benevento.

When the Holy Father told me that the Liguori Fathers have a small allowance, etc., I replied that they too must subsist, and that having the means even to undertake construction is a sign that God is providing and, in fact, that the Kingdom is giving help, etc. Excuse me if I have written lengthily, but my love for the Work [the Congregation], which I would like to solidify with the shedding of my own blood, as

well as the fact that I foresee that I will not be having another opportunity for expressing myself so fully, all of this has led me to come to this decision. I point out, with regard to my intention of not including Rome for me, that this is something which is just between you and me. I desire that the Institute be spoken of as well as our companions, and, insofar as possible, nothing be said about me. I speak to you with open heart.

I repeat, *ama nesciri et ero nihilo reputari* 'Love to be ignored and to be considered as nothing,' etc. . . .⁶⁹

The recounting of these facts regarding the attacks on the Institute and its title during the reign of Leo XII was lengthy, in order to establish how much St. Gaspar had to suffer and to preserve in the Church, with Cristaldi's assistance, both the glorious title of the Most Precious Blood and the very survival of that Congregation which was the only true promoter of the devotion of the Blood of Jesus.

St. Gaspar, Pius VIII and Gregory XVI

The spiritual anguish that Gaspar experienced under Leo XII was quite distressing to Gaspar's heart, as we have tried to describe accurately up to this point.

Because the same vile tongues did not cease portraying Gaspar, his Institute, and his Missionaries in a bad light, the same anxiety began anew under the successor of Leo XII, Pius VIII, who was elected March 31, 1829, and died on November 30 of the following year. Once again Gaspar had to write another memorandum, explaining the purpose of the Institute, its activities, and notes on the founding of the Mission Houses.⁷⁰

Gaspar succeeded in obtaining justice from Pius VIII as well, but another storm was not long in breaking out under Gregory XVI, elected pope on February 2,

1831. This time the pope seemed truly determined to be done with the Institute of Gaspar. This is how the events occurred, according to the testimony of Don Camillo Rossi in the *Processo Apostolico Albanese* for the beatification and canonization of St. Gaspar. He stated:

When Gregory XVI had been raised to the Pontificate one of our Confreres, I believe it was Don Biagio Valentini, presented himself to the now deceased Cardinal [Gian Francesco] Falzacappa [cardinal bishop of Albano Laziale]. The praiseworthy cardinal asked where Canon Del Bufalo might be found because he had not seen him in a long time. He indicated to this Confrere that he wanted a document outlining core ideas of the Institute (*un embrione*) and he promised to present it to the Pope for approval. Don Biagio Valentini spoke of his talk with the cardinal with the Venerable [Gaspar] and also with me, and [Gaspar] dictated to me a compendium of all of the ideas regarding the Institute for the Pious Works, both internal and external, and once this was written down it was presented to His Holiness, and the Pontiff at that point wanted to know nothing of it. Following this, I went to the praiseworthy Cardinal Falzacappa, to obtain the consent to preserve the Holy Oil in our Church of St. Paul, and he said to me: 'When there is another Pope, I will have the approval for the Institute in twenty-four hours, and then there will be room for questions related to the Holy Oil . . .'⁷¹

Thus, according to the testimony of Rossi, Cardinal Falzacappa presented a request for the approval of the rules of the Institute of the Missionaries to Gregory XVI at the beginning of his pontificate, that is during March or April 1831, if he went to request permission to keep the holy oil in the Church of St. Paul since the holy oils

are blessed at the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday, which fell on March 31 in 1831.

The cardinal revealed to Rossi the pope's annoyance (*disappunto*) with the Institute. This date at the beginning of the pontificate of Gregory XVI is confirmed by a letter written to Gaspar by Cardinal Carlo Odescalchi [cardinal archbishop of Ferrara and friend of Gaspar who later became a Jesuit]. Gaspar had asked the cardinal to recommend approval of the rules of the Institute to the new pontiff. On April 20, 1831 Odescalchi wrote Gaspar, saying that the pope "does not want to speak of rules at the present time" and therefore, he added: "I did not judge it opportune to seek an audience for you." Here is Cardinal Odescalchi's letter:

Dear Canon: I have not hurried to send a quick response to your request to come and visit with me nor to give you a report of the audience with the Pope. Bad news always travels fast. It is now eight days since I spoke with the Holy Father concerning your pious Institute. I regret that I have to tell you that he is badly informed and that two things deserve particular attention. The first thing is that if Pius VIII may have handled this situation with good humor, Gregory XVI is seriously disturbed about it. The second thing is that he assured me that was how Leo XII looked upon this, and I must believe this. So, this would be the third Pope in a row who has been unfavorable. This would be a source of great disturbance to me if the Institute were mine. He is opposed to the very basis for the Institute. He looks upon the ones who constitute its membership as ignorant and perhaps views the conduct of one or the other as censurable. He is not interested in any discussion at all about its rules. I would not consider it a good idea now to request an audience for

you nor to leave for him the brief and the two requests that I am returning to you. Since the Holy Father gave me a task which I cannot reveal to you, maybe something good can result from it. This might well be a last hope, after which, if another shipwreck occurs, one might have to set the whole idea aside as insupportable. More about this in person, after you complete your retreat.⁷²

Don Camillo Rossi—and he is not alone in this—interpreted the “seriously disturbed” found in the letter of Odescalchi as indicating the intention of the pope to suppress the Institute.⁷³

In addition to Cardinals Falzacappa and Odescalchi, St. Gaspar also turned to Cardinal Giovanni Filippo Fransonì [cardinal vicar of Rome], asking that he present to Gregory XVI or to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars [*Translator’s note*: “Regulars” are those who follow a rule, i.e., members of religious congregations.] a petition for the revision of the rules of his Institute, but Fransonì did not believe it opportune to present the petition. Here is the text of the deposition made by Fransonì on April 24, 1844 in the *Processo Ordinario Romano* for the beatification of Gaspar:

The Congregation of Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, during the life of Canon Del Bufalo, never had formal apostolic approval, even though he had requested this and had recommended that I present it to his Holiness Our Lord Gregory XVI or to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. I did not judge it opportune to present the petition, because the title of Most Precious Blood appeared to be displeasing to the Holy Father and because, in various remarks made in audience about those Missionaries, he showed that he had a bias against their competence: the

Holy Father told me that they were a crowd of ignorant people.

I have guarded jealously the petition that the Servant of God [Gaspar] gave me for this purpose, and it concludes with the following: 'Most blessed Father, the Missionaries inscribed in the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, prostrate at the Throne of Your Beatitude, humbly ask that the revision of their rules be sent to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Although these rules come from the same rules of Canon Law and from the wisdom of the Roman Pontiffs Pius VII and Leo XII, in any case they would fervently desire the pledge of beneficence and good will (*dilezione*) on the part of Your Holiness. . . .'⁷⁴

Such negative feelings toward the Congregation of Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood in the heart of Gregory XVI were not new; he had been nursing them for a long time. During the canonical processes Betti spoke of these negative feelings on the part of the pope:

The present Supreme Pontiff Gregory XVI, at that time the Most Reverend Cappellari, in a visit he made to San Gregorio for the commission of Canon Del Bufalo . . . made me aware of his lack of esteem for the Institute; and *especially* he shared that he did not approve of the title of Most Precious Blood, and had to say much about this, even though with all due respect I would try to put forth the reasons for keeping it.⁷⁵

Nevertheless even Gregory XVI, after getting a better understanding of the facts, changed his mind, so that on October 15, 1831 he made a visit to the house in Albano⁷⁶ and it was he who later approved the

Congregation of Missionaries in 1841, but four years after the death of St. Gaspar!⁷⁷

Merlini notes that Gaspar, in writing to Sr. Maria Giuseppa Pitorri, discussing the devotion to the Most Precious Blood, told her “that it seemed to him that Jesus had spoken to him that as he had shed his Blood amidst sufferings, thus amidst sufferings the glories [of the Blood] were to be spread.”⁷⁸

This testimony resonates with the whole of Gaspar’s life, but it reaches its high point in the events which we have referred to in this section.

From these events, it is evident that Gaspar’s contributions to the modern history of devotion to the Most Precious Blood are outstanding, because, in defending the title of his Institute, he protected the cult of the Divine Blood from the Jansenist zeal of persons who had easy access even to the Apostolic Palace.

The Spiritual Legacy of the Congregation of St. Gaspar

Gaspar wanted to give his Congregation a well defined physiognomy. This consisted not only in its juridical organization and in the choice of apostolic works (missions, retreats, and “works of perseverance,” that is, the devotions, associations, evening oratories, etc., aimed at keeping alive the fruits of the retreat or mission) that are the substance for revitalizing the Church, but also in the cult of the Divine Blood, which animates the spiritual formation and the apostolate of the members.

Thus in the *Rule* approved later by Gregory XVI in 1841, he established that the Missionaries “from the moment which they serve (in the Church) under the standard and in the name of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, have nothing more at heart than to offer [that Blood] the worship it deserves and to spread that devotion everywhere; from this wellspring in fact came the abundance of all graces.”⁷⁹ Every member

who embraced the Institute consecrated himself to this mission: “to enter together with others in the commitment to propagate in a special way the great Devotion to the Most Precious Blood, and to apply its merits (*efficacia*) tirelessly with preaching, and with the administration of the Sacrament of Penance to Souls.”⁸⁰

Thus Gaspar writes to his Missionaries in the *Circular Letter* for the retreat in 1834:

As the Lord never fails to support every creature in its needs, so he offers us the Red Sea, a symbol and type of the mysteries of his Precious Blood. It is in that Blood that we find provisions for our welfare. The mystical soil of souls, arid because of sin, is cultivated and watered. A way is prepared for the sinner by which he may go out of Egypt, image of this wicked and desert-like world. To the penitent person, as well as to those souls burning with love for Jesus, he gives a spur, an incentive even to become shipwrecked in that mystic sea, thus spelling out another victory for the bountiful and divine Redeemer of all.⁸¹

In order for this to run truly well, Gaspar made his Missionaries understand—through exhortations, advice, and aids of all kinds—the need to nurture a great devotion to the Precious Blood, that mystical force of their sanctification and their apostolate.

Union with Jesus Christ is the goal to which we strive. This union consists in perfect, true, and pure love: therefore to love Jesus Christ. To love him 1) because he is our Father—we are sons of his Blood 2) out of gratitude: how much has he done for us? . . . 3) He does more for a Priest, elevated to the sublime dignity: to bring God to the world, to sacrifice to the Heavenly Father, to forgive sins, to preach the gospel to the people

. . . 4) As members of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood, then, we must preach the love for Jesus Christ to others; but one who is cold does not bring warmth to others. Therefore, devotion to the Most Precious Blood will be the most secure way to reach the love of Jesus Christ.⁸²

When his Missionaries were engaged in ministry, he found a way of reawakening in their hearts the ideal they had embraced, using a little note.

To Don Pietro Torsani he sends a word of praise and encouragement:

I give thanks to God for the zeal that you show for our devotion . . . Oh what a grace of God it is, my dearest in the Lord, to render service to the glory of Jesus Crucified. He gave himself entirely for us, and we must give ourselves entirely to him. We are irrevocably his. But he is the *fasciculus myrrhae* 'bundle of myrrh.' But, do we lose courage because of that? No. Read all the rest that lies in my heart.⁸³

In the same way he writes a lay collaborator: "I give thanks to God for the concern that you nourish in promoting the glories of the Divine Blood and I hope that abundant blessings will be your reward (to Giovanni Palmucci of Offida, July 31, 1828)."⁸⁴ To a diocesan priest: "Joyfully did I note the concern you have shown in increasing the number of the adorers of the Divine Blood. Oh how many blessings you will receive from the Lord! To a diocesan priest, Don Ferdinando Giglozzi of Fonta Liri (July 4, 1825)."⁸⁵

The Missionaries must not fear the battles that the demon puts up as obstacles to their apostolate. He works to take away from their clutches the souls redeemed by the Blood of Christ; the devil becomes "angry"⁸⁶ and for his part "The devil does everything in his power to keep

Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood far away.” *Ipsi (enim specialiter) vicerunt draconem propter Sanguinem Agni* ‘They (in particular) conquered the dragon because of the Blood of the Lamb’ [Rv 12: 11].⁸⁷

In the Blood of Christ the Missionaries will find the support for bearing their crosses and the reward of their apostolate.

Spreading the devotion to the Most Precious Blood in the specific apostolate of the ministry of the word can be said to be the task Gaspar gave to his Missionaries during his life, and entrusted to them as a precious gift after his death, in order that everyone might hear the invitation of divine love coming from the Blood of Jesus.

Vincent Pallotti, in this testimony in the canonical processes, describes this solemn handing on not as a word barely murmured but as a trumpet blast that would sound throughout the world:

[Gaspar] was the man particularly chosen and enriched with the needed and opportune natural and supernatural gifts from God to be the heaven-like trumpet of the gospel in the Church at this time, capable of illuminating the people through his preaching the divine values of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. He preached this so fully as to sufficiently arouse hearts to a love of Jesus who with infinite love poured out all of his Most Precious Blood for us.⁸⁸

Pallotti goes on to say later that Gaspar was chosen to be the founder of the Congregation of Missionaries

who in their daily, monthly and annual occupations, giving Missions and Retreats, preach the infinite treasures of the Most Precious Blood, thus continuing to be in the Church of God so many more trumpets of paradise to destroy in the hearts of sinners all earthly affections . . .⁸⁹

Chapter Five

Sisters of the Most Precious Blood

The Missionaries of the Precious Blood came into being soon after the time of Gaspar's exile, as he wrote to Leo XII on July 29, 1825.¹ The plan to found the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood was also born during the exile, in Bologna, to be precise.

We know that in 1811, while Albertini and Gaspar were together in Bologna, they were guests of the Countesses Marianna Spada Bentivoglio and Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi, her daughter.² Albertini, who had been chosen by Catherine as her spiritual director, saw in her and revealed to her that God was calling her to found an institute of sisters, who would be called the *Figlie del Preziosissimo Sangue* 'Daughters of the Most Precious Blood.' They were to be dedicated to the care of the sick in hospitals and in homes.³ On November 29, 1812, while Albertini found himself in Corsica in the harsh prisons of Bastia, Bentivoglio began writing the *Rules of the Daughters of the Most Precious Blood*,⁴ in line with the directions she had received from Albertini during his stay in Bologna and also in light of the experience of service to the sick in hospitals that she had at that time.⁵

When Albertini was freed from prison in Corsica in May 1814 he passed through Bologna before returning

to Rome. There he communicated to Bentivoglio that he had changed his mind about the apostolate of the Daughters of the Most Precious Blood: they were to be an institute of contemplative life. Finally, after Albertini's death in Terracina on November 24, 1819, Bentivoglio came to know, by means of the *Articoli Fondamentali* that were sent to her from Rome, that the Institute of the Daughters of the Most Precious Blood would be dedicated to the secular and religious education of women. Thus, in a letter of November 20, 1820, to Mons. Gian Francesco Falzacappa (1767–1840), the person whom Albertini asked to assist Bentivoglio in the founding of the institute, she describes the various changes in the activities of the institute:

In the rule I wrote when Father [Albertini] (*il Papà*) was in Corsica⁶ . . . everything is there, because 'these rules carried the obligation of serving the sick in hospitals [and] at home,' as I told you, but I believed that the institute was for education and less aimed at the cloister. I became aware of the latter [the cloister] upon his return from exile and the part about Education I determined from the papers they sent me after his death . . .⁷

The papers sent from Rome after the death of Albertini that Bentivoglio is speaking of are the *Articoli fondamentali sopra de' quali resterà basato il nuovo Istituto delle Devote del Preziosissimo Sangue di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo* 'Fundamental Articles on which will be based the new Institute of [Sisters] Devoted to the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,' composed by Albertini after he was nominated bishop of Terracina, Sezze, and Priverno, in 1819. According to the prescriptions of these *Articoli Fondamentali* Bentivoglio was to found the Institute of the Daughters of the Most Precious Blood.

St. Gaspar Helps the
Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi to
Found the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood.

In May 1820 Bentivoglio was called to Rome together with three other companions to begin the work. Unfortunately, and notwithstanding the various attempts made (in the Monastery of the Oblates of St. Philip Neri in the Monti district, the Monastery of Divine Love near the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, and finally in Frosinone, in the school of Maria Teresa Spinelli, future foundress of the Augustinian Sisters of Jesus and Mary), Bentivoglio could not establish the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood and she died on July 9, 1826.

Mons. Falzacappa, who had the responsibility for aiding Bentivoglio in the founding of the sisters, was created cardinal and bishop of Ancona in 1823 and later, under Pius VIII, bishop of Albano. Despite his good will, he was not able to help Bentivoglio realize the work while she was alive.

In this situation Gaspar was not able to be personally involved in the founding of the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, even telling Merlini that this foundation was not his affair.⁸ He placed Merlini in charge of revising the *Rules* of 1821–22, written by Bentivoglio in collaboration with others and in conformity with the provisions of *Articoli Fondamentali*. At the same time, Gaspar always felt a lively desire to found such an institute, out of respect for Albertini. For this reason he committed himself to collaborate energetically to this end with Falzacappa. This interest of Gaspar, always subordinated to the decisions of Falzacappa, we gather from the letters he wrote to both Bentivoglio and Falzacappa, which were found in Tarquinia in 1997 in the archive of the *Società Tarquiniense d'Arte e Storia*.⁹

Toward the end of 1820 Gaspar had Falzacappa present a plan already drawn up by Albertini to Pope

Pius VII. This plan for reforming the Church called for opening religious houses under the protection (*sotto l'invocazione*) of the Most Precious Blood in every diocese for the human and Christian education of women by means of a school and spiritual exercises. The ideal would be to start this work in Rome, "the center of Catholicism," and looking at "one of the languishing monasteries for this tender plant, which, grown to the glory of God, would extend its branches for the Reform of the people."¹⁰ In the *Pro Memoria* to Pius VII Gaspar had stated that "already since the exile there is no lack of persons to put [this plan] into action"¹¹ and that among those to be included were the niece of Albertini, Maria Giuseppa Pitorri,¹² and his own sister-in-law Paolina Castellini and her daughter Luigia del Bufalo.¹³ In his zealous enthusiasm St. Gaspar suggested to Falzacappa the names of some Roman monasteries suitable to be given over for the beginning of the work¹⁴ and made it known that he knew other persons ready to collaborate with those already designated by Albertini.¹⁵

In addition, St. Gaspar had committed himself to helping Bentivoglio in compiling the *Rules* of 1821, as we have already indicated above.¹⁶ These revisions had to respect the provisions given by Albertini in the *Articoli Fondamentali*, according to which the aim of the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood was:

. . . to obtain with wholehearted commitment that the Blood of eternal life, the price of our Redemption, not be shed in vain, but that each might take advantage of it for his/her own salvation. But since a most efficacious means to add to such an aim is a good civil, Christian, and spiritual education, this will be the principal aim of the new Pious Institute (articles 1–2).¹⁷

Writing to Falzacappa on November 1, 1820, Gaspar tells him:

My dear Monsignor, I do not let pass a favorable opportunity for this purpose, always working in the silence that is the soul of pious institutions. I have already written to the Bishop of Narni [Antonio Maria Borghi] to have the constitutions of which I spoke to you . . . I have already indicated to the Countess, that my sister-in-law will enter. In the matter of *articoli fondamentali*, after long prayers, they can from time to time sit down at the desk and note down whatever God will inspire. Also you may confirm in writing if there was any agreement (*si rimase d' intelligenza*).¹⁸

At the end of February 1821 the first draft of the *Rules* was ready. There was a great deal of work to be done on these *Rules* to bring them in conformity with the provisions of the *Articoli Fondamentali* of Albertini as well as with the Rules of the Oblates of St. Philip Neri and later with those of the Monastery of Divine Love. This was a project that lasted from the middle of 1820 through the fall of 1822.

Prior to going to Frosinone with the teacher Maria Teresa Spinelli for a third attempt at founding the sisters, Bentivoglio sent ahead the aforementioned *Rules* to Spinelli, in order to acquaint her with the spirit and apostolic activity of the institute she intended to found.¹⁹ It seems that Gaspar had given these *Rules* to Merlini so that he could polish them, bringing them into conformity with the provisions of the *Articoli Fondamentali* of Albertini and assimilating them "to our methods," that is to the *Rules* of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, "given that they are of the same spirit" (*essendone eguale lo spirito*).²⁰

In the same way, Gaspar collaborated with Falzacappa in 1825, when Bentivoglio proposed the possibility of going to Terracina to start the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood in the work begun in this city by Don Luigi Locatelli.²¹

St. Gaspar Enlists the Help of Various Persons to Found the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood

As long as Bentivoglio was alive, St. Gaspar, even though he was aware that the founding of the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood was not his "affair," as we have previously noted, nevertheless sought out and assisted various priest friends and pious women to establish the Institute of the Sisters of the Blood of Christ in various dioceses according to Albertini's plan. There were several attempts at such foundations.

Before examining those attempts supported by St. Gaspar, we should respond to the following questions: Why so many foundations of sisters, in various dioceses? Moreover, why were the foundations entrusted to *secular priests*, good and zealous, but not to his Missionaries, as will be the case after 1830?

We find the response to these questions in the *Pro Memoria* which Gaspar had Falzacappa present to Pius VII at the end of 1820, as noted above. We found the response repeated in an explicit way in some material which Gaspar formulated for Leo XII and sent to Mons. Cristaldi in 1825. In these documents Gaspar points out not only the areas in which it was necessary to work for a true reform of the Church, but he also suggested some appropriate remedies. In the material regarding "*nuns*," St. Gaspar proposes that each diocese have an institute for educating girls, according to the directives of the *Articoli Fondamentali*.

Every diocese should have at least one institute for the education of girls; wherever that is lacking, the late Monsignor Albertini has laid down basic procedures by which, with little difficulty, an organization can be set up, under the title of Adorers of the Divine Blood, so that every girl will recall the price of our redemption and the concern that we all must have for our eternal

salvation (*ognuno ricordi cosa costan le anime nostre, e qual impegno aver dobbiamo, onde salvarle in eterno*).²²

These various foundations, then, according to the plan formulated in the so-called *Pro Memoria* to Pius VII, were to come together in the foundation which Bentivoglio was supposed to establish under the guidance of Cardinal Gian Francesco Falzacappa.

With this goal in mind, St. Gaspar sought to press for various foundations, entrusting them to zealous diocesan priests, although in the early years, given his position, he would have had to watch over the effort more attentively. He did not obligate his Missionaries and himself, whether for reasons of the distance from the ministry or to avoid further gossip about the Congregation, which was under harsh attacks particularly from the time when Gaspar was given the task of overcoming brigandage in the Province of Marittima and Campagna, from October 1821 to about 1830.²³

We can infer this from the testimony of Don Biagio Valentini, successor of St. Gaspar in governing the Congregation and his spiritual director after the death of Albertini:

At the beginning of his ministry, the Servant of God, for prudential reasons, showed that he was against setting up those foundations of teachers under the title of the Most Precious Blood *both because at that time there would probably have been more gossip directed against the Institute by its opponents and* because his main interest was the implantation, the establishment and the perfecting of his Institute of missionaries. During the later years of his life, in seeing that his Institute of missionaries was progressing in its membership as a result of his labors, he felt better disposed to set the other Institute of women teachers in motion through the

cooperation of Fr. Giovanni Merlini and me.
This was blessed by God . . .²⁴

This task was given to Valentini and Merlini in 1830 as we will see.

Here are the various attempts at foundations that were promoted by St. Gaspar, which we know from his letters and from other sources.²⁵

The Foundation at Offida

The foundation at Offida, in the province of Ascoli Piceno, goes back to 1821, the year in which St. Gaspar preached a mission in this town.²⁶

In a letter of October 13, 1821, to Sig. Giovanni Francesco Palmucci, he writes: "A thousand greetings to the Adorers of the Blood of Jesus Christ. Oh what a grand title! Oh what a beautiful boast for Offida!"²⁷ This is a sign, therefore, that the foundation of Offida goes back to 1821 and that it enjoys the "beautiful boast" of being the first of these foundations!

Offida lent itself well to an institution like this, because in the Church of St. Augustine an important relic of the Most Precious Blood from a Eucharistic miracle that had taken place at Lanciano in 1273 was still being venerated. In his letters Gaspar writes: "With tenderness, I recall the Mission I conducted there, especially the procession with the holy relic."²⁸ He exclaims: "Oh, what beautiful days I spent in Offida!"²⁹ He would have liked to establish a mission house in that town to keep the devotion to the Precious Blood alive, but the efforts came to nothing.³⁰ He did, however, establish all of the usual works that he was accustomed to leave after completing the missions, entrusting them to zealous priests.

When he had to propose the founding of the Adorers of the Most Precious Blood in the city or town of some priest, he would readily point to the Adorers of Offida, also making clear the purpose of these foundations. In a letter that St. Gaspar wrote from Frosinone on April 11,

1824, to Don Ferdinando Angelici, his dear friend in Santanatolia (today Esantoglia in the Province of Macerata), pointing out the example of the Adorers of Offida, he makes him aware of the apostolic activity of the sisters and of his intense desire to expand such foundations:

. . . in Offida, there are individuals who have joined together and have set up a certain type of foundation and taken on this title [of Adorers of the Most Precious Blood]. The substantial notion for the institute is that of public education, for girls and women by means of retreats. But this good work could be initiated only gradually. Canon Tarulli is also familiar with that type of institute. If necessary, send your letters to me in Rome. I shall make every effort to be as helpful as I can. I am not, however, knowledgeable about the temporal bases, the hereditary rights. The reverend Vicar could advise about that subject. After a novena to St. Francis Xavier, he will be able to begin by giving impetus to this important program for the greater glory of God and tending toward the care for souls. Miserable thing that I am, I shall not cease praying and have others pray.³¹

In another letter to Don Ferdinando Angelici of March 12, 1825 he writes: "I will not fail to pray that the Lord will bless the holy desires of the Alberici Adorers of the Divine Blood. May Jesus protect them in the grand work that they have planned."³²

All of these foundations, then, were to be modeled on the *Articoli Fondamentali* of Albertini.

The previously cited letter to Angelici of April 11, 1824 paves the way for speaking of another foundation. In the letter St. Gaspar writes: "Canon Tarulli is also familiar with (*è anche inteso di*) that type of institute."³³

Foundation at Matelica

In the letter of April 11, 1824 St. Gaspar names Canon Adriano M. Tarulli, who was from Matelica, in the Province of Macerata. Thus, if he was “familiar with that type of institute,” it means that quite probably some foundation of Sisters [of the Precious Blood] had been realized in this city.

We found a certain confirmation of this supposition in examining the witness for the *Processi Canonici* of St. Gaspar. The same Canon Tarulli, telling of the way in which he came to know St. Gaspar, says:

In May 1818, when the Venerable Canon Del Bufalo had gone to Matelica, my home town, to engage in the apostolic ministry of the Most Holy Missions . . . , I had occasion to associate with him daily . . . In September of the same year . . . *I went to the house of a pious lady who was a teacher in schools for girls.* I heard a cry of young people on the street. I went to the window and was told that Canon Del Bufalo with some other companions was passing through Matelica, in order to reach the Mission of Cerreto . . .³⁴

From this deposition and from the letter of St. Gaspar one deduces that a pious woman of Matelica certainly established a school for girls there and that this school, likely started in Matelica proper, was truly a foundation of the Institute of the Adorers of the Most Precious Blood that was realized between 1818 and 1824. In fact, St. Gaspar, in a letter to Tarulli dated December 25, 1820, writes thus: “As for the young lady that you have directed and who wishes to become a nun, would you not consider her fit to join the new institute that you are acquainted with?”³⁵ In another letter of September 5, 1821, he further defines the project, including it in that of Bentivoglio:

The idea of a foundation is a holy one, and to my fullest satisfaction in God. I presume that the pious person will be able to dispose of the estate. The foundation could be started whenever one wishes. The bishop of Camerino [Mons. Nicola Mattei Baldini] is fully behind such an institution in general, since we have discussed setting up one in Camerino. I would begin it on a small scale, and, when things begin to develop, I would have two of those selected according to the spirit of the organization to come from Rome. The mother can remain with her daughter, and in this there would be no obstacle. Let me know with greater precision how many could be supported on the present endowment. Later on, God will provide. I would begin the organization with the two from Rome, but with the principal foundress from that area. I would check out the articles in the first section. There will be furniture.

So, nothing more remains to be done except for you to have a meeting with the Archbishop, whom I will inform beforehand, and then more details *ad alias* 'for another time.' Perhaps it will be necessary to support the two from Rome since they will be taken from another community. Let us develop everything by the use of prayer. In matters such as these, *bonum est praestolari in silentio* 'it is good to wait in silence' [Lam 3: 26]. Include in your calculations also the support of relatives concerning whom I have no clear information. May Jesus be with us and may his grace abound in our hearts. Amen.³⁶

On October 13, 1821, St. Gaspar recommended that Tarulli start a foundation of sisters in Pievetorina:

Look after the beginning of the foundation in Pievetorina, by adhering to the articles now as though in school. In Offida, they have obtained the longed for title. *Ora, iube, vale* 'Pray, entreat, be steadfast.' Tell me what I should do with the novice's documents.³⁷

Foundation at Santanatolia

In the previously cited letter of April 11, 1824, to Don Ferdinando Angelici, Gaspar writes thus of the proposal for an institute of Sisters of the Most Precious Blood in Santanatolia, present day Esantoglia, in the Province of Macerata:

Vicar Buscalfemi's project is not to be disdained, and they could activate an institute of Adorers of the Divine Blood observing those regulations that might be revived so that the basic idea is not mistaken. Even in Offida, there are individuals who have joined together and have set up a certain type of foundation and taken on this title. The substantial notion for the institute is that of public education, for girls and women by means of retreats. But this good work could be initiated only gradually. Canon Tarulli is also in agreement with that type of institute. If necessary, send your letters to me in Rome. I shall make every effort to be as helpful as I can.³⁸

The institution of Santanatolia, nevertheless, could not be realized. In 1830 St. Maria De Mattias makes mention of this in one of her letters:

I believed that the school in this town [Santanatolia] was very necessary, all the more because our Founder, Canon Del Bufalo, spoke of this from 1830³⁹ with these Ladies, and ordered it begun immediately, and they began to offer school to some girls in this town.⁴⁰

The Attempt in Morino

In a long letter to Mons. Paolo Trucchi, written on May 17, 1850, St. Maria De Mattias makes him aware of another attempt at a foundation in Morino, in the vicinity of Avezzano.

Mons. Trucchi had rebuked Maria, because she had it in her head to found some houses. The saint responded that

I had never wanted to be involved in opening the schools, nor to seek them on my own, but to accept those that were offered either by the Bishop or by the Comune, not out of my own interest or vanity, but for the salvation of souls for Jesus.⁴¹

She goes on to cite the case of Morino, where, with the permission of Mons. Vincenzo Annovazzi, Bishop of Anagni, she went to open a school in November 1841, at the invitation of the pastor in the name of the bishop of Sora and of the Comune [of Sora].

After a few years the new bishop of Anagni, Mons. Pier Paolo Turchi, issued “a decree to close this school.” Maria goes on to say:

The pastor had received word to execute this order, but he immediately [sent] a letter to the eminent bishop, very resentful in tone, saying that if the current Teacher (*Maestra*) is recalled, he would have to send some others, under the same title of the Most Precious Blood, because that school was built for that purpose at the advice of the late Canon Del Bufalo.⁴²

According to this testimony, the foundation in Morino did not take place prior to the attempt of De Mattias. Nevertheless, it reveals to us the tireless concern of St. Gaspar to spread this institute in various places. To whoever asked him for prayers that the Lord might help some girl discover her vocation, Gaspar



Don Biagio Valentini

would respond: “With regard to the soul, etc., etc., miserable thing that I am, I shall continue to pray. Who knows whether God is not reserving her for the Institute of the Sisters Adorers of the Divine Blood?” Thus Gaspar wrote to D. Pietro Butti, canon of Alatri, from San Felice di Giano on January 20, 1826.⁴³

St. Gaspar Entrusts the Task of the Founding of Sisters of the Most Precious Blood to Valentini and Merlini

As noted previously, Cardinal Falzacappa withdrew his commitment to guide the Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi in the founding of the Adorers of the Most Precious Blood and the countess died on July 9, 1826. Around 1830, after the opposition to the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood came to an end, St. Gaspar entrusted Don Biagio Valentini and Don Giovanni Merlini, two of his most effective Missionaries, with the task of working toward the founding of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood. Valentini is linked to the foundation of the Adorers of the Most Precious Blood in Patrica (Frosinone) and

Merlini to the foundation of the Adorers of the Most Precious Blood of Acuto (Frosinone).

The “*Maestre Pie del Divin Sangue*” of Patrica⁴⁴

We begin with a selection from a memorandum (*Memoria*) of the archpriest of Patrica, Don Giacomo Pilotti, which gives us some information on the origin of the foundation in Patrica.⁴⁵

The foundation in the area [Patrica] dates from the end of 1832 with the establishment of a Pious Conservatory (*Conservatorio Pio*) which began nearby.

A certain Clementina Giorgi of Ferentino came around that time to become a *Maestra Pia*, and she joined with a certain Brigida Contenta, an honest spinster of Patrica, who had received an inheritance from a relative of hers, and they informed Archpriest Giacomo Pilotti of their desire to form a Conservatory of *Maestre Pie*. In this union they could serve the Lord better by the *observance of a rule (regolare osservanza)*, at the same time applying themselves to the public instruction of girls there and in other places of the Diocese, according to the judgment of the Ordinary and if the number of *Maestre* would increase. The Archpriest was well aware of the great advantages that could redound to civil and Christian society by the Pious Establishment and gave his full consent to the project and, trusting in divine assistance, aided the Work. In a short time a house with attached garden was acquired.

This narrative of the zealous archpriest, also a martyr of the Napoleonic persecution, is incomplete in several aspects.

In the first place, from his account it is not clear who was the real foundress, while it is certain that Brigida

Contenta deserves the title. It was she who wanted the foundation and made it possible with her inheritance. Beyond that, in the "Chronicle of the Mission House of Patrica" edited by Don Angelo Mordenti, Missionary of the Precious Blood, we have found explicit mention that the *Maestre Pie* were founded "in Patrica by means of *Maestra Brigida Contenta*, who was joined by the three Alderisio sisters and others from the town and neighboring region."⁴⁶ Finally, some notes regarding the house in Patrica, inserted after the selection of Pilotti which we have reproduced, state explicitly that on February 18, 1850, *Maestra Brigida Contenta*, *foundress*, died and was buried in the Church of San Rocco.

From the quotation of Pilotti we do not have the exact title of the "Pious Establishment" of Sisters, while from the "Chronicle" of Mordenti and the older tradition of Patrica we have certain knowledge that it had the title of "Most Precious Blood."

This title leads us to suspect that St. Gaspar or at least some Missionary of the Precious Blood had to be involved at the origin of the foundation. There is no mention of this in the memorandum of Pilotti. The suspicion becomes a certainty, because we have found, in a notice regarding the Pious Conservatory of Patrica, that at the death of Contenta she willed her entire inheritance to the *Maestre Pie* or, if these had been suppressed, to the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, or absent these, to the Sisters Adorers of Acuto.⁴⁷ (We note in passing that the Missionaries had not opened a house in Patrica while Contenta was living, but had ministered there many times, spreading the devotion to the Most Precious Blood. The disposition of the foundress, therefore, was intended to facilitate the establishment of the mission house in this town.) Why this interest in the Missionaries, we ask, if they were not involved in the foundation of the *Maestre Pie* of Patrica? Why, then, was there such pressure from D. Biagio Valentini, in

agreement with the archpriest Pilotti, to foster the union with the Sisters of De Mattias?⁴⁸

The answer to these and other queries can be given only if we admit the presence of the Missionaries at the origins of this institution. Justifiably, then, the Missionary D. Francesco Gargari testifies in the canonical processes of beatification of Merlini that “the Venerable Del Bufalo together with D. Biagio Valentini, now deceased, founded a house of these Sisters Adorers in Patrica, Diocese of Ferentino.”⁴⁹

The Foundation of St. Maria De Mattias in Acuto.

Among the various attempts at establishing the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, the institute founded by St. Maria De Mattias was blessed with vitality and permanence.

Divine providence had already begun to prepare the cornerstone of the new institute in a region where brigandage was freely spilling the blood of revenge and of cruelty: in Vallecorsa, a town of the Ciociaria, in the province of Frosinone.

It was here in March of 1822 that Gaspar and his companions were called to overcome the brigands with the word of God by the preaching of a mission, according to the provisions of *Progetto di cultura religiosa e morale per la Delegazione di Frosinone* “The project of religious and moral culture for the Delegation of Frosinone,”⁵⁰ approved by Pius VII on October 8, 1821. A regular participant in the functions of the missions was Maria De Mattias (born February 4, 1805), a seventeen-year-old girl who “for about three months . . . had given herself completely to God.”⁵¹ Gaspar, having gone up “on the platform, seemed to Maria to be directing a penetrating look at her, pointing out to her the crucifix he had in his hand.”⁵² This encounter with the gaze of Gaspar aroused a burning desire (*una fiamma viva*) for the same ideal in the heart of the young woman. In fact Merlini, later her spiritual director, writes: “Reflecting on the great good



Maria De Mattias

that the Venerable [Gaspar] had promoted with the Holy Mission, [Maria] conceived a great desire to imitate him, working for the salvation of souls as well as she knew how and was able to.”⁵³

In 1824 Gaspar sent Don Giovanni Merlini to Vallecorsa for Lenten preaching. Maria, after about twenty days of spiritual anxiety, revealed her soul to him and asked him to be her spiritual director. Merlini directed Maria from 1824 to 1866, the year of her death, after obtaining permission from his own director, St. Gaspar. This permission was also reaffirmed later on, when St. Gaspar forbade Merlini to take on more spiritual direction because, in his position as secretary general, he was very much occupied with the affairs of the Congregation. Gaspar nonetheless permitted Merlini to continue spiritual direction with Maria.⁵⁴

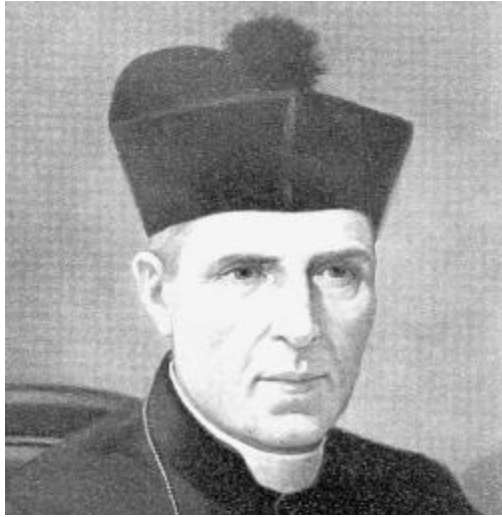
Under Merlini’s direction and through contact with the Missionaries of the Precious Blood who had been established in Vallecorsa, the heart of Maria opened to the devotion to the Divine Blood, whose seeds, moreover, were noted in the spirituality of her early years.⁵⁵ Spurred on by the Blood of Christ, the desire for perfection and apostolic zeal continued to grow in her. Thus

writes Merlini: “. . . she wanted to live totally withdrawn from the world, and she contemplated entering some monastery, but as a lay sister, to spend her days unknown and neglected.”⁵⁶ In fact, at the request of her father, Giovanni De Mattias, St. Gaspar sought a monastery for his daughters,⁵⁷ until in August 1827 Maria, after a period of discernment,⁵⁸ joined the Trinitarian Sisters, who had opened a school for girls in Vallecorsa. Unfortunately, her stay with these religious lasted a short time because, after the death of her sister Vincenza on January 21, 1829, Maria had to return to her family. Merlini writes in the *Compendio*: “In 1829 [Maria] lost her sister and soon would lose her mother [who died on September 1, 1830] and had to devote herself to running the house.”⁵⁹

After leaving the Trinitarians, Maria had a personal meeting with St. Gaspar, the only one in her lifetime, to seek counsel on her vocation. She herself tells us this in a letter to Merlini written on August 12, 1847. She writes:

One time I was fortunate to speak with the Servant of God [Gaspar] to receive advice on my vocation. He advised me not to go to other monasteries,⁶⁰ telling me that I could become holy in any place. He told me to learn the Office of the Blessed Virgin and to study Fr. Rodríguez. Thinking back on these words, it seems that the good Father wanted to make me ready for this Work.⁶¹

This meeting took place in the middle of May 1830.⁶² Certainly it is in August 1830 that Maria shows herself willing to go to Norcia as a *maestra pia* at the school for girls there, responding to the request that Mons. Gaetano Bonanni made to St. Gaspar, because Bonanni found in him a person suitable for this task. Gaspar dared to ask the father of Maria, Giovanni, to willingly give up his daughter to the Lord, assuring him “that he



Don Giovanni Merlini

would have great merit in Paradise for doing this.”⁶³ “My Father”—Maria writes—“cried very much, but he made his sacrifice willingly.”⁶⁴ Even though everything was ready for Norcia and in April 1831 a detailed itinerary for the trip to this city had been prepared according to the various stages meticulously described to Mattias by Merlini,⁶⁵ the journey and the proposal to found the Institute of Adorers of the Most Precious Blood were put on hold because of the revolutionary movements in central Italy in 1831.⁶⁶

After the failed attempt in Norcia there was an opportunity for a school in Acuto. On March 4, 1834 Maria arrived in Acuto, with “the desired and expected blessing” of Gaspar, “who had told her to go with courage and trust in God, because everything would turn out well.”⁶⁷ She came there “not only to open a school, but to found a Monastery as well”⁶⁸ “under the title of the Most Precious Blood.”⁶⁹

Thus the seed God planted through Gaspar in the fertile soil of the heart of Maria in 1822 bloomed and matured under the wise guidance of Merlini and, with

the ongoing collaboration of Maria, brought forth abundant fruit and luxurious growth after the death of St. Gaspar.

We have recounted this chapter only to shed light on the action undertaken by St. Gaspar to give to the Church, by means of St. Maria De Mattias and Venerable Giovanni Merlini, a congregation of women dedicated to the Blood of Jesus: the Adorers of the Most Precious Blood.

Conclusion

The Missionaries and the Adorers of the Most Precious Blood are like two beats of the same heart. The truth of this image of life is the communion of ideals for which they work in the Church: to become holy (through adoration) and to make others holy (through mission) with faith in the Precious Blood which Jesus shed for the salvation of all. That is to say, that they announce the Gospel of the Blood of Christ and give witness to it by their lives.

This is the end that St. Gaspar wished for and which he defended with the greatest sacrifice. It is the end achieved by St. Maria De Mattias, whom one can consider the loveliest fruit cultivated and harvested by Gaspar and by his Missionaries.¹ And this is their specific mission in the field of the Lord, as Blessed John XXIII reminded the Missionaries, the Sisters, and the laity of the Pious Union of the Most Precious Blood in the audience granted them on June 2, 1962: “Behold, my dear sons and daughters, the meaning of your presence in the Church, the tenor (*tono*) that your service in the womb of the Church must assume: to spread the devotion to the Most Precious Blood . . .”²

The value of this specific apostolate, begun by Gaspar in the womb of the Church, reaches unexpected frontiers of space and time. From his heart comes a procession of apostles, who go into the world holding the

chalice of salvation in their hands. In fact, Gaspar saw this and rejoiced in it:

In my mind's eye, at times, I see a multitude of workers who are gradually making their way throughout the entire earth with the holy chalice of Redemption, offering to the Divine Father the Divine Blood: *Pacificans per Sanguinem* 'making peace through the Blood' [Col 1: 20]; and, at the same time applying it to souls: *Iustificati in Sanguine*, etc. 'justified in the Blood' [Rom 5: 9]. While there are many who will be giving abuse to the price of our Redemption: *Quae utilitas in Sanguine meo*. . . 'What profit is there in my Blood' [Ps 30: 9], there will also be a huge army of souls who, with solemn worship, will be seeking to make compensation for the many wrongs that Jesus receives . . .³

The standard-bearer of this procession of apostles and adorers of the Divine Blood is St. Gaspar del Bufalo. Blessed John XXIII justifiably linked the name of St. Gaspar to the devotion to the Most Precious Blood in his apostolic letter *Inde a Primis*, just as St. Bernadine of Siena is associated with the devotion to the Name of Jesus and that of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque is associated with devotion to the Sacred Heart.⁴

* * * * *

In this work we have accompanied St. Gaspar in his formation and his mission as Apostle of the Most Precious Blood and we pause to admire Gaspar's qualities as one who adored the Divine Blood and who spread its devotion.

We will do this through the eyes of those who lived with him and we add some additional testimony found in the canonical processes for beatification and canonization.

Don Beniamino Romani, who for many years had “the opportunity to work with and talk with”⁵ Gaspar, asserts “with full conviction that . . . such devotion to the price of redemption [in him] was constantly tender, strong, and operative, and one can say that it surpassed that of all others he knew, thus . . . he was the *principal propagator* of [the devotion].”⁶

The Missionary Don Luigi Mosconi adds that by Gaspar’s work, “I know that [the devotion] was spread and propagated.”⁷

Don Ferdinando Angelici confirms these claims with the results achieved in the Marches, comparing the state of the devotion before and after Gaspar’s apostolic work:

I . . . know . . . [the] infinite price of our redemption in our region came to be venerated in a generic way, but . . . after the preaching of the Venerable [Gaspar] it came to be venerated in a *very special manner*, through the institution of the appropriate sodality with the title of the Most Precious Blood.⁸

St. Vincent Pallotti, recalling the image of the prophecy of Sr. Maria Agnese del Verbo Incarnato, rightly calls Gaspar the “gospel trumpet of Paradise” and “the most zealous propagator in our time of Aggregation of people to the Venerable Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.”⁹

Angelici, who, as we have already noted, compared him to one of the twenty-four elders of the Apocalypse,¹⁰ calls him also the “the superhuman adorer of . . . the Most Precious Blood.”¹¹

We make reference, at last, to the testimony of the Venerable Giovanni Merlini in the *Processo Ordinario e Apostolico di Albano*. We apologize for the length, but this selection constitutes a magnificent synthesis of all that we have said up to this point:

Above all, [Gaspar] was enraptured by devotion to the Precious Blood. He used to say that he

would not deprive anyone of that devotion. (Writing to Cristaldi on June 10, 1823 from Offida) he expressed his feelings by saying: 'Oh! Would that the entire world were purged of the leprosy of sin! This is the objective toward which our devotion tends, our very title! This divine Blood is offered continuously in the holy Mass, it is applied in the sacraments, and it is the price of salvation; finally, it is the testimony of the love of a God made man!' Elsewhere, I mentioned that he had made a vow to promote this tender devotion.

At the urgent request of the Servant of God, Monsignor Strambi gathered together materials for the month of the Most Precious Blood and Monsignor Bonanni, our colleague at that time, saw to its spread. At the urgent request of the Servant of God, Canon Palma put into print another compilation of monthly devotions entitled: *L'anima invitata alla contemplazione dei misteri del Sangue di Gesù Cristo in 31 meditazioni per ciasun giorno del mese*. 'The soul invited to the contemplation of the mysteries of the Blood of Jesus Christ, in 31 meditations, one for each day of the month.'¹² This pious author dedicated it to the Servant of God on June 30, 1829,¹³ despite the fact that the Servant of God wanted it to be dedicated to the King of Naples, as is noted in the letter of July 23, 1829. In addition to those two monthly devotions in honor of the Most Precious Blood which he inspired, he likewise encouraged the printing of a third consisting of short meditations. Also, through his influence, many confraternities of the Most Precious Blood were established and aggregated to the Archconfraternity set up in Rome in the church of San Nicola in Carcere. He

also lined up a large number of aggregators, whenever possible, even in foreign areas, so as to increase the number of devotees and enrollees.

He urged the recitation of the *Glory be* seven times a day in remembrance of the principal seven sheddings of the Most Precious Blood. In this regard, I point out that he made a mistake, as Monsignor Muccioli and others likewise did. Not having carefully examined the Brief, it was thought that this practice was the work enjoined for the gaining of the indulgences. However, as I pointed out to Fr. Biagio Valentini, after the death of the Servant of God, reading the Brief once again in reference to that action, there was an indulgence granted independently of them. Perhaps this error happened because, at the beginning, the recitation of the *Glory be* seven times was recommended and very simply was considered to be the work enjoined. It is quite certain that the Servant of God thought that the matter should continue as explained. In no way, did he commit the least defect in maintaining that, since he was in good faith and did not, even for a moment, have a doubt.

Furthermore, he engaged in seeking the promotion of a perpetual cult of adoration of the inestimable price of our salvation. He recommended an hour of adoration; he saw to the printing and distribution of many flyers. He was greatly delighted when he learned that in Naples they were seeking devotees who, in the course of the year and with shared hours of adoration, would offer to the divine Eternal Father the price of redemption. Whenever anyone wished to please him, all he had to do was to tell him that he was

interested in propagating this devotion. He was very distressed when he found out that the devil had cut him off from a companion who had been very deeply dedicated; I, myself, saw him when he was afflicted for this reason.

He made every effort to have this devotion introduced not only to private families but also in churches and religious communities. Not only in the churches taken care of by the Institute but also those in places where he conducted missions and anywhere else that he could introduce the monthly devotion of the Most Precious Blood, which he referred to often with the substitute expression 'the great month.' He would simplify the procedure and wished that in the large cities they would pick twelve churches so that in each month of the year there would be a church offering adoration of the Most Precious Blood. In part, he carried out this desire of his in Rome, as long as he was alive, by contributing some of his own money annually to cover expenses. In Sant'Andrea delle Fratte he met a benefactor in 1832 (at the end of May he was present in the Church of San Carlo al Corso where he was preaching the month honoring the glories of Mary Most Holy) and made every effort to keep him interested, as that benefactor himself told me. His name was Ponziano Morichelli, the one encouraged by the Servant of God to perpetuate this devout exercise. In Perugia, in 1824, together with Canon Tori and Mr. Adriani, in the Church of the Addolorata, he set up the Pious Union of the Precious Blood and promoted the month of June, as seen in the decree of Monsignor Cittadini issued on May 30, 1835. Each year, he contributed to them three *scudi* and devotional materials.

Not satisfied with all that, he ordered that in all of the churches of the Institute, early each morning at the first Mass, the Chaplet of the Divine Blood should be recited along with the Seven Offerings, and that this was to be repeated in community after the period of meditation. On the day of the feast of the Most Precious Blood which we, by special privilege, celebrate on the first Sunday in July, he ordered the solemn exposition of the most Blessed Sacrament from early that morning until evening in order to call the faithful, in that way, to the special cult, directing them to recite in the morning the customary Chaplet in the presence of the sacramental Jesus and to repeat it at the evening service with *fervorini* and hymns. He ordered that this same Chaplet should be recited along with the Seven Offerings at the first Mass offered during missions. Wherever possible, he would leave behind this devout exercise. Furthermore, he saw to the translation of this Chaplet into various languages, as well as the month of June devotions which, at first, appeared under the name of Strambi since he had been the first to gather the materials together, then, under the name of Bonanni since he was responsible for its spread. Thus, he tried in this fashion to involve the people more and more in this most beloved devotion.

It is superfluous (*inutile*) to mention how much devotional material he distributed in this activity, how many times he had the Chaplet and the Seven Offerings printed and to how many people he distributed them so profusely. I shall say only that he seemed to regard any opportunity that was offered to him as a precious treasure. If the occasion was not there, he sought one on

his own, so great was his urge to propagate it. Once, finding it very difficult to satisfy a request submitted for this devotional material from Veroli, he told me that he did not have the heart to disappoint them, making every effort to remedy the situation as best he could.

Whenever he preached the glories of the Divine Blood, he was at times as it were outside of himself and tried to inflame each and every soul to a feeling of gratefulness. To succeed even better in this regard he would apply himself diligently, just as one day he said to me, to the study of Scripture and the Church Fathers in order to gather as much as he could for his sermons on the Divine Blood. He wanted his talks and any other presentations that he would make to show the fullness of doctrine and of inspiration. During missions, he delivered a sermon on the Most Precious Blood. Three times he preached the month in San Nicola in Carcere, three times in Sant'Andrea delle Fratte, even though on one occasion he did not complete it. Once he preached in the Church of the Carmine alle Tre Cannelle. Here, in Albano, he preached it many times and the last occasion, though he did not complete it all, was in the final year of his life. He preached that same monthly observance in Frosinone, Offida and elsewhere. Not only in public but also in private he spoke freely of the power and efficacy of the Divine Blood. He would say to me that this was the devotion for our time and that through it divine justice would be placated. In a word, he sought every possible means to propagate this devotion and did so with an unmatched fervor, as will become more apparent if you review all that I spoke of concerning the title of our Congregation. Here I

shall add only that in the last year of his life he suffered a great deal because of doubts that came to him about the manner of enrolling people in this devotion that we are treating here. However, he became calm upon reflecting that those doubts were the work of the devil, as he stated to me in a spiritual communication.

So great was his devotion to the price of our salvation that he wanted the concession of the office and the Mass of the Divine Blood extended to the entire Catholic world and he considered himself blessed if he would be able to achieve that goal before he died, as he mentioned to me several times. However, the Lord, who wanted to test the virtue of his Servant, did not will to give him the consolation of seeing the feast raised to a double of the first class with an octave for his Congregation, even though he himself had submitted a request to the Sacred Congregation of Rites.¹⁴

In order to animate himself more and more in the trust of divine mercy, he had the devout practice of often offering to the Eternal Divine Father the Blood of Jesus Christ with the customary ejaculatory prayer: 'Eternal Father' which he recommended and prescribed to us likewise at the conclusion of our meetings in common. He also applied this practice at the beginning and the end of his sermons, giving it as a reminder to the people and he also gave it as a penance in hearing confessions.

Since he had placed all of his hope in the merits of the Savior and in most holy Mary's intercession along with that of St. Francis Xavier, as was evident to me, I am certain that he never had doubts in any way when he was faced with

the question of eternal salvation, even though, in viewing his own demerits, he felt fears of being lost. With tenderness and a particular expansiveness of heart so that it showed even in his face, he would recall, meditate on and repeat those texts which inspire confidence in the merits of Jesus Christ, for example: '*Justificati in Sanguine ipsius, salvi erimus ab ira per ipsum*' 'justified by his Blood, shall we be saved from wrath through him' [Rom 5: 9]; '*Redemisti nos, Domine, in Sanguine tuo*' 'You have redeemed us, O Lord, in your Blood' [Rv 5: 9]. Softly, too, he would recall texts from the Fathers and Doctors, for example: '*Sanguis Christi, clavis paradisi*' 'The Blood of Christ, key of paradise'; '*Bonum aurum Sanguis Christi*' 'the Blood of Christ [is] fine gold.' I, myself, witnessed him tenderly moved and almost in tears whenever, feeling more than ordinary fervor, he would utter those passages. In writing to Cristaldi on June 29, 1827, he said: 'the Divine Blood, indeed, is the offering to be presented to the Eternal, Divine Father, for it is written: '*pacificans per Sanguinem Crucis ejus sive quae in caelis sive quae in terris sunt*' 'making peace through the Blood of his Cross both those things on heaven and on earth' [Col 1: 20]. It is a just thing to render a cult of special compensation, especially in our times, to Jesus who continues to repeat: '*quae utilitas in Sanguine meo?*' 'What profit is there in my Blood?' [Ps 30: 10]. Finally, while the devil would like to have all people be the victims of justice, through this devotion, may I say, the gates of divine mercy are opened and the only means established for reconciliation is made available. '*Justificati in Sanguine ipsius, salvi erimus ab ira per ipsum*' 'justified by his Blood, shall we be saved from

wrath through him' [Rom 5: 9]. He used this very same language not only with Cristaldi, but I also heard him use it from the preacher's platform as well as in private, familiar conversations.

Then, too, in writing to Monsignor Muccioli on September 4, 1822, he says: 'Our relatives, however, are not lost; they simply precede us and a sweet bond of religion unites us to them in a marvelous way. *Nolite contristari de dormientibus* 'Do not be sad over those who sleep' [A paraphrase of 1 Thes 4: 13]. You have probably learned already of the death of the good Fr. Torribio, whom God has willed to take back to himself. It is written: '*Oremus pro omnibus. Nunc nobis instat magna dies! At Sanguis Jesus Christi est nostra spes et salus pro vita aeterna*' 'Let us pray for everyone. The great day is upon us! But the Blood of Jesus is our hope and salvation for eternal life.'¹⁵

He had given the title of the Most Precious Blood to his Congregation and this sustained him at the cost of all the opposition that was raised against him, and amid sufferings so harsh for him. When Leo XII deleted this title in a manuscript, he knew how to speak to the Holy Father and moved him to restore the title to the Institute. Writing to a religious, he spoke of the devotion to the Precious Blood and that it seemed to him that Jesus had told him that just as He had shed his Blood in the midst of sufferings, so among sufferings must the glories of the Blood be spread . . .¹⁶

We have come to the end to this part of the work. We have tried to trace the personality of St. Gaspar as the Apostle of the Precious Blood, describing how he was

formed by the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, how he lived and defended it and his tireless activity to spread it. This was the scope of our study.

Have we succeeded in presenting the personality of St. Gaspar in its true stature? Let the reader decide. For our part we are aware that we have not said everything that could have been said. There are many spiritual riches of St. Gaspar yet to be explored in his writings, nearly all of which are available to us now. We are confident, therefore, that others who follow us will fill in the gaps we have left, delving more deeply into the thought of St. Gaspar and the influence that he and his spiritual heirs—Missionaries, sisters, and lay people—have had in the Church under the living impetus of the Blood of Christ.

Appendix A

Documents Sent by St. Gaspar to Pope Leo XII

The following are found in the collection of the letters of St. Gaspar, nos. 1214 and 1215. Both letters are dated July 29, 1825.

1214

General idea of the Society^a

In these times of upheaval, which it has pleased God to reserve for us, there is a great need for a reform of the people. The Lord, *in misericordia dives* 'rich in mercy,' [Eph 2: 4] wished to provide an effective means for curbing the torrent of iniquity and for restoring order in the hearts of the people by furnishing them with helps that are most suitable for the sanctification of their souls and for their continuous and lasting improvement.

One such means is the establishing of more Mission and Spiritual Retreat Houses for the secular clergy, to revive in them a sense of dignity, of good example, as

^aSt. Gaspar's presentation shows evidence of corrections by Cristaldi. This is the original as written by Gaspar.

well as an eagerness for study and holiness, all of which is in line with the spirit of that ancient discipline in which community living of ecclesiastics was eagerly fostered. St. Augustine, the Doctor of Grace, treated this matter in a special way . . .

Now, we turn to the question of the title which adorns these foundations, as is evident from various documents, it was the Supreme Pontiff Pius VII who considered it, as a matter of fact, a good idea to take it from the Archconfraternity having the august title of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, of the most holy Mary, Help of Christians and assigned to it as special protector the glorious apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier.

This title does not present anything novel, since it flows from what we see in the sacred scriptures: "*Redemisti nos Domine in Sanguine tuo, et fecisti nos Deo nostro regnum et sacerdotes.*" 'You have redeemed us, O Lord, in your Blood, and made us for our God a kingdom and priests' [Rv 5: 9–10]. [*Translator's note:* The Vulgate reads "and made them for our God."] We priests, therefore, are marked with the sacerdotal character in order to apply the divine Blood to souls. It is his Blood that is offered in the divine Sacrifice; it is his Blood that is applied in the sacraments; it is his Blood that is the price of redemption. This is what we can present to the heavenly Father for the reconciliation of sinners. "*Te ergo quaesumus tuis famulis subveni quos pretioso Sanguine redemisti*" 'We, therefore, beseech you help your servants whom you have redeemed by your precious Blood.' Whereas the devil would like all to be the victims of justice, we ministers of the sanctuary must make known the depths of God's mercy so that "*justificati in Sanguine ipsius salvi simus ab ira per ipsum*" 'Justified in his Blood, we will be saved from wrath through it' [Rm 5: 9]. In this devotion, we have the treasures of wisdom and holiness; in it we find comfort, peace and salvation.

Indeed, it is an essential devotion in Christianity, venerated by our mother, the Church “*quam acquisivit sanguine suo*” ‘which he acquired in his blood’ [Acts 20: 28]. The Mass, the Office of the Most Precious Blood are already in practical usage in the church militant. Even from most ancient history, for example, we note that God, indeed, prescribed that the Hebrews in Egypt should taint their doorways with blood so as to be freed from the avenging sword, alluding to that means of eternal salvation by which our souls would be liberated from the slavery of hell. Add to this, what the apostle states: “*si sanguis hircorum et vitulorum inquinatos santificat, quanto magis Sanguis Christi emundabit conscientiam nostram ab operibus mortuis?*” ‘If the blood of goats and bulls sanctifies those who are defiled, how much more will the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanse our consciences from dead works?’

One should read the precious little booklet entitled *Il mese di Giugno* dedicated to the devotion of the mysteries of the Divine Blood. It contains the documents supporting this important devotion. Sufficient for now is to conclude with the words of St. Bernard (Ep. 7): “*Sanguis Christi ut tuba clamat*” ‘The Blood of Christ calls out like a trumpet’ or, the words of St. Thomas (Opusc. 15a): “*Sanguis Christi clavis paradisi*” ‘the Blood of Christ is the key to paradise.’

But, to sum up everything briefly, one must not omit listening to what St. Paul observes in Col 1: “*Pacificans per Sanguinem suum sive quae in terris sive quae in coelis sunt*” ‘making peace through the Blood [of his cross], both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven.’ Our times demand that we carry out what is proposed in that quotation. It is, therefore, the divine Blood that will placate the divine eternal Father, that will purify our hearts and will inebriate us with love for Jesus who *dilexit nos, et lavit nos in Sanguine suo* ‘loved us and washed us in his own Blood’ [Rv 1: 5].

1215

Respectful Observations Concerning the
Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood
of our Lord Jesus Christ

It cannot be denied that the Lord, always rich in mercy, has provided powerful means in every age that are capable of drawing souls to a consideration of the Crucified Lord and thus seeing in them the application of the redemption through his Divine Blood.

Prescinding from the first centuries in the Church, centuries productive of martyrs, in the following epochs which history records for us, we note how one or the other dogma was attacked, how sacred things were subjected to scorn in one or the other part of the Catholic world. In our miserable times, the crisis in the people is a general one, with indescribable perversion of basic principles and of proper living so as to hurl an insult at the redemptive act and, through human malice, to frustrate the application of the merits of Jesus Christ who has redeemed us by the price of his Blood. Now, Blessed Father, is it not necessary to rekindle apostolic zeal and follow the inspirations of soul that are so favored by God so that we can revive in the memories of these people the inestimable price of our redemption and attempt to stir them to repentance and to tears?

Is it not also a fact that Sacred Scripture itself gives us the steps to take for a reform? *Pacificans per Sanguinem Crucis eius sive quae in coelis sive quae in terris sunt?* 'making peace through the Blood of his Cross, both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven' [Col 1: 20].

Do we ourselves not know that *Christus dilexit ecclesiam tradidit semetipsum pro ea . . . acquisivit sanguine suo?* Christ loved the Church . . . he gave himself up for it' [Eph 5: 25] 'he purchased [it] with his own blood' [Acts 20: 28].

Does not Divine Wisdom tell us that *justificati in Sanguine salvi erimus ab ira per ipsum?* ‘Justified in Blood, we will be saved from wrath through it’ [Rm 5: 9]. It is not sufficient simply to utter the name of the Lord to be saved: *Non qui dixerit Domine Domine hic salvus erit* ‘Not the one who says “Lord, Lord” shall be saved,’ but *qui fecerit voluntatem Patris mei hic salvus erit* ‘He who will do the will of my Father will be saved’ [cf. Mt 7: 21]. [*Translator’s note:* This is something of a paraphrase.] Therefore, there are two things that must necessarily be done nowadays. The first is to find a way of placating the Divine Eternal Father; and that we have in the merits of the Divine Blood: *Calicem salutaris accipiam* ‘I will take the chalice of salvation’ [Ps 116: 13]. The other is to try to find a way of effectively applying those merits to souls, and this can be done particularly through holy Missions and Spiritual Retreats, as well as other pious programs that are proportionately salubrious for our times.

In fact, these are the very same reasons that motivated the holy Pontiff Pius VII to erect the Archconfraternity, bearing this most august title of the Divine Blood. Sinners continue to be horrendously abusive and the Lord, in the transports of his love, keeps crying out: *Quae utilitas in Sanguine meo?* ‘What profit is there in my Blood?’ [Ps 30: 10]. So, is there not anyone who will, through this sacred, solemn cult, procure adoration in compensation, and preach to the people its glories, bringing to their attention that in this devotion we have a compendium of faith itself; that is why, in the consecration of the chalice, we say: “*mysterium fidei*” ‘the mystery of faith’ and consequently therein lies the salvation of souls.

In fact, it is to this that the prophetic oracles, the predictions, the symbols, the figures, the sacrifices of the old covenant have their focus. As we read in Genesis: *Lavabit in vino stolam suam et in sanguine uvae pallium suum* ‘He will wash his robe in wine and his mantle

in the blood of the grape' [Gn 49: 11]. The Hebrews were ordered to taint their doorposts with the blood of the lamb in order to be freed from their chastisements in Egypt, a symbol of the liberation of our souls from diabolical servitude . . . Without saying too much further, what did Moses do for his people? *Accipiens librum aspersit Sanguine dicens . . . hic sanguis testamenti quod mandavit ad vos Deus . . . Omnia in sanguine mundantur, et sine sanguinis effusione not fit remissio* 'Taking the book he sprinkled it with blood saying . . . this is the blood of the testament that God mandated for you . . . All things are purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission' [Heb 9: 19–22]. Hear, now, what the apostle says: *Si sanguis hircorum et vitulorum inquinatos santificat, quanto magis Sanguis Jesu Christi emundabit conscientias nostras* 'If the blood of goats and bulls sanctifies those who are defiled, how much more will the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanse our consciences' [Heb 9:11–12].

Without saying everything that could be said, the divine Scriptures are loaded with sacred citations . . . *Quare rubrum est indumentum tuum . . . Vestitus erat veste aspersa sanguine* 'Why is your apparel red? You were clothed in a garment sprinkled with blood.' [Rev 19: 13–14]. One should add only that by means of this devotion the remembrance of our baptism, through which our souls were purged, is revived; we are reminded of penance and the other sacraments. When asked why, we conclude that it was because: *redemisti in Sanguine fecisti nos Deo nostrum regnum et sacerdotes* 'You have been redeemed with blood; you have made us for our God a kingdom and priests' [Rv 5: 9–10].

Other devotions are all means for facilitating Catholic piety, but this devotion is the basis, the sustenance, the essence of all. Other devotions, coming forth at various times, signal a period of time, ever holy, ever praiseworthy, but this devotion of ours is so antique that it goes back to the very moment when Adam sinned; that

is why Jesus was called the *agnus occisus a constitutione mundi* 'the lamb slain from the foundation of the world' [Cf. Rv 13: 8]. And it was because of this that we were given the means of reproducing, through the public press, the glories of this inestimable treasure of our souls, along with the noble compositions of the Fathers of the Church for the understanding of the sacred text; and especially so, since, in our days, generally speaking, this is not sufficiently known. However, the Lord will regenerate them in the hearts of people! Indeed, St. Thomas says: *Sanguis Christi clavis paradisi* 'The Blood of Christ is the key to paradise . . .' St. John Chrysostom: *Sanguis Christi salus animarum . . . bonum aurum Sanguis Christi* 'The Blood of Christ is the salvation of souls. The Blood of Christ is fine gold.'

One should read the small work composed by the outstanding member of the Missionaries of the Archconfraternity, that is to say, the now-deceased bishop Monsignor Strambi who, in giving his final retreats to all the Roman clergy, had them meditate on this very devotion. One could consult with the present bishop of Assisi, well-known for his theological knowledge, or also the bishop of Nocera, not to mention others, and one will discover the interest that everyone should have in diffusing and spreading the glories of the Archconfraternity of the Divine Blood, glories that already are evident in the establishment of the Mission and Spiritual Retreat Houses under the direction of its Missionaries; they make available those means for fulfilling its objective . . . the glories that are evident in the many, many confraternities erected everywhere in the Catholic world, etc., etc., etc.

How could it ever have been possible for the very respectable bishops, among whom we include his Eminence Severoli, to give their consent to the diffusion of this good work if there had been the least disagreement with the principles or the practices of the Church? How could it be that the now-deceased Pontiff Pius VII

should issue a number of briefs for the erection of that Archconfraternity, and the Congregation of Rites should recognize its title by the granting of privileges, in particular, to the Mission and Spiritual Retreat Houses where the clergy have been reclaimed for the apostolate, for pursuing studies, for attaining holiness?

Even your Holiness himself, with the revision of the Chaplet for use by that same Archconfraternity, has increased its privileges through the organ of that same Congregation of Rites, and, at the time when you were Cardinal Vicar of Rome, established the women of charity (under the direction of Butirroni) who had this same most august title.

In these miserable times in which we live, one must point this out, how can the procedure of the Roman Curia be subjected to such derision? In fact, it is because of this that evildoers are led to criticize other titles, thus multiplying the number of enemies, while supposing that they are doing something good by suppressing a title which is the glory of redemption. This is the language of truth, and it is a well-known fact that hell itself trembles at the very mention of "Divine Blood." Furthermore, because of this confusion of mind, one is led to erroneously judge the good people who then disturb the peace of your Holiness' magnanimous heart.

So, in view of the fact that there is nothing involved here which is contrary to good Catholic interpretation, why, then, now change something that has been canonically established? The Pontiffs Paul III and Paul IV, the Pontiff Gregory XIII and Pope Sixtus V (who confirmed it with a brief of May 8, 1586), were these not all men who, in Santa Maria in Vado, erected and promoted the same good work which is now being done by the confraternity erected there under the title of the Divine Blood and which presently has the most intimate connection with the Archconfraternity?

Most blessed Father, these are the intrinsic reasons as well as arguments from the history of the Church . . .

But using such a title would be a case of becoming overly familiar! This was the same difficulty proposed when the Company of Jesus, in particular, emerged. Was it to be given that name, the name of Jesus before which *omne genuflectatur* 'every knee is bent' so that it would be on the lips of everyone and adored by all? And what was the answer given? The religious titles are all very praiseworthy. Any abuse of it would be due to the person who, through his own malice, would beget it, but the Church's intention is a holy one (so says Fr. Suarez in: *De mysteriis vitae Jesu Christi*) insofar as a distinct veneration is shown toward the sacrosanct mysteries of the Savior.

Nor would it be a valid argument for one to say: There will be someone who will abuse this title, so let us get rid of it. . . . Well, there will also be someone who, as a matter of fact, will do the same thing with the name of religion, so therefore. . . . Oh my, to what consequences would this not lead? In keeping with the bases and principles explained, we have the establishment of Confraternities of the most holy Trinity, of the most Blessed Sacrament, etc. Finally, it would be good to point out that there is a mandatory that says: Alms for the Confraternity of the most Blessed Sacrament, and so in ours too there should accordingly be a similar provision. But, *transeat*, 'let it pass,' with regard to this last remark which was produced only to relax the mind of your Beatitude.

We conclude by saying that the adherence to basic principles, the observance of fundamentals, the welfare of our times, the glory given to the Redemption as well as the scorn that hell itself will receive, all demand that your Holiness, rather than derogating and removing this most august title, should be exultant with it and promote it throughout the entire Catholic World with a solemn decree, extending the use of the Mass and the Office of the Price of our Redemption. May what happened to Blessed Giacomo di Bevagna, with regard to

the Divine Blood, encourage your soul to do what, in all humility, has been proposed to you for the pure glory of God.

Appendix B

Document Sent by Gaspar to Pope Pius VIII

This is an excerpt from Letter 1946, dated June 1829.

Once his deportation had been brought to an end in the year 1814, the Supreme Pontiff Pius VII, of happy memory, occupied himself immediately in sending out evangelical preachers for the sanctification of souls and the reform of the people. Already beforehand he had erected the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ in order to promote this sacred cult in compensation for the abuses made by sinners, particularly in our times; likewise, through it, to animate the faithful to offer up this inestimable price of our redemption to the divine eternal Father. In view of the fact that one of the purposes of the Archconfraternity was that of having our brother priests dedicate themselves to the apostolic ministry of giving holy Missions and Retreats, that beloved Pontiff wished to make use of them for this project for God's greater glory, and through their services to promote also that most important devotion to the Divine Blood.

Appendix C

Document Sent by St. Gaspar to Pope Gregory XVI

This letter, number 2140, does not have an exact date but Conti tentatively places it in March 1831. This is a rough draft of the memorandum presented to the pope; the memorandum as finally presented has not been found.

*Justificati in Sanguine ipsius salvi
erimus ab ira per ipsum*
‘Justified in his Blood we shall be saved
from the wrath by it’

SUMMARY

of everything that pertains to the pious Institute of Mission and Retreat Houses under the direction of the Missionaries enrolled in the venerable Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, canonically erected by Pope Pius VII.

PREFACE

In the upheaval of our times, times which God has been pleased to reserve for us, and in the need for reform of the people, the Lord, rich in mercy, has willed to bring

forth a powerful means to be used in setting up a rampart against the torrent of iniquities and to provide us, at the same time, with means that are salutary for attaining eternal salvation through the sanctification and the spiritual cultivation of souls. Therefore, in his Providence, he presented to the Roman Pontiff, Pius VII, of holy memory, the plan for instituting Mission and Retreat Houses in order that through these two weapons of apostolic ministry, a war could be waged against sin, as well as to lead back to the Heart of Jesus all those who had strayed.

The Holy Father then selected as his norm the one set down by Benedict XIV for promoting the Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine which served then, as it still does, to encourage the clergy and the people to a revival of giving instructions, something most necessary for knowledge and observance of the holy laws of God.

We are, presently, living in times in which there is urgent need for stimulating the clergy and the people to the yearned-for reform. The freethinkers, not at all in love with the Catholic religion, are waging a most decisive type of warfare against the Crucifix [or Crucified One]; and, they would like to see everyone become victims of justice through a multiplication of vices and sins. Consequently, it is urgent that zeal for the glory of God, like a spreading fire, must burn in a holy fashion within every soul, and, by calling attention to the glories of the Crucified One, to open the fountains of mercy, thanks to the application of the merits of the Divine Blood which is the thing that will fully placate the justice of the divine, eternal Father: *Pacificans per Sanguinem Crucis ejus, sive quae in caelis sive quae in terris sunt . . . Ipsi vicerunt draconem propter Sanguinem Agni* 'Making peace through the Blood of his Cross whether for what is in heaven or on earth . . . They overcame the dragon by the Blood of the Lamb' [Cf. Rv 12: 11].

Having these basic principles in mind, his Holiness was pleased to erect the Archconfraternity under the august title of the Divine Blood, together with the invocation to most holy Mary, Help of Christians; and, as its special protector, he selected the apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier, so as to provide an exemplar who would stir one from any feelings of languor, who would urge one to the doing of good work, who would encourage one in the face of difficulties and point out, furthermore, the quickest way of promoting the greater glory of God and the sanctification of souls.

Therefore, one can easily note what his plans for the future were and how very well directed they were for the verification of the apostle's words: *Justificati in Sanguine ipsius salvi erimus ab ira per ipsum . . .* 'Justified by his Blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him' [Rm 5: 9].

Finally, adding just a few more things in this preface, it is to be noted that in carrying out these apostolic works of the ministry, we seek to give a cult of compensation to the mysteries of our redemption, so greatly abused by sinners. We wish to awaken in their souls the great idea of the inestimable price of our eternal salvation. . . . *Redemisti in Sanguine . . . Empti enim estis praetio mango* 'you have redeemed [us] in [your] Blood [Rv 5: 9–10] . . . 'you were bought at a great price' [1 Cor 6: 20]. Those who have gone astray are encouraged to have hope or the pardon of the faults that they have committed, since *Christus dilexit nos, et lavit nos in Sanguine suo . . . Quae utilitas in Sanguine meo?* 'Christ loved us and washed us in his Blood. . . . 'what profit is there in my Blood?' [Ps 30: 10] and, finally, this is an opportunity for helping them take notice of the motives which caused St. Bernard (Ep. 7) to exclaim: *Sanguis Christi ut tuba clamat* 'the Blood of Christ calls out like a trumpet'; and St. Thomas (Opusc. 158) to say: *Sanguis Christi Clavis Paradisi* 'the Blood of Christ is the Key to Paradise.'

St. Catherine of Siena, during the schism of her time, received the inspiration from the Lord that on this devotion depended peace within the Church.

Though overlooking many other things . . . there are the documents pertinent to the Office and the Mass of the Divine Blood which urge us to cherish it deeply within our hearts, but at the same time indicate how much our holy Mother Church is concerned about the special cult addressed to the price of our redemption: *Christus dilexit ecclesiam, tradidit semetipsum pro ea, acquisivit Sanguine Suo* 'Christ loved the church, he gave himself up for it and acquired it with his Blood.' [*Translator's note*: There are two quotations from the New Testament that are joined here: cf. Eph 5: 25 and Acts 20: 28.] One should read the little work written by the now-deceased Monsignor Strambi, outstanding supporter of our Institute and our devotion, so humbly presented in these pages. Likewise, one should check the catalog of indulgences granted by Pope Gregory XIII, confirmed and augmented by Pope Sixtus V in behalf of the Confraternity of the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, erected in the church of the Canons Regular of S. Maria del Vado in Ferrara . . .

Then, Pope Leo XII, in addition to what he expresses in his Brief (v. f. n. 2) on the occasion of the installation of the Jesuit Fathers in Spoleto, speaking incidentally of our House in San Felice in Giano, and aware of the various confraternities erected under our title, granted through the Sacred Congregation of Rites the faculty of a solemn Mass of the Divine Blood on the first Sunday in July. Already when he was the Cardinal Vicar he had canonically erected in the church of *Beata Vergine Maria del Buon Consiglio* in Rome, the pious union of sisters visitators of the sick under the title of the Divine Blood.

As a final reflection, note how Vincenzo IV, Duke of Mantova, erected as an equestrian order in the year 1608, the union of Knights under the title of the Divine

Blood. That order was later approved by Paul V as can be seen in the work *Catalogus ordinum equestrium in imaginibus expositus a P. Philippo Bonanni Societatis Jesu oblatus Clementi XI.*

NOTES

Introduction

¹AGCPPS, Box 6, fasc. 2, 4.

²Specifically we cite the decree *Plurima Inter Argumenta* (March 19, 1891), which affirmed the heroic virtue of Gaspar. Because this decree speaks of Gaspar only as the founder of a Congregation of priests with the title of “Most Precious Blood,” we are not going to examine it further. (Cf. *ASS*, vol. XXIV, 6 ff.).

³*ASS*, vol. XXXVI, 741 ff.

⁴*ASS*, vol. XXXVII, 112.

⁵*Ibid.*, 634 ff. The text of interest reads: “. . . *ac perpetuo studio adductus provehendi cultus prestiosissimi Sanguinis Redemptoris Nostri Iesu Christi eo tamquam vexillo munitus vim omnem suae charitatis exercuit, animum adiiciens omni prope vitae conditioni ad sanctitatem revocandae.*” This repeats thoughts and words of the decree *Almae Huius Urbis*.

⁶All who share in devotion to Gaspar know that his feast is celebrated on October 21, but not everyone knows that it was not always celebrated on this date. Many ask why this date was chosen. In this note we make a bit of an excursus on the various dates on which the feast was celebrated and on what prompted the selection of October 21.

The feast of a saint is usually celebrated on a date of significance in his or her life, e.g., the date of birth, death, canonization, etc. Gaspar’s feast could not be celebrated on his birthday, January 6, because it is (in many places, at least) the Solemnity of the Epiphany. For the same reason it was not judged opportune to celebrate it on the date of his death, December 28, since the Feast of the Holy Innocents occurs on that date. By a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites of April 12, 1905, the feast of Blessed Gaspar del Bufalo was assigned to July 15 for the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and for the Adorers of the Precious Blood. The diocese of Rome, on the other hand, chose the date of June 23 for its own calendar. In order to maintain uniformity with the diocese of Rome, the Missionaries and the Adorers sought the faculty of celebrating the feast on June 23 as well. The Congregation granted this request on November 28, 1906.

But since the Feast of the Sacred Heart sometimes fell on June 23, impeding the celebration of the feast of Blessed Gaspar, the Missionaries and Adorers obtained permission to celebrate the feast on December 30 (decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, September 27, 1913) and then on December 29 (decree of July 23, 1914). The Diocese of Rome, however, fixed the feast of Blessed Gaspar on January 4. These dates remained in force even after the canonization of Gaspar on June 12, 1954. That explains why Blessed John XXIII went to venerate St. Gaspar on January 4, 1963, in the Church of Santa Maria in Trivio: the Diocese of Rome was celebrating his feast on that day.

Following the publication of the new Code of Liturgical Rubrics in 1960, the feast of St. Gaspar had to be transferred out of the octave of Christmas and consequently became *moveable*, that is, in some years it would be celebrated on January 2 and in others on January 3. To eliminate the inconvenience caused by this "mobility," the Missionaries of the Precious Blood obtained from the Sacred Congregation of Rites, by decree of May 14, 1962, the right to celebrate the feast of St. Gaspar on October 21. Thus the Missionaries and the Adorers have celebrated the feast of Gaspar on October 21 and in 1973 the Diocese of Rome also adopted this date. It is also possible that in certain places and for particular reasons to celebrate the feast of St. Gaspar on another date.

What were the reasons for choosing October 21? They were above all pastoral reasons. The feast was set for October 21, wrote Don Giuseppe Quattrino, then provincial of the Italian Province, ". . . for the convenience of all the churches of the Institute in Italy and abroad. At this time of the year one avoids the harsh weather of winter and the students of the colleges and schools directed by the Missionaries can participate." Added to these reasons were others linked to Gaspar's life: his mother, Annunziata Quartironi, died on October 20, 1811, and his father, Antonio del Bufalo, died on October 31, 1831. (Since 1937 his remains have been entombed in the Church of Santa Maria in Trivio, near the tomb of St. Gaspar, in the tomb of the Sbordoni family.) In addition, since October is the month of the missions, what could be more suitable for celebrating the feast of a great missionary and founder of a missionary Congregation, whose members are currently involved in missions *ad gentes*?

⁷AAS, XXXXII (1950), 199 ff.

⁸AAS, XXXXVI (1954), 330 ff.

⁹Ibid., 357 ff.

¹⁰AAS, XXXXVII (1955), 175 ff.

¹¹*L'Osservatore Romano*, March 21–22, 1960.

¹²Letter of May 12, 1960 to the Commission of the Roman Synod, published by the *Rivista Diocesana di Roma*, June 1963.

¹³AAS, LII (1960), 306 ff.

¹⁴Ibid., (1960), 545 ff.

¹⁵The first edition was published in 1970 with the *imprimatur* of the Vicariate of Rome; the second edition in 1978 bore the same *imprimatur*.

Chapter One:

The Blood of Christ and the Young Saint

¹AAS, LII (1960), 306 ff.

²G. De Libero, *San Gaspare Del Bufalo romano*, Rome, 1954, 106.

³Cf. A. P. Frutaz, “Sangue Preziosissimo di N. S. Gesù Cristo,” in *Enciclopedia Cattolica*, X, Città del Vaticano, coll. 1778–1780.

⁴A. Rey, *Gaspare Del Bufalo*, I, Albano Laziale, 1979, 266.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Sacra Rituum Congregatione, *Romana Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Gaspare Del Bufalo Canonici Basilcae S. Marci de Urbe, et Institutoris Congregationis Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis D.N.J.C. Positio super introductione causae*, Rome, 1851, § 160, 125. Hereafter cited: *Positio super introductione causae*, paragraph and page.

⁷*Positio super introductione causae*, § 21, 158.

⁸Cf. B. Conti, editor, *Scritti spirituali di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, II, Rome 1996, 152–156. Hereafter this work will be cited as *Scritti spirituali*, the volume and page number. In the matter of these compendiums of the sermons of Mons. Giovanni Baccolo, this is the testimony of Maria Tamini in the *Processo Ordinario Albanese*, f. 1616t: “I remember that when [Gaspar] was a ‘little priest’ (*piccolo abatin*) it happened that one year a Venetian Priest of great merit came to the Church of the Gesù to conduct the Lenten preaching (*il Quaresimale*). During the course of the preaching they put guards at the doors of the Church. The Servant of God, who used to go every day to listen to the preaching with attention, would transcribe the entire sermon once he returned home, as I myself used to observe and I would also read them. When the Preacher had finished the Lenten series and came to know of this, he wanted to see the transcriptions and to read them. He was so astounded that he would not be persuaded that a boy so young was capable of doing so much, until [Gaspar’s] parents persuaded him that it was the work of the Servant of God.” (Cf. *Positio super virtutibus*, §§ 132–133, 88.) However, we must note that in the year 1804 Gaspar was not the “little priest” or a “boy so young,” but had already celebrated his eighteenth birthday.

⁹*Scritti spirituali*, II, 129–130.

¹⁰Cf. Luke 22: 42–44.

¹¹*Scritti spirituali*, II, 273.

¹²Eph 5: 2.

¹³*Scritti spirituali*, II, 174–175.

¹⁴Cf. *Ibid.*, 255, note 1.

¹⁵*Sacra Rituum Congregatione, Romana Beatificationis et Canonizationis Venerabilis Servi Dei Gasparis Del Bufalo Fundatoris Congregationis Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis D.N.J.C. Positio super virtutibus*, Rome 1870, § 123, 235. Hereafter this is cited as *Positio super virtutibus*, the paragraph and the page.

¹⁶*Positio super virtutibus*, § 112, 84.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, § 69, 333.

¹⁸*Pr. Ord. Alb.*, IV, f. 1644; cf. *A. Rey.*, op. cit., I, 89.

¹⁹Cf. *Positio super virtutibus*, § 69, 333.

²⁰*Positio super virtutibus*, § 50, 109.

²¹*Positio super virtutibus*, § 51, 109.

²²*Ibid.*, § 159, 245.

²³*Translator's note*: In Italian, the word *Crocifisso* can mean both "the Crucified One" and "crucifix." It is usually capitalized when it means the former. In this and in other places in the text I have tried to translate it to fit the context, knowing this might differ from other English translations of the same text.

²⁴*Ibid.*, § 16, 101.

²⁵*Ibid.*, § 131, 88.

²⁶B. Conti, editor, *Documenti pontifici sul culto del Preziosissimo Sangue di N.S.G.C.*, Rome, 1982, 88.

²⁷St. Catherine wrote thus to Bartolomeo di Smeduccio, lord of Sanseverino, urging him on to the crusade for liberating the Holy Sepulcher of Christ: "Let your heart and soul be on fire in the dear Christ Jesus, with love and desire to give them in exchange for such love, to give life for life. He gave his life for you and you ought to want to give your life for him, blood for blood. And I invite you, on behalf of Christ crucified, to give your blood for his blood . . ." (L. Ferretti, *Lettere di S. Caterina da Siena vergine domenicana*, V, Siena, 1930: letter 374.

²⁸Cf. *Positio super virtutibus*, § 49, 69.

²⁹*Ibid.*, § 128, 87.

³⁰B. Valentini, *Gaspere Del Bufalo quasi un oracolo divino*, Rome, 1990, p. 37. This work, edited by Beniamino Conti, is the deposition of Valentini given during the process of beatification and canonization of St. Gaspar. An English translation exists in digital form on a CD-ROM, but is not at this time available in print.

³¹*Positio super virtutibus*, § 90, 339.

³²*Ibid.*, § 149, 94.

³³*Ibid.*, § 42, 68.

³⁴*Ibid.*, § 47, 69.

³⁵*Ibid.*, Tamini, 117–118, 85.

³⁶*Ibid.*, Tamini, § 122, 86.

³⁷*Ibid.*, § 127, 87.

³⁸*Ibid.*, § 39–40, 67.

Chapter Two: Formation in the Precious Blood

¹Cf. A. Rey, *Gaspare Del Bufalo*, I, Albano Laziale 1979, p. 351.

²At present this relic is preserved in the Church of S. Giuseppe a Capo le Case in Rome, where it was transferred by the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood in 1936. Cf. A. M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo nella liturgia e nella pietà popolare*, II, Rome, 1989, p. 481.

³Cf. Sacra Rituum Congregatione, *Romana Beatificationis et Canonizationis Ven. Servi Dei Gasparis Del Bufalo Fundatoris Congregationis Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis D.N.J.C. Summarium objectionale*, Rome, 1870, Merlini, 64. Hereafter cited as: *Summarium objectionale*, witness and page number.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Cf. A. Rey, *op. cit.*, I, 351.

⁶*Summarium objectionale*, Lipparelli, 53.

⁷*Memoria della Pia Adunanza del Sangue Preziosissimo di Gesù Cristo, del Rosario della Beata Vergine Maria, e delle Anime Sante del Purgatorio canonicamente fondata nell'Altare del Santissimo Crocifisso della Perinsigne Basilica di S. Nicola in Carcere Tulliano*, in A. M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo e l'esperienza Cristiana*, II, Rome, 1987, 513–519.

⁸Cf. le “Costituzioni della Pia Adunanza,” in A. M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo*, pp. 520–535.

⁹More on the history of the chaplet can be found in the testimony of Merlini in *Summarium objectionale*, Merlini, 65. Merlini notes that Albertini, in his dealings with the Sacred Congregation of Rites after submitting the chaplet to that office, had to clarify that the prayer was directed “to the price of our redemption” and not to the relic of the Precious Blood at San Nicola.

¹⁰Cf. A. M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo nella liturgia e nella pietà popolare*, II, Rome, 1989, p. 475.

¹¹A. M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo e l'esperienza Cristiana*, II, Rome, 1987, p. 519.

¹²Cf. *Scritti spirituali*, IV, pp. 575–576.

¹³Cf. the discourse in *Scritti spirituali*, III, pp. 18–27.

¹⁴St. Gaspar, *Letter 3*.

¹⁵Cf. V. Pallotti, *Gaspare Del Bufalo come l'ho conosciuto*, Rome, 1989, pp. 18–19. The English translation, by Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S., is available in photocopied and digital formats. The reference here may be found in chapter 2 of the English translation.

¹⁶G. Merlini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo. Un santo scruta un santo*. Rome, 1984, 403. An English translation, *A Saint Scrutinizes a Saint*, has been made by Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S. It exists in photocopied and digital formats. The reference may be found in chapter VI, p. 278, of that translation.

¹⁷This assertion is made only by D. Pietro De Victoriis. Cf. General Archives C.PP.S., vol. *Memorie de Albertini*, 101/37 in the manuscript biography of Albertini.

¹⁸G. Merlini, *Un santo scruta un santo*, op. cit., p. 24. English translation: ch. II, p. 24. These affirmations of Merlini are not entirely tarnished by the deposition of Sr. Maria Giuseppa Pitorri, niece of Albertini. Cf. *Letter 1385* of St. Gaspar. This "letter" actually is the testimony of Sr. Pitorri, an Ursuline, that contains twenty-four fragments from the letters of St. Gaspar.

¹⁹M. Armellini, *Il Venerabile Gaspare Del Bufalo, fondatore della Congregazione del Preziosissimo Sangue*, Rome, 1901, 82.

²⁰Cf. Gaspar del Bufalo, *Scritti vari*, Rome, 1999, pp. 202–237.

²¹Cf. Henri Daniel-Rops, *Storia della Chiesa del Cristo*, VI: *La Chiesa delle rivoluzioni*, tomo I: *Di fronte ai nuovi destini*, Turin-Rome, 1966, 164.

²²Cf. "Atti del Convegno di Studi Piacenza—Palazzo Fogliani, November 9, 1986," *San Gaspare Del Bufalo e Piacenza nell'età napoleonica* by various authors, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano Comitato di Piacenza, 1987.

²³Gambini would die in exile in Bologna during the night of January 29–30, 1811. Cf. *Letter 15*. Marchetti, unfortunately, took the oath while in Bologna on September 11, 1812, following the Napoleonic decree of May 4, 1812. He then returned to Rome. Cf. L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di San Gaspare Del Bufalo*, III–1, Rome 1982, pp. 112, 143–149.

²⁴Cf. the General Archives C.PP.S. (AGCPPS), *Memorie di Albertini*, 101/38; L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare del Bufalo*, III–2, Rome, 1991, pp. 326–331; N. Pagliuca, *Mese del Sangue Prezioso*, Benevento, 1908, p. 30.

²⁵E. Gentilucci, *Compendio della vita del Venerabile Servo di Dio Gaspare Del Bufalo*, Rome, 1852, p. 36.

²⁶F. Albertini, *Introduzione alla vita umile*, Part II, Rome, 1830, p. 122. Cf. N. Pagliuca, op. cit., p. 30.

²⁷*Letter 10*.

²⁸Gaetano Bonanni was born in Rome on June 16, 1766, and was ordained to the priesthood on December 18, 1790. From 1800 he and some other companions began to dedicate themselves to the ministry of preaching missions in various parts of the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples. On October 23, 1808, he and Gaspar opened the evening oratory at Santa Maria in Vincis. In 1815 Bonanni was with Gaspar in founding the first house of the Congregation at San Felice in Giano dell'Umbria, where he was the first superior. Appointed bishop of Norcia (Umbria) by Pius VII on February 5, 1821, he was consecrated on July 8 of the same year in San Nicola in Carcere. He died on August 17, 1848. Cf. Andrew Pollack, "The Closest Collaborators of St. Gaspar in Founding the Society," in A.

Pollack, *Historical Sketches of the C.P.P.S.*, revised edition, edited by Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S. Carthage, Ohio: Messenger Press, 2002, pp. 2–16.

²⁹*Letter 9.*

³⁰G. De Libero, *S. Gaspare Del Bufalo Romano*, Rome, 1954, pp. 109–110.

³¹Cf. *Summarium objectionale*, Lipparelli, p. 53.

³²V. Sardi, *Vita del B. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, Rome, 1904, p. 86, note 1.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴AGCPPS, vol. *Memorie di Albertini*, 101/31v–33.

³⁵This is first name of the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, as found in the rule written by Countess Bentivoglio Orsi in 1812. Cf. B. Conti, editor, *Scritti di Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi, II—Regolamenti*. Rome, 2001, pp. 19–91.

³⁶A. Santelli, *Vita del Canonico Don Gaspare Del Bufalo Missionario Apostolico*, Rome, 1992, p. 92.

³⁷Cf. De Libero, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

³⁸Cf. Merlini, *Un Santo scruta un santo*, p. 24. English translation: ch. II, p. 24.

³⁹Cf. Giovanni Merlini, “Vita di Mons. Francesco Albertini,” in A. M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo e l’esperienza Cristiana*, II, Rome 1987, pp. 537–553.

⁴⁰There are many references to Albertini in the letters of St. Gaspar. He recommended collecting memories of Albertini to the latter’s successor as president of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood, Mons. Gregorio Muccioli. In 1829 he charged the Missionary Don Innocenzo Betti with writing a life of Albertini (*Letter 1878*, January 15, 1829), and finally to the Missionary Don Pietro De Victoriis, who completed the biography around 1835. This biography was never published because it had serious gaps.

⁴¹Cf. *Positio super virtutibus*, Merlini, § 4, 459.

⁴²*Positio super virtutibus*, Rossi, § 68, 417.

⁴³*Positio super virtutibus*, Tarulli, § 5, 460.

⁴⁴Cf. G. Merlini, *Vita di Mons. Francesco Albertini*, pp. 548–549, note 2.

⁴⁵The *Introduzione* was first published in Rome in 1820. It was published again in 1830 along with letters and other short spiritual works attributed to Albertini, among them the *Gabinetto mistico*. However, in light of the documents found in 1997 in Tarquinia (Viterbo), the true author of these works was actually Countess Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi. Cf. B. Conti, editor, *Scritti di Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi III—Opere spirituali*, Rome, 2002.

⁴⁶G. Merlini, *Vita di Mons. Francesco Albertini*, p. 550–551. The text of *Direttore diretto*, printed in Rome in 1825, is found in *Scritti spirituali*, I, pp. 357–403. The real author of this work is St. Gaspar.

Cf. L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, III–3, Rome 2001, pp. 144–148.

⁴⁷F. Albertini, *Introduzione alla vita umile*, Part II, Rome, 1830, p. 125. The citations are taken from one of the 49 letters of Albertini that were published in the second part of this edition of 1830.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 118–119.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 120: letter from Bastia on June 24, 1812.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 94: letter of October 2, 1810.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 129: undated letter.

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 121–124: July 22, 1812.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 110–111.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 128: letter of May 1814; p. 139: November 10, 1819.

⁵⁶For a more complete analysis of the Precious Blood in the letters of Albertini, see Alberto Santonato, “Il Sangue di Cristo negli scritti di Mons. Francesco Albertini,” in A. M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo*, op. cit., pp. 566–571.

⁵⁷Cf. L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, III–1, Rome, 1982, p. 13; B. Conti, ed., *Scritti di Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi—Lettere*, Rome, 2000, pp. 11–12.

⁵⁸C. Bentivoglio, *Letter 14*.

⁵⁹A. Santelli, op. cit., pp. 56–57. Until recently it was commonly believed that Gaspar and Albertini along with Bentivoglio wrote the *Articoli Fondamentali* ‘Fundamental Articles,’ according to which the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood were to be dedicated to the education of women (art. 2). However, documents recently discovered in the archives of the *Società Tarquiniense d’Arte e Storia* show that the original aim of the institute was service to the sick in hospitals and in the home. This also appears in the *Rules* that Bentivoglio began to write in November 1812.

⁶⁰*Letter 22*.

⁶¹*Letter 23*.

⁶²Blessed Bartolomeo Dal Monte (1726–1778), a priest of Bologna, preached popular missions in the area around his diocese. With a small group of priests well trained in the ministry of missions, he founded *L’Opera delle Missioni* ‘The Work of the Missions,’ which soon extended its activity beyond the boundaries of Bologna. He died after a tireless apostolate, enriched by more than 300 missions, not counting other preaching. During his life he had printed some little works which then were gathered together with the title, *Gesù al cuore del sacerdote secolare e regolare* ‘Jesus at the heart of the secular and religious priest’ (Rome and Bologna, 1775). He also published *Metodo e Laudi delle Missioni* ‘Method and Praises of the Missions.’ He is buried in the Basilica of St. Petronio in Bologna and was beatified by John Paul II in 1997.

⁶³Cf. L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, III–3, Rome, 2001, pp. 251–254.

⁶⁴Letter 112.

⁶⁵Cf. L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, III–3, Rome, 2001, pp. 62–64; 255–264.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 245–295, especially pp. 255–264.

⁶⁷Letter 33.

⁶⁸Letter 38.

⁶⁹Cf. *Letters 54, 58, 59, 79*.

⁷⁰Letter 65.

⁷¹Cf. L. Contegiacomo, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, III–2, Rome 1991, pp. 328–331.

⁷²*Processo Ordinario Albanese*, I, p. 209.

⁷³Letter 38.

⁷⁴V. Pallotti, op. cit., ch. II, p. 14.

⁷⁵Letter 40.

⁷⁶Letter 48.

⁷⁷Letter 50.

⁷⁸Letter 57.

⁷⁹Letter 66 of May 10, 1813.

⁸⁰Letter 97.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Biagio Valentini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo, quasi un oracolo divino*, p. 55; English translation: ch. 2, p. 1.

⁸³Letter 102.

⁸⁴This letter (number 87) reveals the maturity that Gaspar had achieved just as he turned twenty-eight. Here is an excerpt from the letter:

Your most appreciated letter of the 29th of this past month *gaudio implevit cor meum* ‘filled my heart with joy.’ I cannot find words to express adequately the contentment of my soul; I am beside myself with joy and cannot satiate myself in blessing and thanking the immense kindness of the most merciful God.

The undertaking of the Holy Missions has always been the object of my yearnings: I am destitute, it is true, of those qualities that are required for such a great ministry; but divine Goodness comforts me and his ineffable Mercy encourages my spirit. Hence, quite willingly I accept *et libentissime* ‘and most gladly’ all that you seek to propose to me in your greatly esteemed letter. I thank you for the charity shown toward me by giving me a share in those merits that you acquire by working zealously for the greater divine glory, along with the other most worthy members and Brethren, to whom you will extend these sentiments of mine.

The practices of piety which all of us try to exercise are most opportune to maintain ever inflamed the fire of the

holy love of God, to increase evermore the concern for leading stray souls to the path of virtue, and finally of not overlooking our very selves and the great business of our souls in the midst of the most serious occupations which accompany the indefatigable concern for our neighbors. I shall try therefore to be exact in my Meditation periods, in the reading of a chapter of the New Testament and in a special Memento in the Holy Mass. Pray to the Lord that I profit from it for the attainment of a blessed eternity, and that I may not have to reprove myself in the last moments of my life, for not having taken into account so many impulses which God continues to supply for my conversion. With regard to this, tell Fr. Gaetano to obtain for me the spiritual help of those souls that he feeds with the divine word. In regard to this same matter, I beg you and the other excellent Companions, whom you will greet for me with distinction, to pray that Almighty God will grant me what I desire so ardently.

I would be pleased if all of us, united in spirit, were to recommend the holy Missions to the great Xavier, to whom the famous missionary, Father Paolo Segneri, was so devoted, as is read in his biography. I am convinced that it would be for us greatly advantageous to have his intercession. I know very well that it is not necessary to remind persons of such spirit and burning zeal of this matter; but my own devotion to this Saint, as you know, has urged me to write these few words. Meanwhile may God bless your holy desires, your pious intentions, your apostolic endeavors. *Qui coepit opus ipse perficiat 'may he perfect the work he began'* [cf. 2 Cor 8: 6] . . . *gratia vobis et pax a Deo, Patre nostro, et Domino Jesu Xto . . . gratias ago Deo semper pro omnibus vobis memoriam vestri faciens in orationibus meis sine intermissione, memor operis fidei vestrae et laboris et charitatis* 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God, always making a remembrance of you in my prayers. Hearing of your charity and faith' [cf. Phlm 1: 3]. I am jubilant in the Lord; and since I am and will always be a useless subject in such a beautiful undertaking, humbling myself before God, I shall follow in spirit at least their apostolic footsteps, and I shall go on repeating joyously: *O quam speciosi pedes evangelizantium pacem, evangelizantium bona* 'How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, of them that bring glad tidings of good things!' [Rom 10: 15, cf. also Is 52: 7].

⁸⁵Letter 99.

⁸⁶G. Merlini, *Un santo scruta un santo*, p. 190. English translation: chapter IV, p. 32.

⁸⁷Cf. Ibid. pp. 154–157; cf. also B. Conti, ed., *Regolamenti I: La Congregazione dei Missionari del Preziosissimo Sangue* (1815–1837), Rome, 1998, pp. 28–32. Hereafter cited as *Regolamenti*, the volume and page numbers.

⁸⁸Cf. Santelli, op. cit., pp. 196–197.

⁸⁹*Letter 1216*.

⁹⁰Cf. *Summarium objectionale*, Lipparelli, pp. 53–54.

⁹¹AGCPPS, volume *Arciconfraternita del P. S. e Temporalità*, 35.

⁹²Ibid., p. 32; Cf. *Regolamenti*, II, pp. 542–543.

⁹³Valentini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo*, pp. 16–127.

⁹⁴Cf. *Letter 112*; Cf. also B. Conti, “Il mese del Preziosissimo Sangue,” in A. M. Triacca, ed., *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo nella liturgia e nella pietà popolare*, II, Rome, 1989, p. 290.

⁹⁵Cf. G. Merlini, *Un Santo*, op. cit., pp. 196–197. English translation: ch. IV, p. 131.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷B. Valentini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo*, op. cit., p. 59. Cf. also *Regolamenti*, III, pp. 6–9.

⁹⁸G. Merlini, *Un santo*, op. cit., pp. 196–197. English translation: ch. IV, p. 132. Cf. the report of the appointment of St. Gaspar as Missionary of the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood, dated March 31, 1818, in *Regolamenti*, III, pp. 342–344.

⁹⁹Cf. G. Merlini, *Un santo*, op. cit., pp. 197, 400. English translation: ch. IV, p. 131, and ch. VI, p. 276. It is quite certain that Gaspar had made a *vow* to spread the devotion to the Most Precious Blood, even if we do not know the precise date. To the authoritative testimony of Merlini we add that of Don Antonio Lipparelli: “When I told him that I had no other vow except those attached to the priesthood, he replied to me: ‘Nor do I, except for the vow of promoting the devotion of the Most Precious Blood’” (*Positio super virtutibus*, § 165, 247).

Chapter Three: Devoted to a New Mission

¹*Letter 2092*.

²This chapter will be only a summary exposition of the devotion to the Precious Blood in St. Gaspar. In 2006 Conti published a book containing all of the texts of St. Gaspar on the Blood of Christ from the letters, spiritual writings, and rules. The work is available only in Italian and is titled *Testi sul Sangue di Cristo negli scritti di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*. Rome: Centro Studi Sanguis Christi, 2006.

³*Letter 1184*.

⁴*Positio super virtutibus*, Pedini, § 74, 335.

⁵Ibid., Romani, § 76, 335.

⁶Letter 2159.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Letter 1715.

⁹Letter 1939.

¹⁰Letter 3037.

¹¹Letter 3537.

¹²Letter 1559.

¹³Letter 1905.

¹⁴Letter 3296.

¹⁵Letter 2760.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Letter 1654.

¹⁸Letter 3785.

¹⁹*Positio super virtutibus*, § 168, 247.

²⁰Letter 165.

²¹Letter 797.

²²Letter 3662.

²³Severini, V., Menicucci, G., Panzini, B., *Gaspare Del Bufalo conosciuto da vicino*, Rome: 1992, p. 204. Hereafter cited as Panzini, op. cit.

²⁴*Regalamenti*, III, p. 74.

²⁵Ibid., p. 83.

²⁶Panzini, op. cit., p. 204.

²⁷*Positio super virtutibus*, Antonio Muccioli, § 109, 344.

²⁸Ibid., Silvestri, § 162, 246.

²⁹*Positio super virtutibus*, Falcioni, § 172, 248–249.

³⁰*Positio super virtutibus*, § 110, 232.

³¹A. Santelli, op. cit., 727.

³²Letter 1715.

³³*Positio super virtutibus*, Silvestri, § 77, 335.

³⁴Letter 705.

³⁵*Positio super virtutibus*, § 77, 335.

³⁶Letter 2879.

³⁷Letter 3133.

³⁸St. Vincent Strambi (1745–1824), Passionist and bishop of Macerata and Tolentino. Cf. A. Naselli, “L’Ottocento romano e la devozione al Sangue Prezioso,” in *Il Sangue Prezioso della nostra Redenzione*, 4 (1963), 210–211.

³⁹The first edition of 1820 was published without the name of the author. After the death of Bishop Strambi, January 1, 1824, it was always published with his name. The true authors of the work were S. Vincent Strambi and Don Gaetano Bonanni, made bishop of Norcia in 1821.

⁴⁰*Epistolario*, XI, 81–82.

⁴¹Cf. Letter 1958 of July 23, 1829. Cf. also various authors, *Le missioni teramane di San Gasparre* [sic] *Del Bufalo nel Ragguaglio di*

Nicola Palma, Centro Culturale Aprutino, Bellante (Teramo) 1995, 163–164.

⁴²*Letter 1957*, July 21, 1829.

⁴³*Letter 1815*, September 29, 1828.

⁴⁴*Letter 1215*, July 29, 1825.

⁴⁵B. Panzini, op. cit., 214.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 198.

⁴⁷*Letter 657*, November 11, 1822.

⁴⁸*Positio super virtutibus*, § 174, 249.

⁴⁹*Positio super virtutibus*, § Romani, § 76, 335.

⁵⁰B. Valentini, *Gaspere Del Bufalo*, op. cit., 232.

⁵¹B. Panzini, op. cit., 205.

⁵²Cf. *Letter 22*, for example.

⁵³*Letter 1929*, May 3, 1829.

⁵⁴*Letter 1205*, July 10, 1825.

⁵⁵*Letter 1929*, May 3, 1829.

⁵⁶*Letter 74*, July–August 1813.

⁵⁷B. Panzini, op. cit., 206.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 212.

⁵⁹*Letter 1929*, May 3, 1829.

⁶⁰*Positio super virtutibus*, Spina, § 92, 225.

⁶¹*Regolamenti*, III, 59.

⁶²*Positio super virtutibus*, Berga, § 160, 245.

⁶³*Letter 1810*, September 21, 1828.

⁶⁴*Scritti spirituali*, I, 44. Cf. *Appendice*, N. 16.

⁶⁵*Letter 1184*, June 30, 1825.

⁶⁶*Letter 1905*, March 2, 1829.

⁶⁷*Letter 23*.

⁶⁸*Letter 227*.

⁶⁹*Positio super virtutibus*, §§ 82–83, 223.

⁷⁰*Letter 1190*, to D. Ferdinando Gigliozzi.

⁷¹*Positio super virtutibus*, §§ 82–83, 225.

⁷²*Positio super virtutibus*, § 165, 247.

⁷³*Letter 105*, March 1, 1815, to D. Gaetano Bonanni.

⁷⁴*Positio super virtutibus*, Maggi, § 59, 127.

⁷⁵*Regolamenti*, III, 97.

⁷⁶*Letter 318*, August 18, 1820.

⁷⁷*Regolamenti*, III, 100.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 103.

⁷⁹*Regolamenti*, III, 104.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 105.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²*Ibid.*, 106.

⁸³Fr. Pietro Gravita, or as he was popularly called, Caravita, was a Jesuit, born in Narni (Terni) in 1588 and died in Rome in 1658. He built a church next to the Collegio Romano, which came to be

called the Oratory of Fr. Caravita. This Oratory was the heart of the urban mission and one of the most important centers of the apostolate in Rome. (Cf. A. Guidetti, *Le missioni popolari. I grandi gesuiti italiani*, Rusconi, Milano, 1988, 89–91).

⁸⁴*Regolamenti*, III, 76–77.

⁸⁵*Letter 1161*, June 17, 1825.

⁸⁶*Regolamenti*, III, 108.

⁸⁷*Regolamenti*, III, 108.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 109.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 112.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 257.

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²*Ibid.*, 258.

⁹³*Ibid.*

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 259.

⁹⁵*Regolamenti*, III, 257.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 262.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 283.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 276–281.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 277.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁰⁴*Regolamenti*, III, 296.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 300–301

Chapter 4: The New Congregation

¹*Letter 2103*.

²*Summarium objectionale*, 63.

³Cf. above, pp. 26–27.

⁴Cf. above, pp. 49–52.

⁵Cf. A. Santelli, op. cit., 196–197.

⁶*Letter 105*.

⁷A. Santelli, op. cit., 232.

⁸*Letter 112*.

⁹Cf. G. Merlini, *Un santo*, op. cit., 156–157, English translation: ch. 4, pp. 6–7.

¹⁰Cf. *ibid.*, 171.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 197.

¹²B. Valentini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo*, op. cit., 59.

¹³Cf. *Regolamenti*, III, 58.

¹⁴In fact, from August 1831 Gaspar did not use the title “Missionaries of the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood” for his missionaries, but called them “Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood,” as appears in a letter to Mons. Gregorio Muccioli of August 25, 1831 (cf. *Letter 2203*) and in a request to Gregory XVI on May 23, 1832 (*Letter 2347*).

¹⁵Cf. *Regolamenti*, I, 406–407; *Regolamenti*, III, 8–10.

¹⁶Cf. G. Merlini, *Un santo*, op. cit., 278, English translation: ch. 4, pp. 88–89.

¹⁷Op. cit., 200. Cf. also *ibid.*, 199–200.

¹⁸G. Cespites, “Giovanni Merlini e i Congressi della Direzione Generale CPPS,” in A. M. Triacca, ed., *Giovanni Merlini (1795–1873). Tempi e personalità*, Rome, 1998, 312–313.

¹⁹*Letter 946*.

²⁰*Letter 1181*.

²¹Cf. A. Rey, op. cit., II, 56–57.

²²Cf. *Letter 1210*.

²³Cf. *Progetto di cultura religiosa e morale per la Delegazione di Frosinone*, approved by Pius VII, in B. Conti, *Il metodo delle missioni al popolo secondo S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, Rome, 1991, 9–11.

²⁴In the letter of July 8, 1825 to Cristaldi, Gaspar gave this generic description of Monsignor Soglia: “Now that the present Holy Father has crossed off that title, in my opinion, that was not a good decision, based on the application of the customary rules, but rather one that was produced through the vile intervention of someone close to his Holiness, whom you know very well, and who was seeking to meddle into the situation.” *Letter 1200*. Later we will see that Gaspar will speak with Soglia before speaking with the pope.

²⁵Cf. the petition written by Don Innocenzo Betti in the C.P.P.S. General Archives, vol. *Istituto*, 164–265.

²⁶Cf. G. Merlini, *Un santo*, op. cit., 270–271, English translation: ch. 4, pp. 83–84. The work is found in *Scritti spirituali*, I, 357–403.

²⁷Cf. AGCPPS vol. *Istituto*, 264–269.

²⁸*Letter 1200*.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.* The congregation of women referred to here is the *Ristretto delle Sorelle della carità del Preziosissimo Sangue*, founded in Rome in the Church of Beata Vergine del Buon Consiglio and approved on October 7, 1822, by then Cardinal Vicar Annibale Della Genga, the future Leo XII.

³¹G. Merlini, *Un Santo*, p. 273. English translation: ch. 4, p. 83.

³²Antonio Muccioli (1783–1843), nephew of Cristaldi, was a member of the Gospel Workers and until 1819 preached missions with St. Gaspar.

³³*Letter 1207*.

³⁴*Letter 1209.*

³⁵*Letter 1210.*

³⁶*Letter 1211.*

³⁷*Letter 1213.*

³⁸In the volumes of the General Archives C.PP.S. the first two documents on the Institute and its title are found in *Scritti del Fondatore*, XII, 48–50 (cf. the transcription in *Letter 1214*). Another document on the *Regime dell'Istituto* (cf. *Scritti del Fondatore*, XII, 5–156, which is not transcribed in the *Epistolario*, but in the volume *Regolamenti*, I, 360–365, forms part of these. The third document on the privileges granted to the Congregation by the Holy See is found in *Scritti del Fondatore*, I, 367, and is transcribed as *Letter 1216*.

³⁹Cf. *Epistolario*, IX, 97–101, *Letter 3755* of July 29, 1825. In fact, this text, found in the Archives of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Affairs of the Church (later a part of the Secretariat of State) on the occasion of the processes for the beatification of St. Gaspar, was sent to the Sacred Congregation of Rites on July 5, 1894 and, on June 10, 1961, was sent to the General Archives C.PP.S. Regarding the “printed sheet” (*foglio in stampa*) spoken of therein, see *ibid.*, p. 10, note 2 and cf. *Regolamenti*, I, 37–44.

⁴⁰*Letter 1214*. Conti notes several corrections made by Cristaldi to Gaspar’s text. The uncorrected text appears in the appendix.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²Cf. *Regolamenti*, I, 360–365.

⁴³*Translator’s note*: The oratory, founded by the Jesuit Pietro Gravita or Caravita, is adjacent to the Collegio Romano and was dedicated to St. Francis Xavier. Gaspar must have been quite familiar with this center for the lay apostolate.

⁴⁴*Regolamenti*, I, 360–365.

⁴⁵*Letter 1216*.

⁴⁶Cf. *Regolamenti*, I, 355.

⁴⁷Cf. the various hypotheses on assigning a date to the matter referred to in this letter in L. Contegiaco, *Lettere di S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, I, Rome, 1968, 185.

⁴⁸In the *Letters* of St. Gaspar there is no letter written to Mons. Muccioli on July 27, 1825, but we maintain that it is the letter published in *Epistolario*, IV, 190–191 with the presumed date of July 2–7, 1826 (*Letter 1457*). In the rest of this footnote, Conti outlines in detail the reasons for this opinion, based on his discovery in 1998 of a document in the archives of the Diocese of Rome written by Muccioli along with a request to Leo XII.

⁴⁹*Letter 1457*.

⁵⁰The Archconfraternity was granted the concession to have the Office and Mass of the mysteries of the Passion. Cf. The third document sent to Cristaldi regarding the privileges granted by the Holy See. Cf. Also G. Merlini, *Un santo*, 268–269, English translation: ch. 4, pp. 82–83; *Regolamenti*, I, 371.

⁵¹Cf. *Regolamenti*, III, 265–275.

⁵²Gaspar is referring here to the verse in Revelation: “*Vicerunt [draconem] propter sanguinem Agni*” ‘They overcame [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb’ (Rv 12: 11). Gaspar cites this verse often in his writings.

⁵³Cf. D. Balboni, “*Il miracolo eucaristico di Ferrara (March 28, 1171)*,” in A. M. Triacca, editor, *Il mistero del Sangue di Cristo nella liturgia e nella pietà popolare*, II, Rome 1989, 415–452.

⁵⁴Perhaps Gaspar refers to the following event in the life of Blessed Giacomo di Bevagna, recounted in the book *Mese di Giugno*, (Day XX), written by St. Vincent Strambi: “One day, Blessed Giacomo, desolate and afflicted, placed himself before the image of Jesus crucified, and he saw that from his pierced side a great quantity of Blood flowed, and he heard these sweet words of Jesus: ‘*Sanguis iste sit in signum tuae salutis*’ ‘Let this Blood be a sign of your salvation.’ At this vision and with these words all his fear vanished . . . and he began to strive more than ever in the path of the virtues, which led him to the height of perfection.”

⁵⁵*Regolamenti*, I, 365–370; cf. *Letter 1215*.

⁵⁶ASVR, *Arciconfraternita del Prez.mo Sangue*, 147, Pac. 1, fasc. 6.

⁵⁷Cf. the letter of St. Gaspar to Cristaldi of July 28, 1825 (*Letter 1211*).

⁵⁸Cf. *Regolamenti*, I, 79–97.

⁵⁹*Letter 1222*.

⁶⁰*Letter 1226*.

⁶¹*Letters 1173 and 1174*.

⁶²Cf. B. Valentini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo*, op. cit., 72. Cf. also pp. 68–72, *ibid*.

⁶³In *Scritti del Fondatore* 12, 105, is preserved a sheet written by St. Gaspar on the approval on the part of bishops of the missions and spiritual exercises of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood. The document, however, touches on the approval of the bishops only regarding some ministries carried out by the Congregation from its founding. The text, which is incomplete, mentions a number of places where the Missionaries had work and cites the satisfaction of several bishops.

⁶⁴Cf. *Letter 1208*.

⁶⁵*Letter 1227*.

⁶⁶*Letter 1228*.

⁶⁷*Letter 1229*.

⁶⁸*Letter 1240*.

⁶⁹*Letter 1241*.

⁷⁰One can consult the reconstruction of this history and of the *Memorandum* presented by St. Gaspar to Pius VIII in *Regolamenti*, I, 274–377.

⁷¹*Processo Apostolico Albanese*, II, 1561v–1562.

⁷²G. Merlini, *Un santo*, op. cit., 177–288, English translation: the pages cited cover much of ch. 4.

⁷³Cf. *Processo Apostolico Albanese*, II, Rossi, 1570.

⁷⁴*Regolamenti*, I, 405. It should be noted that Cardinal Fransoni is speaking only of the petition and not of the “Rules.” On the other hand, in *Scritti del Fondatore* 12, 90, on the margin of the page there is the following annotation of Merlini: “Delivered to the most eminent Cardinal Fransoni by the Servant of God with the Rules, but he [Fransoni] did not believe it opportune to hand them over [to the pope] and to recommend them. After [Gaspar’s] death [Cardinal Fransoni] gave them to me.” In his deposition Merlini also notes that St. Gaspar wanted to submit the rule of his Institute “to the judgment of the Holy See, and he said that he wanted to send them [to the Holy See], and he gave the memorandum in his own hand which I saw originally to the most eminent Fransoni.” (G. Merlini, *Un santo*, op. cit., 217, English translation: ch. 4 p. 47.) Probably the “Rules” he is speaking about consisted only in a outline (*specchio*) or *Transunto* ‘Summary’ of the Institute, which in fact was delivered to Gregory XVI. Cf. the *Transunto* in *Letter 2140*.

⁷⁵*Summarium objectionale*, 23.

⁷⁶Cf. AGCPPS, *Istoria della Casa di Missione e Spirituali Esercizi di S. Paolo di Albano*, 34–35.

⁷⁷For more on the relationship between St. Gaspar with Gregory XVI, see the appropriate documentation in *Regolamenti*, I, 378–407.

⁷⁸*Positio super virtutibus*, § 164, 246–247; cf. *Letter 3785*. This is the testimony of Sr. Maria Giuseppa Pittori and contains excerpts of letters written to her by Gaspar, who was her spiritual director. She quotes Gaspar as hearing Jesus speak to him thus: “Look, my son, at my divine Blood. Through sufferings, I poured it out and through sufferings will its adoration be promoted.”

⁷⁹*Regula Congregationis Missionis a Pretioso Sanguine D.N.J.C. cum Praxi*, Alae 1881, art. 5, in *Regolamenti*, III, 93.

⁸⁰*Regolamenti*, I, 400.

⁸¹*Circular Letter of 1834*.

⁸²*Scritti spirituali*, I, 520.

⁸³*Letter 740*.

⁸⁴*Letter 1786*.

⁸⁵*Letter 1190*.

⁸⁶*Letter 1284*.

⁸⁷*Letter 1887*.

⁸⁸V. Pallotti, op. cit., 18. (Chapter II, page 3 of the English translation on CD-ROM.)

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 47. (Chapter IV, page 3 of the English translation on CD-ROM.)

Chapter Five: Sisters of the Most Precious Blood

¹*Letter 1216*: “The Institute . . . was conceived during the time of exile, wonderfully developed immediately after the exile with great advantage to souls, and, at the same time, to the anger of the devil who has never ceased nor does he now cease from waging a special war against this very expression: “Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.”

²Cf. A biographical profile of Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi, especially the years 1820–1826, in B. Conti, editor, *Scritti di Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi. I—Letter*, Rome, 2000, 5–78. Hereafter cited as C. Bentivoglio, *Lettere*, page number.

³In a long footnote, Conti notes that Antonio Santelli, biographer of Gaspar, interviewed one of the companions of Caterina Bentivoglio Orsi who followed her to Rome. This religious, Madre Caterina di S. Luigi, testified that Albertini wanted Gaspar with him at the Bentivoglio household because he had in mind the founding of a community of sisters who would be called the Daughters of the Most Precious Blood. She went on to say that Albertini had Gaspar writing the rules for the foundation almost every night. Santelli believed that she was referring to a document called the *Articoli Fondamentali*, because it had been believed that the institute of nuns was to be dedicated to the education of women. This interpretation can no longer be held, according to Conti, after the finding of some documents in Tarquinia in 1997, because these indicate that there were various plans for the institute of sisters. If Gaspar wrote something regarding the rule of the Daughters of the Most Precious Blood in 1811, those writings cannot be regarded as the rule that Bentivoglio will begin to compile in definitive form beginning in November 1829.

⁴Cf. C. Bentivoglio, *Regolamenti*, 19–41.

⁵Albertini, during his time in Bologna in 1811, had to work hard to convince Bentivoglio and her companions to take on this activity, but he did succeed. In a letter to Mons. Falzacappa, Bentivoglio writes: “You will say to me, ‘How could you put in these [Rules of 1812] the visiting of hospitals?’ It is because this is what [Albertini] used to instill in me and, even though here a Lady rarely goes to serve the sick, he wanted me, together with the first daughter [Clara Benini] to visit the incurables very often. I had many disagreements with my relatives over this, but obedience helped me overcome them . . .” Cf. C. Bentivoglio, *Lettere*, 160–161.

⁶Cf. C. Bentivoglio, *Regolamenti*, 21 ss.

⁷C. Bentivoglio, *Lettere*, 160.

⁸*Ibid.*, 103–104.

⁹Cf. *Epistolario di S. Gaspare*, XI (*Lettere al Card. G. F. Falzacappa*), Rome, 2000. These have not been translated into English.

¹⁰Cf. *Epistolario*, XI, 36–39.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 39.

¹²This is the testimony of Sr. Maria Giuseppa Pitorri in the *Processo Ordinario Romano* for the beatification and canonization of Gaspar: “on their part, they [Albertini and Gaspar] had made plans for founding an institute of nuns under the title of the Most Precious Blood and wanted to make use of my cooperation . . . I was transferred to a kind of temporary lodging (*come luogo precario*) in the Monastery of Divino Amore, because there was a previous understanding that with the Countess Bentivoglio Orsi in residence there, she would be selected to put into motion the founding of the Institute of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood. Seeing that there was no initiation of that foundation and at the same time not feeling at ease with staying in that place, I made known my sentiments to Canon Del Bufalo who, in agreement with Monsignor [Gregorio] Muccioli, bishop of Agatopoli, had me transferred, after almost five months, to this Monastery of the Ursuline nuns where I made my profession in 1823.” *Letter 3785*.

¹³*Epistolario*, XI, 41.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Cf. C. Bentivoglio, *Regalamenti*, 103–104.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁸*Epistolario*, XI, 41.

¹⁹Cf. C. Bentivoglio, *Regalamenti*, 104.

²⁰*Letter 3723*.

²¹Cf. C. Bentivoglio, *Lettere*, 46–53; 61–63 (383–384); 65–66; *Letter 1240* of January 24, 1825 [of St. Gaspar].

²²*Letter 1173*.

²³Cf. “Progetto di cultura religiosa e morale per la Delegazione di Frosinone,” in B. Conti, *Il metodo delle missioni al popolo secondo S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, Rome, 1991, 9–11.

²⁴B. Valentini, *Gaspare Del Bufalo*, op. cit., 274. The words in italics, unfortunately, were involuntarily left out when the deposition of Valentini was transcribed from the *Coppia Pubblica dei Processi*. In the first edition of the volume that collected these depositions these words are missing.

²⁵Cf. also B. Conti, “San Gaspare e la Beata Maria De Mattias,” in *Il Sangue Prezioso della nostra Redenzione*, 3 (1996), 210–218.

²⁶St. Gaspar preached the mission in Offida from June 26 to July 9, 1821 (cf. *Letter 443*) and from June 6–15, 1823 he preached ten days of the month of the Most Precious Blood there (cf. *Letters 722–726*).

²⁷*Letter 482*.

²⁸*Letter 2196*, April 8, 1831. (The text published in the *Epistolario* has “August” by mistake.) In 2001 a *Memorial* of the

event was given to the Congregaton by Sig. Mario Vannicola, which gives a description of the procession with the relic. Conti quotes this document at length. The procession involved the entire town with altars set up at various points. The “Head of the Mission” carried the Cross and the Missionaries gave *fervorini* along the way.

²⁹*Letter 891.*

³⁰*Letter 453.*

³¹*Letter 871.*

³²*Letter 1071.*

³³*Letter 871.*

³⁴*Summarium dei Processi di beatificazione di Gaspare Del Bufalo*, n. 2, p. 26.

³⁵*Letter 379.*

³⁶*Letter 467.*

³⁷*Letter 481.*

³⁸*Letter 871*; cf. also *Letter 897.*

³⁹St. Gaspar preached the mission in Santanatolia in May of 1819 and he did not go there for any more preaching commitments. Conti believes that the date of 1830 probably refers to the period of 1820–1821 when Gaspar was looking for local priests to found the Adorers of the Most Precious Blood with the intent of joining them to the foundation Bentivoglio would make. According to the deposition of Valentini, after the opposition to the Congregation stopped in 1830, Gaspar made use of Valentini and Merlini for the foundation of the Adorers, as will be seen below.

⁴⁰*Lettere della Beata Maria De Mattias*, I, Rome, 1944, 293–294. Hereafter cited *MDM* and the page number.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*MDM*, 327. The pastor of Morino, Ab. Felice Fiocchi, was well known to Gaspar and accompanied him on the mission of Roccagorga (Cf. Santelli, op. cit., 656).

⁴³*Letter 1303*. Cf. also *Letters 1456, 1481, 1485*. St. Gaspar began to speak of this “soul” with Butti in 1824.

⁴⁴An exhaustive treatment of the foundation in Patrica is found in M. Simoni, *Brigida Contenta e le Adoratrici di Patrica*, Rome, 1983.

⁴⁵AGASC, Prov. *Acuto*, Cart. *Patrica*.

⁴⁶*AMP*.

⁴⁷Cf. AGASC, loc. cit.

⁴⁸Cf. *MDM*, I, 9. In this letter of October 7, 1837, in reply to a letter of D. Giacomo Pilotti of September 29, Maria De Mattias states that she is open to being joined with the community of the Sisters of Patrica. Because the bishop of the diocese, as Gargari affirms, wanted to retain “absolute jurisdiction” over the Sisters of Patrica, this union would be realized only on March 20, 1906, when the Sisters of Patrica were nearly extinct. In any case, the Sisters of De Mattias always had very good relations with the Sisters of Patrica.

⁴⁹*Summarium Merlini*, § 29, 70. Cf. also the testimony of D. Vincenzo Gasdia: *Ibid.*, 233.

⁵⁰Cf. B. Conti, *Il metodo delle missioni al popolo secondo S. Gaspare Del Bufalo*, Rome, 1991, 9–12.

⁵¹G. Merlini, *Compendio della vita della Serva di Dio Maria De Mattias . . .*, Rome, 1868, 15. Hereafter cited as G. Merlini, *Compendio*, and the page number.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 15–16.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁴G. Merlini, *Lettere a Maria De Mattias*, I, Rome, 1974, 429. Conti notes that permission was granted sometime after May 1828.

⁵⁵Cf. B. Conti, *San Gaspare e la Beata Maria De Mattias*, op. cit., 195–205.

⁵⁶G. Merlini, *Compendio*, 21–22.

⁵⁷Cf. *Letter 1439*. In this letter he speaks only of a daughter. In a letter of March 21, 1827, also written to Giovanni De Mattias, he speaks of two daughters.

⁵⁸Cf. *Letter 1602*, in which he speaks of only one daughter whom we know to be Maria from other documents.

⁵⁹G. Merlini, *Compendio*, 26.

⁶⁰This phrase permits us to say that the only meeting of Maria De Mattias with Gaspar occurred after she left the Trinitarians, because he advises her against going to “other monasteries.”

⁶¹*MDM*, I, 242–243.

⁶²In the light of the documents now available to us, it seems that one must place the meeting around May 15, 1830. Conti cites a number of documents to support this dating.

⁶³*MDM*, II, Rome, 1947, 63. On February 14, 1831, Gaspar writes to Giovanni De Mattias: “I am writing in this ordinary mail delivery, having given a reply to everything, to the Most Reverend Bishop Bonanni, bishop of Norcia. As soon as I receive an answer, you will be instructed in everything. In the meantime, prayers. The sacrifice that you are making will call down upon you ample blessings. God rewards everything.” (*Letter 2125*).

⁶⁴*MDM*, II, 63.

⁶⁵Cf. *Ibid.*

⁶⁶On March 1, 1831, Gaspar writes to Giovanni De Mattias: “The most reverend bishop of Norcia has written to me that now it will be necessary to allow some time because of circumstances; then, he will give advice concerning the execution of the holy plan.” (*Letter 2131*).

⁶⁷G. Merlini, *Compendio*, 28–29.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*MDM*, I, 2.

Conclusion

¹For more on the Precious Blood spirituality of St. Maria De Mattias, cf. the excellent doctoral dissertation of Sr. Angelita Myerscough, ASC, entitled *Redemptive Encounter*, Ruma, Illinois, 1963.

²“The Holy Father to the Missionaries, Sisters, and [to the members of] the Pious Unions of the Most Precious Blood,” in *Il Sangue Prezioso della nostra Redenzione*, 48 (1962), 61.

³*Letter 1419*.

⁴Cf. *Documenti Pontifici sul culto del Preziosissimo Sangue di N. S. G. C.* Rome, 1982, 64.

⁵*Positio super virtutibus*, 14.

⁶*Ibid.*, § 83, 223.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, § 169, 248.

⁹V. Pallotti, op. cit., 19.

¹⁰Cf. *Positio super virtutibus*, § 110, 232.

¹¹*Ibid.*, § 109, 232.

¹²The exact title of the work of Palma is: *L'Anima invitata alla contemplazione de' Misteri del Sangue di Gesù in meditazioni per ciascun giorno del mese*, published in Aquila in 1830.

¹³Cf. *Letter 1958*.

¹⁴G. Merlini, *Un santo*, pp. 400–403; English translation: ch. 6, pp. 273–275.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 297–299.

¹⁶*Processo Apostolico Albanense*, I, Merlini, f. 830.

