



The Blood of Reconciliation

by Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S.

Reconciliation in C.P.P.S. Charism and Spirituality

by Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S.

Stories of Reconciliation

by Alan Hartway, C.P.P.S.

Reconciliation and Social Justice

by Gennaro Cespites, C.P.P.S.

Reconciliation in a Parish

by Antonio Baus, C.P.P.S.

Becoming a Community of Reconciliation

by Rosario Pacillo, C.P.P.S.

The Blood Of Reconciliation

by Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S.

In 1985, the Church of Chile celebrated a "Year of Reconciliation" to heal the many wounds still open and festering after years of political and social upheaval. At the time, I was Rector of St. Gaspar's School, and on the Archdiocesan Team for the Coordination of the Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese. I was invited to sit on the Coordinating Committee which was preparing the year's activities. I recall one planning session when the Vicar General looked at me and said: "Barry, you can help us understand what reconciliation means, since you are a Missionary of the Precious Blood!" It soon became clear that we faced a concept which was not easy to understand and certainly very difficult to achieve. Reconciliation is one of the aspects of the Church's mission which is drawing increasing attention in today's world. And the Blood shed by Christ to reconcile everything in his person (cf. Col 1:19-20) lies at the very heart of a spirituality of the Blood.



What does reconciliation mean? I still struggle today to arrive at a definition of reconciliation. There are too many false understandings of it in vogue. Often people who have suffered long under social unrest and violence ask in their desperation that peace be imposed, seeking thus to achieve some measure of security for themselves. But can true peace be built solely upon the physical elimination of opponents and delinquents? Is the reconciliation Christ achieved through his Blood the peace of the graveyards? Is reconciliation about "forgetting" and about granting wide-ranging amnesties to exonerate the oppressors from all their crimes against humanity? Is peace the equivalent of signing a truce between warring countries or feuding tribes, which perhaps stops the hostilities but does nothing to resolve the underlying issues of injustice which often sparked the conflicts in the first place? Certainly not. But then what does reconciliation mean?

Perhaps one of the best ways to understand reconciliation and its dynamics is to think of it as bringing people and things into their proper relationships. Sin--whether personal, social, or institutionalized--has wreaked havoc on humanity, distorting, obstructing, and often destroying the proper relationships which God intends for our world. We might think of reconciliation in this sense on several levels:

- personal, in which we are put into the proper relation with God;
- communal, in which we reestablish the proper relationship with one another;
- social, in which we develop the proper relationship among peoples, races, societies;
- environmental, by returning to a respectful and proper relationship with our mother earth.

Or as it is put in the Letter to the Ephesians: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ. It is he who is our peace, and who made the two of us one by breaking down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart." (2:13-14)

The symbol of the cross itself speaks to us graphically of this reconciliation. The vertical post of the cross rises from the ground to the heavens, showing that humankind is once again in relationship with the Father and sons and daughters. The horizontal beam which holds up Christ's outstretched arms speaks to us of a reconciled humanity in which we become one with others, recognizing our condition as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father. Thus the original harmony between God and humans, and between all peoples, is restored through Christ, who made peace through the blood of the cross (Col 1:19-20). Our relationships have been redeemed.

Reconciliation in the Truth

We will only be able to give peace if we have attained in our own lives that deep peace and reconciliation in the blood of Christ. An important part of this process of personal reconciliation lies in accepting the truth about ourselves. And the truth is this: "God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not holding men's faults against them, and he has entrusted to us the news that they are reconciled." (2 Cor 5:19)

Many of us have fallen into Satan's snare. We have accepted his lies as truths. We believe along with most of humanity today that the truth of our identity lies in success or popularity. Such competitiveness breeds so much suffering and injustice in our world. It can also creep into and poison our hearts and relationships within religious life. Jesus has come to unmask the lie! Jesus teaches us that the truth of our identity is not found in any of that. It is found rather in God's infinite love for us.

Pope John Paul II spoke about this years ago on a visit to Brazil: "The Precious Blood of Christ brings us the greatest joy of all: that of knowing that we are loved by God!" And what a peace and joy that truth brings us! Each of us must first accept this startling truth if we are to be bearers and witnesses of God's love and reconciliation to others: "Realize that you were delivered from the futile way of life you fathers handed on to you, not by an diminishable sum of silver or gold, but by Christ's blood beyond all price: the blood of a spotless, unblemished lamb." (1 Peter 1:18-19)

We are sons and daughters of god, we are of royal lineage. We should not be content to live in any other way. This is what Jesus came to teach us. This is what Jesus reveals to us: the truth about our human condition! He came to begin a New Creation, and he calls you and me to build that new world with him in his Spirit. Jesus came to reconcile us in the Truth.

Ambassadors of Reconciliation

Once we have discovered and accepted this truth, we are in a position to take up the call to become ambassadors of reconciliation. "It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation. In other words we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were appealing through us, and the appeal we make in Christ's name is: be reconciled to God." (2 Cor 5:20) It is a "call of the blood" which beckons every one of us, whatever our ministry or age. All of us are called to ambassadors of reconciliation, both those engaged in active apostolates as well as those confined to our houses by health, age, or other responsibilities. We belong to a broken humanity in need of healing. We are called and sent forth to extend to every person we meet the compassionate love of Christ who has redeemed all peoples in his blood. Special attention must be shown to those whom the Lord himself has chosen as the privileged ones: those that society rejects or marginalizes, those pushed to the fringes by prejudice, jealousy, and hatred.

We do not need elaborate programs to exercise this ministry of reconciliation. It is something that each of us can do if we set our hearts to it. All of us, by our attitudes and our simple gestures, can announce the truth proclaimed in Psalm 72:12-14: "For he shall rescue the poor man when he cries out, and the afflicted when he has not one to help him. he shall have pity for the lowly and the poor; the lives of the poor he shall save. From fraud and violence he shall redeem them, and precious shall their blood be in his sight."

In this edition of *The Cup* several missionaries bring to us different points of view about reconciliation. Fr. Robert Schreiter begins by looking at reconciliation's place in our charism and spirituality. Fr. Alan Hartway shares with us several stories of reconciliation from his experience as pastor in Garden City, Kansas in the USA. These stories taken from the everyday life of the parish, and drawn from a multicultural context, will surely make us aware of the many ways we are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation in our daily ministry.

Don Gennaro Cespites writes about reconciliation and social justice in the life and work of our Founder, St. Gaspar. he points out that, while Gaspar addressed the social issues of his day, he also recognized that the underlying cause of social injustice is a moral one, and the ultimate answer lies in conversion of the heart.

Fr. Antonio Baus speaks candidly of his experience in a large urban parish in Santiago in Chile. It is a community that has seen both social and internal conflict. Reconciliation has called him and the pastoral team to face the truth of their situations, sustained by the spirituality of the blood.

And finally, Don Rosario Pacillo, past of St. Philip Neri Parish in Putignano, Italy, shares with us the experience of his parish putting at the center of their pastoral activity the care for rehabilitation of chemically dependent youth. The entire parish is involved in one way or another in helping these young men and women become reconciled with themselves and with God, with the Church and with society. This is a striking example of how to respond creatively to our call to be missionaries within the parish setting.

These reflections, profound as they are, only begin to touch the possibilities for the complex and challenging work of reconciliation. Hopefully they will spark our imagination and our own creativity as we go about our everyday tasks, ever more conscious of our call to be ambassadors of reconciliation, motivated by the spirituality of the Precious Blood.

Reconciliation In C.PP.S. Charism And Spirituality

by Robert Schreiter, C.PP.S.

Reconciliation in Our World Today

As the twentieth century ends, the theme of reconciliation has come forward with ever increasing frequency. Relief agencies note that since the end of the Cold War, the number of disasters to which they are asked to respond has increased fivefold. Before the mid-1980's, almost all of the disasters they confronted were natural catastrophes; today they are nearly always of human origin: ethnic conflicts and wars. Caritas Internationalis, the umbrella organization for the relief agencies in the Catholic Church, has made reconciliation its theme for the its current quadrennium.

Many countries have experienced the end of dictatorship, civil war, and terror. Within the C.PP.S. alone, one thinks of Chile, Peru, Guatemala, Croatia, and Poland. Communal strife continues to threaten India. Violence against the indigenous goes on unabated in Brazil. The fragmentation of life in many societies, and the social conflict arising out of ethnic tensions in Europe and North America, call out for finding ways of coming together and resolving old hurts. Pope John Paul II made reconciliation the theme of his address for the 1997 Day of World Peace, and sees it as key to a deeper evangelization.

All of these situations represent today's "cry of the blood." As Missionaries of the Blood of Christ, we need to look in a special way at what our charism and spirituality offer to these situations calling out for reconciliation.

Reconciliation in the Bible

In order to understand what our charism and spirituality might contribute to reconciliation in the world today, it is worthwhile to summarize the biblical teaching on reconciliation. The term itself is only used fourteen times in the Bible, and then in the writings of Paul. To be sure, there are many biblical stories of reconciliation in both Testaments, such as Joseph with his brothers (Genesis 45:4-6) and the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).

Let me summarize the teaching in five points:

- First of all, reconciliation is always the work of God, who initiates and completes the work in Christ. As many of the stories in the articles that follow in this issue of The Cup indicate, we are only present and able to witness to what God does in the act of reconciliation.
- Second, because it is the work of God and we are but "ambassadors for Christ's sake" (2 Cor 5:20), our attitude in the work of reconciliation is that it is for us more a spirituality than a strategy. We can only hope to create the environment in which God chooses to work.
- The experience of reconciliation makes of both the victim and the wrongdoer a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). In commonsense thinking about reconciliation, we think that reconciliation becomes possible when the wrongdoer repents. But in point of fact, reconciliation biblically understood begins when God heals the victim, restoring the victim's damaged humanity. The restored and reconciled victim becomes the agent through which God effects a wider reconciliation. But this restoration and reconciliation is not a return to a previous state. Rather, the victim is indeed a new creation, carried to a new place and a new mission as ambassador of reconciliation.
- Fourth, the process of reconciliation that creates this restored humanity is the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. We are healed by the blood of the cross (Col 1:20). Just as God restores the innocent victim Jesus to life in the resurrection, so also will God restore us.
- Finally, reconciliation understood in this manner reveals how difficult and costly reconciliation really is. Full reconciliation happens only when all are brought together in Christ (Col 1:20).

Reconciliation is one of the most important ways the Bible provides us for talking about God's action in our lives and in our world. Today it has taken on special significance

Reconciliation and Our Charism

According to our Normative Texts, the center of our apostolic work, given to us by St. Gaspar, is the ministry of the Word. We are to speak God's Word wherever it is needed and in such a way that it can be understood. By so doing, we participate in the creating and redeeming power of God's Word.

Reconciliation is fundamentally tied up with speaking. It is the word of forgiveness spoken in the sacrament of reconciliation that heals our relationship with God. And as the stories in Frs. Hartway's and Pacillo's articles recount, telling the story of what has happened to us is a way of getting beyond the power those stories can have over our lives. In preaching, we have the opportunity to encounter God's word for us. That is why St. Gaspar saw religious instruction as so important for the people of Sonnino, as Don Gennaro Cespites notes in his article. The words are words of life, that bring us to a new place and to a new creation.

Inasmuch as our charism is bound up with the renewing power of the word, it should be, in our times, preeminently a ministry of reconciliation. As was noted earlier, many areas where the C.P.P.S. Missionaries work are emerging from long periods of acute conflict. Others are experiencing the fragmentation of a pluralist society and a fast-changing world. The word of reconciliation becomes the word we need to hear today.

Reconciliation and Our Spirituality

If reconciliation is more a spirituality than a strategy, what form does it take within our spirituality? The signal passage in the Bible for our spirituality is found in Ephesians 2: 13: "You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Here those who have been made strangers and are alienated are brought together. It is the blood of the innocent victim that makes that possible.

I think it was Don Beniamino Conti who, in 1992, first insisted on the centrality of the theme of reconciliation for our spirituality. His words have certainly reached fulfillment today. The blood of the cross is the source of our peace (Col 1:20; cf. Eph 2: 14), and when we proclaim the love God has shown for us in Christ's shedding of his blood, we are speaking the word of reconciliation. But concretely, what does a life devoted to reconciliation look like? Let me make some suggestions, illustrated by the testimonies to reconciliation that appear in this issue of The Cup.

It begins by offering victims a zone of safety and hospitality. We should be creating in our mission houses, parishes, and schools places where victims can come to explore their wounds. It is only when such places are available that the reconciliation process can get underway. As Don Rosario's article shows elsewhere in this issue, creating such a zone becomes transformative not only of the victim, but also of those who extend safety and hospitality to others.

Second, a spirituality of reconciliation requires patient accompaniment of the victims. P. Antonio Baus' story of a parish riven first by years of dictatorship and oppression, and then by the shock of a double life of its pastor, shows how important--and how difficult--this step is. Often we wish God would work faster, but as Fr. Hartway reminds us, God works in God's own time.

Third, reconciliation requires a commitment to truth. The past cannot be ignored or repressed. Often it has been a tangle of lies that has diminished all who have been in contact with it. Injustice cannot be condoned or legitimated. Gradually we must all come into the bright light of truth out of the shadows of deception and illusion.

Finally, a spirituality of reconciliation is about building communities of memory and hope. A community of memory is one that does not forget its past, but no longer lives under its burden. We can never forget what happened, but we can remember it in a different way. To be able so to remember is the grace of reconciliation. But a reconciled community does not dwell on the past; it looks ahead to the

future in hope. It does this by trying to create the conditions under which such wrongdoing can never happen again.

It seems to me that a spirituality of reconciliation is preeminently the call of our charism for this time in our history. It speaks loudly of how God is at work in our world, even amid the wrenching realities of evil that often surround us. As Missionaries of the Blood of Christ, the "call of the blood" for us today is certainly in this direction.

Stories Of Reconciliation

by Alan Hartway, C.P.P.S.

Reconciliation in parish life is not usually something actively undertaken or a course of action actively pursued. Rather, it is an attitude, a standing open, a being available. Some people have a gift or a special sense of reconciliation. In my own experience, reconciliation did not involve a lot of words, proposals, or ideas from me, but rather listening to the stories of people, honoring those stories with dignity and respect, and assisting people in discovering in those stories meaning, identity, and security.

While I was for nine years pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Garden City, Kansas, I was very blessed to be involved in many stories of reconciliation. Each of these stories remain for me memories of grace and wisdom. In each narrative I experience the love God has for these people, often people rejected by the powers of our society and culture. The charism of reconciliation is really about grace and wisdom. In the midst of each instance of reconciliation I came to realize how little I knew and how much I needed to learn. I realized how much was not of my own doing, but came directly from the power and presence of God, acting in our lives to build us up as a community of faith and hope.

I want to share four stories of reconciliation from Garden City with you. Each of these stories has a multicultural component, because it seems to me that--at least in North American society--it is this aspect that stands most in need of reconciliation.

Reconciliation and Race Relations

In the late 1980's, Garden City was chosen as a site for studying race relations. Garden City is a community of about 30,000 people, in an isolated area in the west of the United States. The main industry in town is the processing of beef; over 8,000 cattle are killed each day. Because there was very low unemployment, people from many countries have been attracted to come there. In our parish, one of two Catholic parishes in town, there were a dozen different language and cultural groups. The largest was Latino, predominantly from Mexico, but it seemed like almost every Latin American country was represented. The Ford Foundation, that was conducting the study of race relations, placed three anthropologists in our community to study us. They asked what we were doing to make race relations smooth, and what was happening when things got tense. Our parish was one of the focal points, because so many different groups gathered there for worship and for other parish activities.

During this time, federal arbitrators were employed to work with the police department and the Mexican and Mexican-American community. There had been a pattern of excessive arrests of Latinos after the taverns closed at 2:00 A.M. There was clearly a need for better understanding between a predominantly the white culture, represented by the police force, and the Mexican cultures.

The strategy was to hold a series of meetings in safe locations to increase the quality of communications between the two groups. St. Mary's parish meeting room was chosen as one of the sites. On a Sunday afternoon all the groups gathered. The arbitrators began by inviting people to tell their stories. It was like opening a flood gate. After about an hour, the police chief started tapping on his wrist watch, as though it had stopped. Irene, one of the elders of the Latino community, stood up and pointed to him, saying, "That's the problem. Our sense of time is different. We come from two

different cultures." The police chief responded, "It's been over an hour. How many more of these stories do we have to listen to?" Irene retorted, "Every single one of them!" Then the chief complained, "But they all sound the same." To which Irene replied, "No. Each story is about an individual person. They must all be heard."

I do not think that I will ever forget that exchange. How wise was this elder woman of our parish! In reconciliation, every story will be heard and attended to. Every person will know that they are important. The rest of the meetings between the police and the Latino community were mainly about sharing stories, learning how to hear the stories from another's point of view and without our own judgments, and learning to share cultural differences. My role as pastor was simply to be there, a presence which communicated to the people that this would be a safe place to speak, that what they were doing was something holy and important. The work of reconciliation was the interaction between the various groups and their coming to listen to one another. In a certain way, the police chief was correct: it is a long and patient undertaking. But Irene was also right: it is a work worth doing and it is worth taking the time. Reconciliation does take time--and the time is usually God's time.

Reconciliation between Families

In November, 1992, a secondary school pupil was killed in a tragic automobile accident on the way home from a sporting event. Another young man was driving. It was in the early morning hours, and he missed a curve in the road. The other young man, who was sleeping at the time, was killed in the crash. He was an extremely popular youth, and a volunteer catechist for the primary school children in the parish. He was the only son of a Mexican-American couple who were themselves very involved in the parish and in the community. They also had a daughter. His death was a tremendous loss for this couple, especially for the young man's father. The young man who had been driving was Vietnamese, and had been adopted as the only son of an American couple who were not Catholic.

Several weeks after the heavily attended funeral, the parents of the deceased youth approached me, and asked if I would arrange a meeting with the young man who had been driving, and with his parents. They lived together in the same small town near by, and found their relationships now, and the silences, awkward. The father also confessed how angry he was about this youth who had "killed his son," as he put it. With great fear for how this might turn out, and after considering it for some time, I agreed to work with them. I had several meetings with the couple who had lost their son, and I had one meeting along with the other family.

Then we arranged a meeting at the home of the dead young man's parents. There were many tears as the story of the night of the accident was told and retold in every detail. It was almost like a ritual dance of words in which everyone could come to have the same words for the terrible event. Everyone was trying to understand and make sense of the accident that had changed their lives. My role was to ask questions to seek clarity, and to invite people to speak when they were being quiet.

Everyone expressed their grief, their sadness, and their anger. At one point the father said to the young man. "You killed my son, my only son." It was like David mourning Absalom. The young man answered, "I know I am responsible, and I am sorry. I am sorry that you no longer have your son. Please forgive me." At that point the father stood up and came across the room. I was scared about what he might do. But he hugged this young man with many tears in his eyes.

I believe that it was on that day and in that moment that the healing began. I also know that it was a small step in reconciliation which will take many more years. But it was a beginning, a beginning that came from the grace of God.

Reconciliation and Violence

In 1990, after a series of violent deaths of parishioners, a group of people (including the family of the latest victim) came to me as their pastor. They wanted to do something about guns in the community. They felt that the Church ought to take a stand on this issue. So we talked first with the lay Latino Council of the parish, and then with the Pastoral Council. We came up with a plan. I would preach a series of homilies about the effects of violence in our culture. This would culminate in a "gun call" at

the altar, at which time people would be invited to come forward to lay down their arms. A second part of the plan was an invitation to sign a statement at all the Masses on November 1. The statement would be presented during the presentation of gifts at each Mass, and say: "This Christmas I am a parent committed to buying my children gifts that are non-violent. I am committed to teaching my children about Jesus, the Prince of Peace."

This latter part of the plan received an overwhelming response. Few responded to the first part of the plan. No weapons were brought forward at Mass. Several weapons were turned in privately, and these were given to the police to be destroyed. But it provoked a considerable discussion in the whole community about violence in our lives, and how we were all responsible for making it stop.

Again, the most important thing that happened was the telling of stories, and remembering and honoring the victims. It also meant that everyone could do something about the problem. I received much criticism during this "campaign." I also took risks, since I was threatened by local members of the National Rifle Association, and was even criticized by fellow priests--one of whom informed me that he always slept with a gun. Reconciliation is all about the risks we are willing to take for that which is important to us.

Reconciliation and Other Religions

Among the men working in the beef processing plants were five young Muslims from Africa. They worked with and became friends with the Latinos in the plant, and also spent their free time with them. They even came to Mass on Sundays with their friends. When they did this, one of parishioners came to me very concerned about this, thinking that they should not be there because they were not even Christians. This person wanted to know what I was going to do about this as pastor. I said, "Extend to them the sign of peace." Eventually two of them joined the Church, because they had experienced our hospitality and found a home among us. Sometimes bringing people together and reconciling difference is just this simple.

St. Gaspar and Reconciliation

In St. Gaspar's day, there was a tremendous gulf between the culture of the city of Rome and the culture of the mountain peoples near Rome. Both had enough violence, each of their own kind. Gaspar was able to read accurately the problem and to analyze the problem at its root. He also had the courage to do something about it. He was able to step outside his own culture and enter the culture of another with compassion and understanding. He was able to listen to their stories, and accord them dignity and respect. He was able to invite them to become new creations. He afforded them hope and hospitality, a place where a new world could take shape around them.

It seems that the charism of the Precious Blood is this. We read the signs of our times, know what can be done, respond to and engage others in our activity, have the courage to commit ourselves to a risky course of action, and be present and participating. For the rest, we know that reconciliation is a matter of God's grace and love for us, and it is just this grace and love that urges us on in this ministry of reconciliation.

Reconciliation And Social Justice

by Gennaro Cespites, C.P.P.S.

When speaking of reconciliation and social justice, especially in the times of St. Gaspar and Venerable John Merlini, we are drawn automatically to the matter of brigandage and the brigands, for whose redemption our two saintly missionaries labored and suffered so much. But brigandage was not the most worrisome aspect of the political and social life of the Papal States, even if it was the most striking and generally troublesome one. Gaspar's judgment of the efficiency of the Papal States in dealing with it was severe (cf. *Epistolario III* (1824-25), 337-353).

The political class then in power was corrupt and out only for its own gain. The brutal use of force, the

unequal distribution of income, and the laxity of the clergy reinforced the opposition to the government in strongly anticlerical and often irreligious terms. To friends who were seriously engaged in politics Gaspar proposed some political solutions that at times appeared to be a return to the feudal state. But "political solutions" were not Gaspar's principal concern. His priestly and missionary activity--along with that of his companions in ministry, above all that of Venerable Merlini--was fiercely apolitical, in the sense that his sole motivation and passion was to announce the message of salvation to all, whatever their social, cultural, and political context. It was apolitical, but not divorced from reality; apostolic, but not inhumane. Everything was oriented to heaven, but not disengaged from the events of the world in which he lived.

He writes in a letter to Cardinal Cristaldi in September, 1824:

Furthermore, I would like to ask you to have the Holy Father remove the abuse of having heads cut off and the dismembering of the bodies of those who died after being condemned in justice. It is quite enough that the guilty one be justly judged; then, Christian burial should be allowed for anyone of them who, through the sacraments, has been reconciled to God. What is going on now is inhuman. In this Province, in certain localities, the skulls appended to the gates are more numerous, so to speak, than the stones....It is a great agony to find oneself continuously in the face of this practice, which I, in no way at all, can reconcile with the spirit of religious piety toward the deceased. (idem, 153)

Sustained by a strong apostolic awareness, Gaspar felt these things very deeply on this "frontier" that had been entrusted to him directly by Pope Pius VII. His ministry of reconciliation, which had gone through trials of fire and water, was lived in an ever growing consciousness without which his ability to act would have withered away.

In another letter to Cristaldi, dated June 20, 1825, Gaspar denounces the causes of brigandage which, in his mind, resided in social injustice, the corruption of the ruling classes, and the lack of public order:

It cannot be denied that brigandry may, in great part, have its origin in a certain hatred between the poor and the well-off, and especially with regard to interests. One is unable to say what sort of ruinous system may have been introduced relative to negotiation in grain and to so-called loans, which have no resemblance to a loan, so that the poor people, irritated by this vexation, contemplate revenge and havoc.

The rich person who makes use of that oppression of the needy and furthermore knows how to squander that temporal income in continual gaming, dances, intemperate actions and similar things. (idem, 340).

He is suggesting therefore that some practical, economic interventions to support the poorest and most needy, taking into account the synodal laws given but as yet unenforced. He then says that "in this way there will be a correlation between those external laws and the pious and religious training they will get. I repeat, in this way, a huge number of baneful weeds in the hearts of people will be removed." (idem, 340).

It is very important to underline Gaspar's approach here: to associate external laws with the religious instruction of the poor, since the true enemy of truth is not error, but ignorance.

Gaspar goes on to review other situations which, in his opinion, have been the cause pushing these people into the path of hiding in the mountains and into brigandage: "The second cause is the reduction of the immunity of the local church and of pious places to a simple exterior convenience, at most a matter of words, and not preserved in substance." In this way a great chance has been missed, because the purpose of that ancient institution "would be to set up, between the crime and the measure to be taken, a sort of middle way which would indeed impede one from despair but would dispose the person to a condition of surrendering himself into the hands of the authorities, like a son who is returning to the arms of his parent. The mixture of bitter and sweet, so to speak, causes the crime to be seen in its own proper deformity." (idem, 340)

Gaspar also denounces the fact that the laws have had, in general, the opposite effect intended. He notes that, under the escort of the civil guard, there are other "ways by which to bring the delinquent back to reconciliation with the government, and the acceptance of punishment, mitigated because of

good behavior." This would also free the State itself from many worries and expenses. "Experience has shown that, even though all disorders are not going to be removed in this manner, it cannot be denied that they would be lessened, and there would be a way of not increasing them, as follows, for anyone who, in despair, might decide to live in the mountains." (idem, 340)

At this point Gaspar suggests to the authorities to draw up an edict, conciliatory but in terms no one can overlook (and these are not lacking), including also an indirect invitation to anyone who has been delinquent up to now, urging them to place themselves in the arms of the Church, and peacefully to submit themselves to those measures which the rule, who is also a father, would know to apply in those cases. All of this would, in every way, remove this evil form of life. Likewise, one must adhere to a certain decisive action, and from among the various possibilities available, select the one which balances best what is spiritual and eternal with the temporal and external world. What a painful experience it is to be informed that there are poor people who are about to die without even pronouncing the word Jesus! Indeed this is a matter of eternal fire and of souls that have cost the Blood of our impassioned Lord! Whatever may be the principle of public law to be taken into consideration, it is certain that we should examine those principles of law, not in a restricted fashion but in a composite sense, that is to say, with mercy, with charity, with zeal for salvation of souls." (idem, 341).

Here is the key for understanding the social commitment of Gaspar and of John Merlini: "zeal for the salvation of souls."

What does all this mean, practically, for a ministry of reconciliation?

It was a decision to combat the lack of religious education, which was the true cause of that social plague of brigandage. That is why Gaspar asked that he and his companions be allowed to go alone to the brigands without military escort, with a very clear program in mind: "It is not ourselves that we are proclaiming, but Christ Jesus as the Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. It is God who said 'Let light shine out of darkness,' that has shone into our hearts to enlighten them with the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ." (2 Cor 4:5-6)

For Gaspar, to be a person of reconciliation is to be one who possesses a radical consciousness of Christ, an awareness that is not something external to his life, but constitutes the intimate truth of his very being. From this perspective of faith, the answer to violence is not based on external considerations of laws and social order, because if it is in the first instance a matter of law and order, then the response to violence will have to be judicial and punitive. But, on the other hand, if the answer comes from one's own commitment to "follow Christ more freely and to imitate him more closely" (Perfectae Caritatis, 1), it will become a response of peace and healing reconciliation. Therefore, Gaspar "with all due respect" says to Bishop Benvenuti, Delegate to Frosinone, "if you want to end brigandage, thoroughly and quickly, publish a decree of clemency." He underscores the fact that the missions of his companions have extinguished hatred among the people and their thirst for vengeance. Because of this the people who have hidden in the mountains would be able to return to a normal life, by getting off lightly, and the problem would be resolved.

Everything Gaspar says is echoed by a letter sent by the brigands from their mountain hideaway, to "the very esteemed and very reverend Don Giovanni [Merlini]" who always "preaches the things of God and those of the earth" in order to bring peace "and quiet to the world." "The poor brigands commend themselves to the benign charity of your fatherhood," and ask him to speak with Canon Del Bufalo to obtain from His Holiness "the publication of a decree of pardon." They also have a firm intention--if Gaspar says yes--to go to Rome and to take along their family members to obtain the pardon of the Pope.

Unfortunately, a rapid end to brigandage would not have pleased the enemies of the Papal States, because it would have heightened the prestige of the Pope; nor would it have pleased his own bureaucrats, who would have lost their combat pay for running extra risk!

The ferocity of the brigands, which had its origin in spiritual and cultural ignorance, would continue; the ferocity of the authorities, which had its roots in the thirst for power and wealth, would continue even longer. The story remains true today.

The great need for "forgiveness" is the grand theme of this century, a so-called "laicist" century . It is the unresolved knot around which revolve the most thorny cases that impassion world politics and culture. Perhaps it is a new kind of Canossa to which such a "laicist" century might come to lay down the moral concerns it cannot resolve.

Reconciliation In A Parish

by Antonio Baus, C.PP.S.

The Missionaries of the Precious Blood came to work in Chile in 1947. From those first years, they were responsible for the pastoral care of San José Parish which, in the course of time, took on ever greater proportions, both in size and in population. Located on the extreme edge of Santiago, it was characterized by poverty and an almost uncontrolled growth of new settlements in its environs. One of these settlements began to receive pastoral care in the 1950's, and became an independent parish on July 8, 1962 with the name of Our Lady of the Precious Blood. From that time until the present, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood have developed their ministry their in the midst of many difficulties, both organizational and of infrastructure. There were the effects of the years of the dictatorship and later, the shortage of priests. The various settlements and regions which have been constructed reflect the situation of many families who came there and began, with great effort, to build their own houses, working under difficult conditions of employment and with little help from their neighbors. Little by little neighborhood organizations began to develop which gave shape to the district, working to meet their basic needs for light, water, and sewage.

Within this entire process, the Church was being built up, not only in its physical aspect but also in the countless relationships which had been established through the shaping of distinct groups that began to be born around the parish. However, progress was slow and required much patience and dedication.

The Years of the Dictatorship

During the years of the dictatorship (1973-1989), many districts in the area suffered from the abuses committed. The area of our parish was particularly affected by political oppression, and was further made even more acute by the negative effects of the economic recession in the 1980's. But this was not an obstacle to the birth of some organizations under the aegis of our parish that helped the people in very concrete ways to overcome or withstand the great difficulties imposed by the system. Some of these organizations and their leaders also came under suspicion and received their share of suffering, even being exposed to exclusion or persecution.

The presence and support of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood were a constant presence, but this also was not without misunderstanding and pain. Not all the people in the parish, even though living in a poor area of the city, thought the same about the directives of the ruling government. There were those who supported it and those who were against it. This aggravated even more the tensions that came inevitably to be found in pastoral activity.

A New Pastoral Direction

At the beginning of 1994, the Director of the Vicariate asked me to become the Parochial Vicar of Our Lady of the Precious Blood, with the hope that the new pastor would arrive within the next months to replace the one who had been there the last thirteen years. From the beginning I was able to discern that I was not welcome to the local community. There were rumors and rejections of my pastoral style. At the beginning I maintained an attitude of tranquility, knowing that it was very hard for the people to accept a change in pastoral direction, especially from that of a pastor who had worked there with great dedication for thirteen years, and in particular during some of the hard years of the dictatorship. I began with words of esteem and recognition for the work that my predecessor had done. I genuinely gave thanks to God for the people having so affirmed the work on a confrere of our Congregation. However, tensions continued, and one could not discover the reason for such distrust. After about half a

year, we received word through good sources that there were accusations of a breach in the promise of celibacy of my predecessor. At the beginning none of us could believe such allegations, especially concerning a brother priest who would deserve our utter respect and consideration. Sadly we had to face the truth of things that were implied in the accusations, which in the end compromised his freedom, and his availability and capacity to minister as a member of the Congregation.

At this same time, the Vicariate was experiencing an acute shortage of priests, in conjunction with which we decided to turn back to the Archdiocese one of our two parishes. The Vicariate decided to keep Our Lady of the Precious Blood. Personally at that moment I had to reflect: where are the wounds? Where has blood been shed? Where could we best live our spirituality? The response to and personal motivation for all these things right down to the present time has been the reflection on what had gone on.

Lessons about Reconciliation

The road through these things during nearly five years had not been easy, especially during the time--due to special circumstances--that permitted the previous pastor to continue developing a ministry in the parish. That added to the confusion, but at the same time it was a good thing inasmuch as it revealed through the course of time certain hitherto unclear and confusing things to everyone. I believe that one of the paths we chose was to confront the wounds we suffered in all frankness and pain, without trying to imagine or act as though they had never happened. The history of pain--and I am not referring only to the personal problems of the previous pastor, but also to the entire political and social context through which we had all lived--was something we tried to take on and leave behind us reconciled through the help of our rich spirituality.

More recently the Sisters of the Precious Blood (of Dayton) have joined us in our pastoral work. They have taken upon themselves very well the challenge of our spirituality, which is bringing about a healing of our wounds, the reconciliation of our hearts, and the learning how to forgive offenses, and above all to experience the unconditional love of the Lord.

Becoming A Community Of Reconciliation

by Rosario Pacillo, C.PP.S.

I have been asked to recount the experience of reconciliation lived out in St. Philip Neri Parish in Putignano. The significance of the experience is owed to the fact that since 1988 this parish community has committed itself to giving a concrete response to those youth who have entered the dark tunnel of drugs. Close at hand to the various parish activities, connected with the catechetical and liturgical ministries, there has developed also a charitable activity, directed by a plenteous group of volunteers from the Family Association of St. Philip Neri, to aid the chemically dependent. This work has given birth to two structures: one, of initial welcome and hospitality, where addicted youth undergo the difficult phase of detoxification from addictive substances; the other, the Family House, where youth reside who are already advanced in a program of recovery, directed in collaboration with a therapeutic community of the "Uomo" Project in nearby Bari. In the first phase of the program, directed alternately by regular attendants, volunteers, and conscientious objectors, already 1,200 youths have come through, mainly boys, often also with problems with the law. In the second phase, much more recent in origin, about seventy have already gone through.

The Association also directs preventative activities (with children, youth, parents, teachers, either in school or in the parish) and a formation program. Some youth have been accompanied in the phase of social reentry.

On the basis of this summary, which was necessary to permit the reader to understand what I will say, I will speak of the experience of reconciliation lived within the parish community regarding the specific impulse of this activity in that direction.

Reconciliation with Missionary Identity

As a Missionary of the Precious Blood I have been asked many times: What is my missionary identity? I answer: It is to announce the mystery of Christ! But how do I announce this mystery? With the Word! But how can the Word of the Blood be announced without discharging its saving power? Does it sometimes remain without effect? That happens when it is not accompanied by witness! But then what kind of witness renders present the Blood of our Redemption? It seems to me that it is not personal, but communal work, directed toward chemically dependent persons, redeeming them from the slavery of drugs, that is a clear testimony to the mystery of the Blood that rescues. I have felt that this work, something not sought out but born spontaneously out of pastoral needs, has reconciled me as well to my identity as a missionary. It is a reconciliation that remains always to be achieved more fully, above all when the human activity gives the upper hand to the action of the Spirit.

Reconciliation within the Parish Community

But the parish community has also experienced reconciliation. The Italian Church has felt the need to be reconciled with the poor of our time, developing the pastoral plan for the 1990's set forth in the document "Evangelization and Witness of Charity." The need was felt to place charity at the center of this work, to be reconciled therefore with the most dramatic situations of the region, with that part of the social environment which has escaped the proclamation of the Gospel because, like a field hardened by difficult problems and the experience of marginalization, it has been incapable of welcoming the seed of the Word. How could catechesis penetrate families locked in their own suffering if it is not accompanied by its sister, Charity? And how could they celebrate the praise of the Lord in the liturgy when they live under the servitude of other lords? The parish became aware that the problem of drugs was not some distant thing, but was implicated in every corner of their neighborhood and was shaped in large part the social and spiritual life of the faithful. Thus the catechists and their coworkers did not shrink away from the problem, but made themselves available, fully and generously, for this cause. But at the same time they were immersed also in the difficulties, conflicts, fears, and jealousy of a community that believed itself to be OK, and preferred to not look rather than to see, to defend itself rather than fight.

To be sure, the experience for some was traumatic. Using the religious education rooms and other parts of the parish compound for the chemically dependent created initially scandal, dismay, and alarm. But for many it has been a sign of prophetic witness and hope. Having chemically dependent persons within the parish compound showed a Christian community that provided space not only for liturgy and catechesis, but also for charity. There developed a kind of charity competition which called forth volunteers for Church among those who up to that time had not been practicing their faith much.

They not took their turns helping the youth, day and night, preparing meals, and accompanying them to sessions in the various communities.

But there was still a long way to go. An organization based on volunteers runs the risk of becoming separated from the resources both vital and spiritual of the Church, as well as failing in its turn to communicate its own energies. To be sure, some of the parish groups shared experiences with the residents in the pre-admission program, as envisioned in the meetings in preparation for the Jubilee. Other groups welcomed them, visited them, gave and received testimony to their experiences, and became more deeply aware of their plight. But this was able to go much further because religious education availed itself of the rich experience of the therapeutic community and its methods.

The youth in the preadmission program enlivened Sunday Vespers with their singing and their prayers.

At the various Masses they brought forward offerings to support the needs of the two centers. But what they were able to do was not merely a spectacle, not pure admiration, but motivation toward a communion of hearts. The parish community experienced another aspect of reconciliation: with its missionary character.

Working with the chemically dependent has fomented this reconciliation as well. Because of that the

parish has become a beacon for those youth and families that find themselves in need. Word of its charity has spread everywhere. Others are emulating it, and the volunteers are called upon to give testimony to what has happened.

Reconciliation of the Chemically Dependent with God and the Church

The stimulus for reconciliation with the Church came out of the powerful experience of recovery for the chemically dependent. They are the living icons of the Paschal Mystery, of death and resurrection, of defeat and victory, of fall and recovery. The chemically dependent experience an internal breakdown with themselves, and therefore also with Christ and his Church, from whom they are alienated spiritually and physically. They know that drugs have taken the place of God for them, exercising an absolute and despotic power over them, emptying them of every value and affection. It has also destroyed their relations to their loved ones.

They have become utterly alone. God is not for them on their side, but has become an enemy. They cannot escape God's judgment for the crimes they have committed: theft, robbery, violence, prostitution. The simple act of setting foot inside a church requires a violence to themselves. They feel themselves to be unworthy, without any chance of forgiveness. Being reconciled is possible, but not without a process of liberation, an inner change, a distancing of themselves from ancient servitudes external and internal.

But this extraordinary work is achieved through the Blood of Christ. It is conveyed through the prayers of the entire Church and through the free, generous, and humble love of the volunteers. Thus what seems to human beings impossible becomes possible to those who place their trust and hope in the Blood of Christ. This experience of such a powerful and vital redemption becomes the paradigm of every other possible conversion. For those Christians who despair at overcoming their own vices, they see with their own eyes that even the vice of drugs can be defeated.

Reconciliation within Families

A work that is absorbing and also wrenching is with the families of the residents. We live in a society in which the family is in a situation of conflict and needs relief.

Besides generational conflicts and conflicts over values, there are specific ones also for families of the chemically dependent. There are conflicts that precede drug-taking (violence within the family, child abuse, separation, divorce, betrayal), come along with drug-taking (insubordination, deceit, lies), or follow it (bankruptcy, indebtedness, loss of reputation, desertion, promises made to children, and the like).

The continuing meetings with the family members are an act of patience in reconciliation, as well as with the family of origin which needs to move from recognition of their own errors to a resolve to meet them with a new and constructive spirit. Not everyone is willing to risk healing, but at times one is able to be present for veritable miracles of reconciliation.

From this work with the families of the chemically dependent has come the impulse to work with other families in the parish in order to prevent future conflicts. From these have come meetings and courses for parents where they can approach and address a variety of familial issues.

Reconciliation within Civil Society

Lastly, work directed toward the chemically dependent has also created peace within civil society, either by allowing them to reenter that would have caused a great deal of alarm ten years ago, or by bringing about a rapprochement between civil society and the Church.

Already marginalized, the chemically dependent have always created an even greater marginalization; already isolated, the distance grew even greater. The notoriety of their behavior, consisting of purse-snatching, robbery, theft, swindling, violence, and lies, marked them irredeemably.

All of that has to be taken into account when we tried, for years, to find a place where they might devolve back into our activities.

The parish community, in its hospitality, showed that it was possible for the chemically dependent to live together with others, even children. By putting them at the heart of parish activity, it became possible to build a rapport with them and to welcome them, at the end of their road of recovery, to the threshold of society.

The St. Philip Neri Family Association, with its volunteers, has contributed both directly and indirectly to introducing a good many of these youth first back into society and then into the work sphere. By attending to their recovery, the parish had vital role in creating peace in both the ecclesial and the civil community.

By decreasing the number of chemically dependent, with the attendant petty criminality, a greater trust in the Church has been created among the inhabitants of Putignano, replacing the frequent accusations that the Church distanced itself from social problems.

In conclusion, I would like to recall the undoubted validity of this work and to recommend to other communities, especially those guided by the Missionaries of St. Gaspar, either in facing problems with drugs (which happens in so many places) as well as other problems.

It appears to me to be a testimony to charity, the "new and living way," through which the Blood of Christ connects with those shackled by evil and, in rescuing them, brings them back to a genuine reconciliation with God.