

IN THE SAME CHARISM

with responsibility



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**COMPANY OF SAINT URSULA
SECULAR INSTITUTE OF SAINT ANGELA MERICI
FEDERATION**

www.istitutosecolareangelamerici.org

www.angelamerici.it

email: fed.comp@libero.it

International Study Meeting

**The Federation
Company of Saint Ursula
From its origins to our day
“Along the ancient way, and a new life”**



Casa tra noi - Rome

August 1-5, 2015

ACTS

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TO THE READERS

Along the Ancient Way and a New Life

Last August in Rome, we celebrated a historic conference, reviewed the history of the Federation, and all felt the integration between the ancient way and a new life.

In the days of the conference and after, I thought about this Merician expression in the Rule that says: *“Keep to the ancient way and custom of the Church, established and confirmed by so many Saints under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And live a new life”* (Seventh Counsel, 22).

Keep to the ancient way....

- For us, this means to continue along the ancient road of our institute within the Church, the same Church that, since the 1500s, has officially recognized the Company and the Rule.
- It means that we continue to refer to saints, to our holy foundress and to the many daughters of Saint Angela who already enjoy the "virginal crown."
- It means that we still embrace the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to whom Saint Angela has advised us to give our primary and highest obedience.

Live a new life....

- The new life.... which today's Church suggests to all secular institutes – still putting into action today the forward-thinking insight of Saint Angela – ours being recognized as the precursor of this vocation.
- The new life.... in the Companies that united in one Federation, recognized by pontifical law since 1958 as a secular institute.

Along the ancient way and a new life we pick up the materials from this conference with desire and commitment to remember our origins and traditions on *a path of holiness for a more effective witness in the Church and in the world* (cf. Decree, Constitutions 1994).

Caterina Dalmasso

REETING TO THE PARTICIPANTS INTERNATIONAL MEETING 2015

Maria Razza - President of the Federation

It is a joy and an honor to welcome you to our international meeting, always a time of unity and grace.

I greet the Assistant to the Council of the Federation, Bishop Adriano Tessarollo, and the reverend Vice-

assistants Father Gaetano Zito and Father Raymond: with their hard-working collaboration they support and assist the Council of the Federation to carry out its proper tasks, and they safeguard the Council's intention "...to be in total and filial union with the Holy Father and in docile adherence to the teaching of the Magisterium."

I greet the speakers who, each for his/her own part and making available his/her own competence, will give their considerable and valuable contribution to enrich this meeting, which this year has a very special importance and value.

A particular greeting to the sisters of the Company of Brescia,

present here with their new Superior Maria Rosa Pollini, to whom we wish a rich fruitfulness in her governance of that beloved Company. Your presence gives us immense pleasure and makes concrete the



mandate for unity, which our holy Madre prayed for us “...to the point of shedding my blood.”

We have called this meeting of ours “historical” because the Council’s motivation is to revisit the Federation’s history from its birth to our time, to recognize the wise guidance of the Spirit, to reconstruct and understand situations and events, to set out markers that delineate the road completed thus far and the route already taken ... to go forward aware of our roots and open to the future and to change.

On May 25, 1958, the Sacred Congregation of Religious, with the decree “*Vetustum et Praeclarum Institutum*,” constituted and approved the Federation of the Companies of the Daughters of Saint Angela Merici, “...*the divinely inspired forerunner of that more recent form of life of perfection that seems to take shape best in secular institutes.*”

In this way, after years of study and research, reflection and meetings, consulting experts and soliciting information from the numerous Companies, in a labor that started at the “base” and was carried forward from there, the Sacred Congregation defined the juridical form with which, from that moment on, our presence in the Church would be recognized.

Now we are here to listen to our speakers, all studious and competent authorities, who will offer us their contributions, each one about the aspect that he/she was asked to cover.

Particular thanks to Professor Paolo Gheda, who accepted our request and took on this burdensome job, bringing to it his widely recognized and esteemed competence and the great value of his friendship for us and for our institute.



History of the Federation – Company of Saint Ursula

Paolo Gheda

Professor of contemporary history, University of the Valle d'Aosta

ABSTRACT

The author's two speeches at the international convention had the main purpose of presenting some important passages regarding the history of the Federation as it is being finalized. They facilitated the author's discussion with colleagues and witnesses on specific aspects.



In this regard, the period immediately after the suppression due to the Napoleonic era was analyzed. During this period, also known as the Restoration, the Company of St. Ursula resumed its institutional and religious life, although it had continued even during the French Revolution in several local contexts (Ghedda, 2000).

Immediately after the return – undertaken first by the Piedmontese priest Frassinetti and then by the Girelli sisters of Brescia – the Institute's spontaneously federative nature can be clearly showed, sometimes anticipated by statements and documents of clergy and of consecrated women. In the decades soon after the Unification of Italy, this practice was clearly seen in the creation within parish communities of local groups of the Company based on the “master” Rule, the so-called “original” Rule of Saint Angela, directed specifically to consecrated secular women.

In 1947 the promulgation of *Provida Mater Ecclesia* constituted a crucial step in recognizing the specific meaning of the Merician inspiration as an original interpretation of the state of life, namely consecration in the world, offering for the first time a space of institutional recognition to those formulas of presence in the world based on vows or a firm resolve.

This recognition led to the maturation of the idea that the Company of St. Ursula, in order to be included in the same ecclesiastical affiliation as the other secular institutes, needed to be structured in a more or less centralized federated framework, although it was the ancient and illustrious ancestor of all secular institutes and had a variety of local formulas in which it was established.

After 1948 the meetings of diocesan leaders of the Companies led to amplifying this reflection, especially as a result of the work and inspiration of Msgr. Giovanni Battista Fedrizzi, superior of the Company of Trent; of Msgr. Serini, superior of the Company of Brescia; and of Msgr. Guiglielmo Bosetti, vicar general of Brescia. Based on the proposal of Msgr. Girando, vice-superior of Cuneo, the superiors came to a plenary meeting at the end of July of 1952.

In this phase the figure of the Cardinal Arcadio Larraona was decisive in the effort to put into discussion the correct rules within the Company so that it could be included among secular institutes, through the adoption of vows and the formulation of the Federation of Companies.

During the Second Congress of Rome in 1954, held in the presence of the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation P. Larraona himself, the transition of secular Ursulines to the formula of vows was decided upon, which would assist the Company's recognition as a religious institute.

Another important figure in this delicate transition was the Sicilian Bishop Vota, then superior of the Company of Catania, who helped to define the path towards the Federation from the south to the north of Italy.

The first federated council was elected on May 25, 1958, when the Sacred Congregation sent a Decree of legal recognition of the Company of St. Ursula, with the text of the experimental Constitutions, valid for seven years. In this way, then, the Federation of the Companies was formed, as a secular institute of pontifical right. The original Company of Brescia would join soon after.

It was in effect only briefly by the time of the Second Vatican Council; by its conclusion the Federation would have defined a new text of the Constitutions, according to the directions on religious life derived from the Council's assemblies and its dogmatic constitutions.

At this point the thinking was to shape the Federation, still as an organization of local Companies at the diocesan level, but through a project of unification and centralization that would rotate around the president, the central council and the general assistant. This idea arose from the need to bring the model and the operation of the Merician federated government closer to other major secular institutes already recognized by the Holy See. The new president was the superior of the Company of Trent, Annamaria Toniolatti, a key figure in the subsequent years of the Federation.

In this way, in 1966 the Institute was centralized, according to the explicit suggestions of the Congregation for Religious. Some local companies did not welcome the change in the institutional structure, and in 1971 Brescia, Mantua and Verona left the Institute with the consent of Pope Paul VI.

In Brescia only a small part of the Company would remain as a diocesan Company federated within the Secular Institute, led then by Elisa Tarolli.

After the transition in the role of general assistant from Brescian Msgr. Morstabilini to Msgr. Affolti in 1968, a renewal program started. The primary focus was formation. A long reflection process would lead to the first training course for directresses and formation guides, held in Rome in the summer of 1969. In the following summer of 1970, all ecclesiastical assistants from the diocesan companies were called together.

At the end of December 1976, the Assembly of the Federation was called for the election of the President and the approval of the new Constitutions. The Assembly recognized the validity of the federative



form experienced from 1952 to 1967, reaffirming the importance of diocesan autonomy. On December 30, Lina Moser – then directress of the Company of Trent – was elected as president. In the Assembly of 1982, she was reconfirmed.

Thanks to the Constitutions of 1977, the Company of St. Ursula was definitely specified as a women's secular institute of pontifical right with diocesan organization.

An important role, in the upcoming years, was undoubtedly played by the journal of the Federation, "Responsibility," directed by Elisa Tarolli from 1977 to 2005. In 1988 Elisa Tarolli also became president of the Federation. She worked to bring about a new constitutional text. Her focus was to be more attentive to the contemporary historical context and more open to the future, while respecting the intentions of the origins with the discovery of the oldest versions of the Rule of Saint Angela known today: the version of "Turlino" (printed in 1569); the "Trivulzian" version (manuscript datable to 1545-1546).

In 1996, Mariani and Tarolli published a new version of the Rule, with the Counsels and Testament (in the current version), divided into verses according to the manuscript of the Trivulziana library in Milan. It was a work of regularization and simplification compared to the old Borromean Rule of the Girelli.

The Holy See approved the revised constitutions on August 8, 1994. This document was able to combine harmoniously the legal aspect and the spiritual inspiration of the Foundress. Thanks to Elisa Tarolli's studies there was an increased focus on the clarification based on the original Rule, and therefore on the specific secular Merician charism, especially in the sense of the autonomy of women's government and of the specific model of consecration regarding the evangelical counsels.

Starting in the 1990s, the Federation would play a crucial role in the spread of the Companies in European and extra-continental countries. This, among other things, has characterized the presidencies of Caterina Dalmasso and Maria Rosa Razza.

Consecrated Life in the 1900s: Historical Note

Gaetano Zito

Instructor in history in the St. Paul School of Theology of Catania

For the topic and the audience at this meeting, this presentation does not offer new historio-graphical discoveries, the outcome of details investigated in unexplored areas of the history of consecrated life. It is situated, rather, amid information that aims to offer a general picture of the situation of consecrated life from after the suppression of 1866 till the end of the 20th century. Furthermore, both for the context and for the audience, it refers primarily to the Italian situation. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to properly check it at the level of the universal Church. There is also the need to offer to a largely Italian audience some essential coordinates for the landscape in which the history of the Secular Institute of Saint Angela Merici developed.



Such a choice, nonetheless, poses not a few problems for the wide range of questions that will apply to the consecrated life in its various facets: here it is possible only to point them out. For valid historio-graphical knowledge, it is necessary to refer to specialized studies. For these, now some decades later, we are indebted to Giancarlo Rocca who, after having completed the weighty and foundational *Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione*, continues to deliver the results of his systematic studies.

In any case, one aspect is crucial for the history of consecrated life: archival formation, conservation, and oversight. Today such an intention confronts two issues above all. The first is connected with lack of sufficient care in gathering and conserving the documents that are produced, little by little, in the first phase of the experience of consecration. Without this evidence, it becomes almost impossible to

reconstruct people's lives and roles, as the choices and the first applications of the vision that has produced the presence of a new institute in the Church. The second is nearly similar. The identical difficulty could afflict future efforts to reconstruct our own day, if there is no provision for necessary conservation of the memory of the present, now produced in quantity by computers. In fact, along with all the benefits that computers offer, there are risks for the future's secure conservation and use of documentation, given the speed of the evolution of different systems of word-processing and of acquisition and conservation of digital documents.

1. What happened after the suppression of 1866?



This radical intervention of the Italian government was like those of other European governments in various times, more or less similar in its

legislative substance. Beyond contributing to or even producing an effective purification of the traditional forms of consecrated life in the 19th century, the events prove the premise of how much the ancient and new forms of consecrated life were alive especially in the first decades of the 20th century.

With the law of July 7, 1866, the State no longer recognized “the orders, the corporations and the regular and secular religious congregations, and the schools and training centers which adopt common life and have an ecclesiastical character.” But it continued to confer on their members the “full exercise of all civil and political rights.” This was a new legislative version akin to both the Piedmont laws of 1855 and the representative decrees issued immediately after the conquest of the various regions.

The approval of the law happened within an environment of wide discussion about the life of religious. The debate had been reinvigorated since the early 19th century, fed by a juridical approach fostered by the influx of French Enlightenment culture. Proposals for reform were being advanced from many sides. The discussion centered

on the social and religious usefulness of monasteries and convents, as well as of religious and nuns.

Although this law responded to the liberal cultural orientation of the new united State, in fact it turned out to produce a radical reform of consecrated life, worked out through harsh crises. This reform had not been achieved through the strenuous efforts of the Popes from Pius VII to Pius IX: to purify the motivations for entering convents and monasteries, to require more demanding novitiates, to bring about greater fidelity to the vows and to community life and full observance of the rules of the respective institutes. And there were at least four congregations of the Roman Curia involved with religious life: those on bishops and religious, for the reform of religious, on the religious state, and on religious discipline. However, historic interpretation has now ascertained that the law did not succeed in striking the institutes of consecrated life in Italy at the root. On the contrary, overcoming every kind of difficulty and trying multiple strategies, many of the suppressed communities were reconstituted. At the same time, new institutes were helped to flourish, primarily responding to needs of an assistive, educational, pastoral and missionary sort. The fact of these new institutes also indicates that a good number of men and women remained open to these vocations, which were affected by the dominant culture.

The reaction of the religious to the application of the law was varied and reflected their personal feelings about their own situation, besides that of the religious order and community. The profound affliction and anxiety for the future, experienced by some, stands in contrast to the exultation of others over gaining their liberty. Among all there was a distinctive reaction, composed and permeated by a faith-filled reading of what was happening. The Benedictine abbot Giuseppe Benedetto Dusmet (citizen of S. Nicola l'Arena), expressed this attitude to the prefect of Catania at the moment of sending the monks away from the monastery: "We remain serene and tranquil. We do not nurture anger, hatred, or ill-will of any sort in our hearts. Raising our gaze on high, we bow our heads before the inscrutable yet just designs of Providence and are ready to follow the example of our elders on the

road of tribulation. We will pray all day for prosperity and peace for those through whom it pleases the Lord to visit us. Most Illustrious Sir, such are the sentiments with which we say our last goodbye to these beloved places, thinking of our purest joys, our warmest tears, our most intimate feelings. So, in total resignation, we repeat: The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Others, who agreed with the government’s decision, reacted very differently. To be sure, they had a good economic outlook, considering the suppression providential, declaring themselves linked to the government and ready to work together to liberate people from ecclesiastical prejudices and hypocrisies. This attitude usually worked to obtain appointments for them as rectors of the churches in the suppressed monasteries and convents.

In reacting officially to the law and its application, the local authorities communicated to the central office of the State that the suppression was considered by the people “as an attempt to persecute the very existence of the Catholic Cult.” At the same time, “By the intelligent class it was welcomed favorably, as a major step of civil progress toward that perfection which liberal institutions should lead to.” The reaction of the people, considered ignorant, was thought to be fomented by clerics; therefore, it should be stated that the suppression was not the same as giving less deference to the Catholic religion, to which the Government intended to show respect.

After the confusion following the first years after the application of the law of suppression, bit by bit the desire to supplant it began among the most zealous members of the different religious orders. They also made plans to return to common life. These people continued to observe the rules of their institutes, to wear their own religious habits, and to carry out their assignments. Slowly they started to take back their community life informally, often in places connected with churches that had previously belonged to them, now State property reserved by law to the rectors. Where possible, they even acquired under their own names portions of their former convents, intended by law for public uses. Most of the time, they had support from the local bishops. And so, in two decades, the law of suppression was itself suppressed by those whom it

was intended to suppress, at least in the formal common life constituted by law.

The progressive regrouping of dispersed religious in community became more and more evident and the government authorities had to be aware of it, but they did not intervene to block it. A factor was that it involved community in fact but not constituted by law, with the properties acquired belonging to individual members and not to the institutes they belonged to. Ten years later, the recovery of many ancient religious communities was blanketing the whole territory of Italy and by that time could be considered a *fait accompli*. On August 2, 1876, the Minister of the Interior forcefully called on the prefects to exercise greater vigilance to deter the reopening of convents and the return of women's monasteries to monastic life. In the years of difficult relationships between State and Church, these communities "create a true danger. Before this force and this danger, denying life to the convents is more than a right of the State. It is its duty."

The suppression also had another result, not always properly cited by historical analysis, at least in southern Italy and Sicily. Along with the religious, the weakest and poorest members of society were heavily penalized. Just about everywhere, religious communities gave alms in cash and in the form of necessities and, often with the bishops, contributed to maintaining establishments of public welfare. With the law of July 7, 1866, all those who were living by charity or assistance or by doing some sort of compensated service to convents and monasteries, found themselves without a door to knock on. And the State was not taking charge of them. So the poor became even poorer. In Sicily, for example, the abolition of religious orders became one of the factors unleashing popular outrage, flowing into agitation, like the revolt of September 1866 in the region of Palermo. To create a substitute on behalf of the poorest classes would once more be the work of religious of the ancient institutes and the new ones that emerged in the 1800s.

Let it also be noted – and in this case too it does not appear that historical analysis has again paid enough attention – that the exit from convents and monasteries, with the resulting return of many religious to

their families, raised the issue of balance in relationships and in managing housing, as well as in local ecclesiastical structures. In the family it was necessary to redistribute the living spaces of all the members, to permit to the returning religious relative a dwelling suited to her situation. It is even more delicate to speak of the relationship between men religious returning to their home territory and the local clergy. Ritual and sacramental services had to be portioned out anew, along with the connected salaries. Up till then these were the nearly exclusive prerogative of diocesan priests.

2. Why the new forms of consecrated life?

The suppression of 1866 fostered a new season for consecrated life. The closing of both men's and women's convents and monasteries did not mean fewer vocations. Slowly the way of the ancient religious orders – monastic, mendicant and regular – was reclaimed, now purified and with better discerned motivations than in the past. Also, many people joined the new institutes of consecrated life spread throughout the nation. As was noted, institutes identified and responded to at least two needs: first, meeting social emergencies that were popping up, first through education/assistance; second, manifesting a greater fidelity of the Church to the Gospel. They spread rapidly in society, incarnating particular forms of consecration, often quite courageous. The new institutes were a response to an intense spiritual life and to the forward-looking pastoral openness of their founders. The first members received and shared these qualities with an enthusiasm capable of overcoming material difficulties and lack of understanding even on the part of ecclesiastical authorities. In many cases, however, the new charisms were derived from those religious institutes that the law of suppression had not succeeded in suppressing.

Wishing to offer a picture combining the ecclesial context in which the new institutes of consecrated life matured and the social sectors in which they were being inserted, sometimes in a way that ruptures the boundaries of the specific area of this talk (in the thinking of Salesian educators and instructors), the following traits can be clarified:

- intense spiritual life, nourished through the sacraments, spiritual direction, and devotions accompanied more and more by openness to the biblical text, by meditation on it and by taking it as a substantial point of reference for personal and community life;
- acceptance of the developing liturgical sensibility and of resources intrinsic to popular piety while valuing, correcting, and implementing it;
- heavy commitment in the educational sector, from literacy to professional formation;
- generous dedication in supplying the varied forms of material need of large swaths of the population (with an attitude progressively – though slowly and perhaps never definitively – drawn from an “assisting” charity to a charity more committed in the social sphere and sometimes even denouncing unjust structures);
- sensibility for opening new ways of pastoral care, as with emigration; generous dedication to missionary activity, with the foundation of appropriate men’s and women’s congregations, especially for the African territories, and in their vocational recruitment taking advantage of the romantic vision of missionary work, exalting its hardships and dangers that must be faced to evangelize.

New institutes, with their works, surely contributed also to raise the level of culture; to make up the short-comings of institutions, both the government and local administration in social assistance and education; to contain the growing burden of poverty and, at the same time, to be vehicles of modernity, especially among the poorest classes and in some predominantly rural areas.

Two almost universal elements can be seen across the board. First is the initially local scope of most new institutes, often reaching national and international dimensions quickly. Second is women’s decisive contribution to the insertion of consecrated life in social structures and missionary activity, whether by founding new institutes or by the number of their members. *Donne religiose*, as Giancarlo

Rocca has called them in one of his principal studies, are in every case essential to women's history between the 1800s and 1900s. In a quest for a particular type of feminism or emancipation of women, no matter what, their history with its specific institutional innovation and social commitment comes first "regarding the women's movement properly so called."

In reference to the socio-political and cultural contexts that have marked the history of the end of the 1800s and all of the 1900s, a general tendency among new forms of consecrated life toward debating can be observed in discussions with the dominant culture, making it possible to observe and identify concrete answers to the demands of the "real world," at a distance from the "legal world."

Nicola Raponi, posing the historic question of the birth of the new religious institutes in the 1800s, observed, "At the roots of these new religious institutes there is certainly a *reaction* to the process of laicizing culture and society due to the critical spirit of rationalism and of the Enlightenment, a *reaction* to the anti-religious excesses of the Revolution and to secularization. Above all, however, is the search for a new path to religious and contemplative life after the crises of the old cloistered forms and the suppressions completed by royal-style state politics, by the revolutionary governments, and by the modernizing laicism of the Napoleonic Code (which saw in perpetual religious vows an unacceptable renunciation of civil rights); a new way of thinking that no longer placed contemplation at the pinnacle of the state of perfection, but rather charity working for the neighbor."

Obviously the ideal and the activity promoted by founders were lived by men and women who shared their charism, bearing intrinsic, essential motives, essentially spiritual. The basic standard is the Christian method of incarnation: How to make faith credible in a modern context, which became increasingly distant from the Church, from the ecclesiastical institution which did not succeed in seizing the positive elements within the modern context. Facing the growing ecclesial and social needs, founders asked themselves how to bring about a suitable response. Once that was identified, they agreed to gamble themselves first, and then, with their own example and an

explicit proposal, drew others into the same experience of the Spirit. These new foundations, in fact, in contrast to the monastic and conventual forms of consecrated life, mostly positioned themselves out of the house, inserted themselves in the social fabric, and worked to help it. There many people lacked useful means for their fulfillment and were bearing material and spiritual, physical and moral sufferings and difficulties.

3. How many?

Some dates give an idea of how consecrated life went on from the crisis between the suppression of 1866 and the period following Vatican II.

In the twenty years between 1861 and 1881, the population of the realm of Italy grew from 22,176,477 to 28,951,546, an increment of 30.5%. In the same period, marked by the suppression of 1866, consecrated life registered a marked decrease. The data on religious must be taken as approximate and not at all sure, since it seems that not all religious declared their actual condition. The available data report that male religious declined by 23,441, going from 30,632 to 7,191, i.e., 76.5% less. Meanwhile the female religious registered a lesser drop of only 14,492, going from 42,664 to 28,172, i.e., 34% less. Twenty years later, in the 1901 census, the number of male religious, 7,792, was substantially the same, compared with the growth in the number of female religious, up to 40,251. This growth of 42.8% is attributed to the greater number of women's religious institutes relative to men's. It might perhaps have been opportune to intervene with these new institutes to connect or perhaps to unify better those with identical or at least similar purposes.

In fact, the number of women religious in Italy was constantly rising, as is apparent from the data that emerge from the census of 1921, when 71,679 of them were counted, and the census of 1951, showing 144,171. The region with the strongest growth, compared to other parts of the peninsula, was surely the area of Venice: from 1,151 women religious in 1862, it went to 20,581 in 1951. But the regions of Piedmont and Lombardy present particularly high numbers for the same period: Piedmont from 2,645 to 18,335, and Lombardy from 2,183 to

26,738. At the beginning of 1975, 152,689 women religious in active life were registered in Italy. Of them, 141,952 were working in Italy and 10,737 in foreign missions. But among them is a significant number of foreign women religious: a solid 3,259 sisters. All of these belonged to 516 religious congregations, 434 of pontifical right and 82 of diocesan right. Nevertheless, from 1970 to 1975, in barely five years, the numbers show a 5% decline, as much as 30% for some institutes, which represents the beginning of a process of constant diminishment, all the way to the present. However, it is true that not all institutes experienced a decline in the number of members. In the same period, in some of them one can see a growth of over 15%, and for others between 5% and 155%. Of course, the data would be composed, at least in large geographic areas, of institutes and apostolic works. To understand better the reasons for declining membership, there may be three fundamental reasons: fewer vocations, dispensations from vows, and deaths of members. In some years the acute phase of the crisis of consecrated life is evident, exploding after the Council but from the deep roots of the preceding period. In fact, the cause of the crisis should not be attributed to Vatican II, even if the conciliar event catalyzed the tensions and problems already fully present in the Church, without succeeding in opening up effective routes toward the indispensable renewal.

Particularly interesting elements emerge from another period, between 1986 and 2011. In a little less than 30 years there was a collapse in the number of women religious: the 152,689 women religious of 1975 had become 132,869 by 1986, a reduction of a little over 20,000 individuals. They became 115,616 by 1996 and 89,243 in 2011. In thirty years, then, women religious were 63,446 fewer, with a loss of 41.5%. Members of men's institutes were not immune to such phenomena. Considering only those of pontifical right, the reduction is less than among the sisters, a loss of just 4,659 members: from 19,834 in 1986 to 15,175 in 2011, that is, a loss of 23.4%,

Taken together, then, from 1861 to 2011 the number of male religious contracted by 50%, from 30,632 to 15,175; for female religious, on the other hand, there had been an increase of 52.2%, going

from 42,664 to 89,243. Regardless, the data show a substantial loss compared to the number of Italian women religious in 1975, as reported above: in just 36 years they lost 63,446, a reduction of 41.5%. Among the causes one could presumably list the development of new forms of consecrated life, able to respond better to the needs of the time and to connect more effectively with the direction of the Church. That is, something happened similar to what was observed between the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th: not substantially less vocational readiness; instead, there were new opportunities for vocational response and fulfillment.

The phenomenon of the so-called “new community” began to manifest itself not only in Italy, but nearly everywhere between the 1950s and the first years of the 1960s. These were years of great ecclesial vitality flowing into Vatican II and launched by it. From then to 2009, a total of 775 “new communities” can be counted, 205 of which began in the United States of America, 200 in Italy, 161 in France and likewise in other nations. In their type, they present identical characteristics: they are lay but include priests; they combine men and women even in common life; they foster a strong ecumenical feeling, to the point of welcoming members of other Christian communions; they resolve to live the Gospel in a radical way. In Italy the best known is certainly the Community of Bose, sprung from the initiative of Enzo Bianchi, around 1963-1964 in Torino.

The majority of foundations arose in the twenty years between 1970 and 1990. They are usually grouped according to three types: a) communities close to monastic-religious life understood in a classical sense; b) communities of service or charitable works; c) communities close to the charismatic movement or to the apparitions of Medjugorje. New forms of consecrated life, with vows, structured with a hierarchy and common life, have also developed within movements and ecclesial associations such as the Focolari movement founded by Chiara Lubich and Communion and Liberation founded by Father Luigi Giussani.

Their juridical recognition by ecclesiastical authority has seemed somewhat problematic. Especially membership composed of consecrated men, consecrated women, and married people all together

has led to these being made autonomous, comparing them to a third order or to an association directed by people in consecrated life. Where the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life posed difficulties for their pontifical approval, they have requested juridical recognition by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Those who aspired to obtain recognition from the Congregation for consecrated life in fact did not get beyond diocesan recognition, since several questions remained unresolved, such as the mixed character of the community and the possibility that the office of superior general could be entrusted to a woman, even if there were priests in the community. Very few “new communities” (no more than ten) have obtained pontifical approval, not as religious institutes properly so called but as “other institutes of consecrated life.”

4. A particular type

Already near the end of the 19th century a new need began to appear: How to witness to consecration in a society by now irreversibly heading toward secularization and secularism? In Naples Caterina Volpicelli (1839-1894) started a form of consecration without religious habit or common life: the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart. But such a form of consecrated life was not getting recognized by the Holy See as a religious institute, because the juridical framework did not provide for this, but as a pious union, subject to the authority of the local bishop.

The situation of the Company of St. Ursula and its development are one of a kind. Besides responding to spiritual needs, it permits many women who are open to consecrated life not to distance themselves from their families, and to remain within their own parishes.

This new model of women open to life as consecrated persons, but outside convents and monasteries, earned a certain interest in the first decades of the 20th century. Among the best known are the Franciscan Tertiaries of the Social Reign of the Sacred Heart (later known as Missionaries of the Kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ), founded in 1919 in Assisi by Armida Barelli and Agostino Gemelli; and the Apostolic Oblates of Pro Sanctita, founded in Rome in 1950 by Guglielmo Fiaqunta, then bishop of Tivoli (1974-1987). Taken

together, especially in Italy, the foundation of such institutes had to be a major factor in the push toward a new “state of perfection” encouraged by many diocesan and religious priests. They sought to develop a Christian presence capable of influencing society, without being dismissed on account of being labeled by a religious habit and common life. Such a need was associated with the ecclesiology of the time, which did not provide any possibility for the autonomy of the laity from the hierarchy. On account of this, such institutes would necessarily have to have been directed by priests, to the point that in 1929 Agostino Gemelli stated: “It could not be otherwise, because God has entrusted to them the care of governing souls.”

Secular institutes attained a juridical form in 1947, with Pope Pius XII’s apostolic constitution *Provida Mater*. Their recognition seemed to be forced by the proliferation of this kind of consecrated life, to the point of overcoming Vatican authority. Around 1940 the Vatican had again expressed the desire to insert it within the structures of religious life properly so called.

One distinctive aspect of some institutes from the very beginning was the obligation of reserve, or privacy about their membership and consecration. The fundamental reason was based on the need to act within society, in all possible situations, without being identified. A typical example is Father Gemelli’s decision from the beginning to impose the obligation of secrecy on both the women’s and the men’s branches of the Missionaries of the Kingship to facilitate their apostolic work, as they inserted themselves anonymously in social structures. Nevertheless, secular institutes have also brought about various works: assistance, instruction, missions, pilgrimages, publishing, women’s political movement (1945).

From a quantitative point of view, in Italy, two points of reference can be considered: the data registered in 1973, with 10 secular institutes and 7,161 members; and 1988, with 12 institutes and 15,269 members. Obviously, these are not the only secular institutes and members present in Italy, considering that others exist which were founded abroad and introduced into Italian dioceses. Recognition is due to these dioceses for knowing how to respond in directing those feeling

a call toward new forms of consecrated life, rather than only to the classical forms.

Just as significant was the development of Italian priestly secular institutes. The principal concern seemingly must be attributed to the difficulty of reconciling the status of the diocesan priesthood, dependant on the bishop and dedicated to pastoral activity, with membership (also juridical) in an institute with a superior and reference points often outside the diocese. These institutes have particular spiritual features, somewhat different from those of the diocesan priesthood, a situation that had already been emphasized by the archbishop of Milan in 1959. For him it was not “admissible that diocesan priests...assume any other obedience, confirmed by a vow... depending on a superior other than the bishop; ... [affirming] the opinion that diocesan clergy lack a spirituality sufficient to satisfy the aspirations of priestly souls yearning for perfection.”

Giancarlo Rocca conveniently observed, “Certainly, these constituted a notable structural change in religious life, without common life, but they did not have the force to change its concrete features, as the Mendicants, the regular clerics, and the congregated religious had done in their times. In other words, secular institutes were not imposed either in the Church or in society.” Among the reasons, the following could be noted. It was difficult to get their features understood, that is, not being religious and not being married (which would be something sought after, especially in the first decades of the 20th century). There was a consequent challenge of defining the juridical features, often perplexing even the clergy, to the point where they pointed those feeling a call toward well-defined religious institutes. Third, that privileged vocational reservoir, the parish-based organization for excellence constituted by Italian Catholic Action, was diminishing. Finally, as mentioned, the new associations and new movements such as the Focolarini, Pro Sanctity, Opus Dei, and Communion and Liberation bit by bit developed their own forms of consecration.

5. *Interventions of the magisterium*

The constant and progressive flourishing of new forms of consecrated life, between the 1800s and the 1900s, succeeded in bringing about a new juridical profile for their canonical recognition. Regarding the cultural and political context, the new spiritual and ecclesial needs, the inclination to social and charitable-assistance commitments which the new foundations were more suited to, considering that the ancient religious institutes, from monasticism to mendicant, to regular clergy, to cloister, were not what was needed. The intervention of the Holy See was necessary to verify the solidity and the stability of a foundation, to regulate the new forms, and to bestow juridical recognition. Thus its intervention is a “second” one, following the first intervention, which is the spontaneous birth of a new modality of consecrated life. And, as has already been stressed, in some cases the Holy See has manifested some difficulty in adapting the law to life and in willingness to modernize juridical criteria that had taken shape in the past.

The first determinative intervention of the ecclesiastical magisterium was that of Leo XIII. With the apostolic constitution *Conditae a Christo* in 1900 and with its companion piece *Normae secundum quas* in 1901, came approval for the juridical features of the religious congregations as new institutes of consecrated life. No longer were solemn vows indispensable for recognition of the religious *state*. Now institutes with simple vows and dedicated to the active apostolate could be recognized as religious congregations. The concept of religious life was becoming systematized, defining in detail the organization of congregations and declaring a precise model for writing their constitutions. The new norms finally gave institutional clarity to the foundations of the 1800s and the following decades. It can be observed, though, that adapting to the norms carried the risk that some religious congregations could lose or modify the originality of their particular charism.

The approval given in 1900-1901 was then included in the first Code of Canon Law (1917), which provided for three forms of consecrated life: a) regular (for canons, monastics, and regular clergy); b) religious congregations with simple vows; c) societies of common

life (not simple associations of the faithful but associations close to the religious state).

After the concordat between Italy and the Holy See (1929) ended the arrangements of the law of 1866, in 1930 and 1935 the Sacred Congregation of Religious published precise instructions for religious institutes on the practices necessary to obtain recognition from the State as *civil* juridic persons. The role assumed by this Sacred Congregation, as time went on, became ever more connected with *canonical* recognition, promotion, and support for consecrated life and for the formation of members. In particular, in 1953, it led to a *Secretariat for the nuns of Italy*, responsible to offer help and assistance to infirm nuns and women religious. Thus the Congregation fostered the emergence of groups of religious with similar apostolic purposes (like the Italian federations of women religious in hospital work, in education, and in rehabilitation). For formation, it promoted meetings and courses for updating. Following the first such meeting (1950), it encouraged the creation of the Union of Major Superiors of Women in Italy (USMI) and of the Italian Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CISM). After the Second Vatican Council, it asked all institutes to revise their constitutions in order to receive the Council's spirit and direction. The principal objectives of the revision were to recover the original ideal of the founders and to promote greater collaboration among institutes of consecrated life and a more concrete coordination with the Church's hierarchy. It must be noted, in this regard, how the proposals presented by bishops for discussion in the Council included an explicit request to eliminate, or at least to reduce, the exemption of male religious from the authority of the diocese where they worked and to have them inserted more fully in diocesan pastoral work, with a more suitable appreciation of it, reducing them almost to semi-diocesan clergy.

After the decree of Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis* on renewal of religious life, instructions from the Congregation also exercised a notable influence. These were *Renovationis causam* (1969), on updating formation for religious life; *Venite seorsum* (1969), on contemplative life and monastic cloister; and *Mutuae relationes* (1978), on the

relationships between bishops and religious in the Church. Also worth noting are more recent papal interventions, at least John Paul II's post-Synod exhortation, *Vita consecrata* (1996), and Pope Francis's decision to name the Year of Consecrated Life, now in progress. Instructions and interventions have accompanied the path of consecrated life in the second half of the 1900s, till the present, whether in the seesaw of quantitative data or in the renewal indicated by new foundations and by the revitalization of ancient institutes.

One aspect strongly emerging through the history of consecrated life in the 20th century is certainly the struggle to define the juridical profile especially of new foundations, without killing off the multifaceted charismatic expression emerging little by little. The juridical demands helped clarify and delineate the charism's institutional forms and apostolic procedures. But it is also true that the new foundations have forced the law to identify new juridical forms and to stretch the boundaries of the preceding codification, then in force.

This dimension is part of a process of joining and linking diverse forms of men's and women's consecrated life through history. In large outline (even with necessary exceptions) the relevant contribution of consecrated life on the Church's journey through history can be understood. Slowly the layers were linked from one to another: from hermit life to monasticism; from mendicant orders to regular clerics and to secular congregations; from the religious congregations of the 1800s to secular institutes, to the new forms of consecrated life of recent decades. The process points to the Holy Spirit's action and creativity. These are the origin of every experience of religious consecration and can be neither prevented nor blocked. For this reason, it is obvious that further new forms of consecrated life will be raised up in the Church, and perhaps are already on the way. Divergent procedures cannot be interpreted, even less reported on, as they are happening. Each one is a gift of the Spirit to the Church for witness to the values of the Reign of God in humanity's history. None of them impoverishes the previous institutions, even if each one motivates the others to constantly recover their founding charism and act out of

fidelity to it, through the courageous and incisive witness distinctive to each.

In fact, as forms change, what does not change is the openness of men and women to consecrated life, precisely as a special opening to the Spirit and not as an expression of private interest, something that could happen to other institutions, even ecclesiastical ones. And this history of consecrated life is surely the history of people, of the Christian people, of liberty, of spontaneity. It is the history of courage to promote or to share concrete historic responses to the needs of one's time and place, guided by the Gospel that only secondarily considers institutional and juridical demands. Therefore, such a dimension of consecrated life sometimes seeks to change the categories of historical analysis for a correct reading of a phenomenon that is being studied by the historic method and can be explained in its essence, if at all, only in an ecclesial context.

There are several questions relative to consecrated life in the 1900s that obviously remain outside the present attempt at a synthesis. I mention at least two, both joined in a tug between the initial charismatic orientation and the later institutional codification developed inside the institute or determined by particular directives from the Roman Curia or from diocesan bishops. These two questions are the form of governance and the ownership and management of goods.

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The Development of the Spirituality of the Merician Federation

**Massimo Naro –Professor of Trinitarian theology
Theology Faculty of Sicily – Palermo**

1. Thanks to the organizers of this meeting for their invitation, which offers me the opportunity to meet you once more and also gives me a way of directly touching into the sources and inspired motives of your spirituality



In fact, the title assigned to me required me to reflect on the spiritual journey that your Federation has completed for as long as it has existed as such, that is, the federated reality of all the Merician Companies spread through Italy and the world. Its history as a Federation began in the 1950s and fits into the highly important time of Vatican II. It takes shape according to a blueprint that became brighter and clearer in the decade after the Council, a time of renewal for the whole Church, for consecrated life and, therefore, also for your Institute. Perhaps it would be possible to clarify the title by reformulating it as *the “spiritual journey” of the Merician Federation*, to speak of the development and the evolution of specifically Merician spirituality through the decades of the Federation’s life.

The sources from which I was able to obtain useful information to reconstruct this sort of development were not numerous. Yet they were packed with material for reflection, to such a point that it would be enough to read attentively over this group of sources, or at least some of them, to retrace the principal stages of the “journey” that we are interested in recovering. These sources include the acts of the meeting of (male) superiors of Italian diocesan Companies held in Brescia July 29-31, 1952, and the meeting of men and women superiors held in Brescia July 9 and 10, 1959. Especially important are the Constitutions that the Companies of the Federation received in 1958 (promulgated as “new Constitutions”) and clarified, reformulated, and explained more and more incisively in the following decades, in light of the Conciliar

teaching. Revised editions appeared first in 1967, again in 1977, and then again in 1994. The last draft amounts to a text which was described in an article in your review of collected materials, *Responsabilità* (2008) as “language adequate to the times, in the light of a truly post-Conciliar ecclesiology and in continuity with the thinking and spirituality of Saint Angela.” The result was “a text for the future.”

The reflection that I put forward here tries more for a theological profile than an historical one, because the historical aspect of this meeting is largely and accurately treated by Professor Gheda. To be more precise, I shall have to walk a tightrope between two distinct but not different disciplines: the history of spirituality and spiritual theology. This last cannot say anything worth hearing without the first: the spirit is always incarnated, and only through it can something be distilled from flesh. Therefore, theology maintains a hermeneutic profile, that is, it is developed as an interpretation of an intricate bundle of experiences that together form history, the history of spirituality.

As regards the history of spirituality, it is sufficient to recall that this is history in every way and therefore studies spirituality not in the abstract. Spiritual personalities exist in the crucible of experience as a believer, within the complicated network of relationships maintained in various spheres, all inevitably connected: ecclesial or religious or social and therefore political, economic, and cultural within a well-defined historical context. The history of spirituality and, more precisely, of spiritual people, is always incarnated. This is why, to develop well the theme assigned to me here, I should follow the valuable pointers in the speech delivered by the superior of the Company of Padua to the congress of 1959, which referred to the “many biographies” (p. 19) which retrace the “spirit” of Saint Angela Merici as experienced and practiced by exemplary spiritual personalities like “the Girelli of Brescia, Mangano of Sicily, Vismara of Milan and so many others.” Given that I am a Sicilian, among these “so many others” I would include also the Servant of God Marianna Amico Roxas, who initiated the Company in Sicily between 1911 and 1912, first in Caltanissetta and later in Catania; Maria Giglio and Melia Ferrara, who began the Company in Palermo; Maria Giardina, first superior of the Company of

Canicatti; and Maria Velardia, first superior of the Company of Caltagirone. All of them, to return to the words expressed in 1959 by the superior of Padua, “lived” the “spirit” of the Merician Rule and therefore manifested what it can mean to live the demands of the Gospel in the heart of the world.

What I shall say, then, regarding the development of the “spirituality of the Merician Federation” will be distilled from various editions of your Constitutions. In the Constitutions themselves there reverberates, from time to time, all that you and your companions before you have understood, experienced, and lived in your vocation of consecration in the world and in your charism.



2. The people that I have cited so far, in some cases rediscovering their names in the documents that I studied, together with other names that are very important for the history of your Federation (for example, Mons. Carlo Vota, Mons. Fedrizzi, Mons. Bosetti) and together with the lesser names that nonetheless tell me much

because they make me recall people whom I had heard mentioned or whom I have known, like Miss Carlino of Caltanissetta (present among the superiors in 1959; cf. p. 47), or Mons. Restivo, archpriest of Canicatti, or Mons. Loreto Viscuso my compatriot (his name was misspelled in the documents in Vincenzo Loretto), especially a spiritual figure of the highest level and of national fame: Don Divo Barsotti (present at the superiors’ meeting in 1952), and the many other persons who come to your mind at this very moment (for example, Countess Piccolomini of Siena, whom I found quoted often in the acts of the meeting of 1952). They represent only the first stage of the “journey” that your spirituality has made in these last seventy years, preserved and transmitted by the federated form that your diocesan Companies were given during this period. In this first stage of the journey, three principal factors seem to deserve emphasis: lack of clarity and perhaps even confusion between the “religious state” and “consecrated life”; lack of clarity and perhaps even indecision between “vows” and “firm

intentions”; lack of clarity and perhaps even convergence between the apostolate of devotion and asceticism and the missionary apostolate.

The first point of emphasis will draw our attention to the reduction of consecrated life to the religious state, a confusion that the daughters of Saint Angela Merici and their council members and superiors were in danger of succumbing to in the 1500s. This unfortunate reduction emerges insistently in the acts of the meetings of 1952 and of 1959. In 1952 Mons. Vota, rector of the seminary of Catania and superior of the Company of San Giovanni La Punta, one of the most authoritative voices in the Merician world, lamented the exclusion of the daughters of Saint Angela both from the category of the orders and religious congregations recognized as such, based on highly detailed criteria established by Canon Law promulgated in 1917, and from the category of secular institutes finally recognized in 1947 by Pius XII’s encyclical *Provida Mater* (p. 16). It was necessary to be upset by these “humiliations” (in the word of Mons. Vota), not to rebel against the will of the Church but to clarify the identity of the Merician Companies. Since the time of the foundress, Angela’s daughters and their spiritual directors and superiors have always nourished an awareness of being “substantially religious.” The new *Constitutions* of 1958 remark on this, affirming that “the daughter of Saint Angela is a religious at home but not because of her home, nor principally because of her material well-being. She is a religious because of the Church and because of the Institute,” as Mons. Fedrizzi commented in his speech at the congress of 1959 (p. 29). To summarize once more, from this perspective, the daughters of Saint Angela would have been “religious in the world, religious in a family context” (p. 31). The ambiguity of these affirmations is best explained by the absorption of every possible and imaginable form of consecrated life under the heading of the religious state, if not *de jure*, then at least *de facto*. The state of life of the daughters of Saint Angela, “a true state of [religious] life” (p. 31) could be legitimized only if their consecration in the world were allowed to be swallowed up in the classically “religious” life. But this involved not merely a canonical and juridical question: it involved, above all, a problem with important repercussions for the world in

understanding and living spirituality. According to Mons. Vota (in the 1959 congress), under the provisions of the New Constitutions, this spirituality should have a distinctly devout, ascetic and apostolic stamp: “The spirituality of the Company is founded on 1. a life of piety, 2. a life of sacrifice and mortification, 3. a life of apostolate” (p. 8). By “apostolate,” he rightly intended to express a missionary perspective not only in the “family” and in the “parish,” but also in the “work environment” (p. 9). We shall see how these characteristic traits of Merician spirituality will later express more clearly their particular meaning, escaping being labeled – especially the first two, piety and asceticism – by the clichés typical of religious life as it was practiced at the time both in the congregated form and in the form of so-called “domestic monasticism.” After the Council, in the light of its re-understanding of both the richness and the pluriformity of consecrated life and the theology of the laity, it would be more easily understood that authentic consecrated life could exist in the secular form, its spirituality certainly less devotional and ascetic than before. This spirituality was more inspired by the Gospel and the logic of the Incarnation, in the footsteps of Christ, the primary Anointed One and thus the first consecrated person. On him the consecrated person would mold her/himself.

The second emphasis, the distinction between “vows” and “firm intentions,” reveals a primary aspect of the uncertainty from which the spirituality of the daughters of Saint Angela needed liberation in the 1950s. After *Provida Mater*, vows were required for recognition as a secular institute, no longer a simple pious union. Unfortunately, in the ‘50s the only “magisterial” criterion for recognizing commitments of chastity, obedience, and poverty remained that furnished by the Code of Canon Law. On some pages of the acts of 1959, one senses a veiled regret over the fact that, as it was difficult to admit the fault (albeit venial) of not observing “simple” commitments, it turned out to be difficult to “maintain juridical efficacy for the commitments” (p. 20).

“After all, it must also be affirmed that a venial fault should not legally be seen as no fault at all, because the Church commonly demands...the obligation under serious sin” (p. 20). Statements like

these reveal an overly canonical and juridical preoccupation, inevitably sustained by a fault-centered interpretation (i.e., starting from a “sin” perspective). Saint Paul was right: Law will reveal sin, sin demands the law; but the Gospel announces a final liberation from sin and thus victory over law. The Pauline teaching was well understood by Saint Angela, who asked her daughters to commit themselves to live the Gospel through fidelity to “firm intentions” rather than to vows, precisely to withdraw them from the ways of the time, when numerous women put in monasteries by force, usually without an authentic vocation, were all locked in forever by obligatory vows. Therefore, for her daughters, the foundress rightly required “not a vow, but a voluntary sacrifice of her heart, a firm intention, a promise” (p. 20).

In the following decades, Saint Angela’s daughters would have to be assisted in overcoming this problem of “conscience” even before dealing with the problem of “discipline” – therefore this properly spiritual tangle – the prudence of the superiors having more weight than the abstruse disquisitions of theological experts and canonists. Awareness of the substantial connection between the “intentions” requested by Saint Angela in her Rule and the three evangelical counsels encouraged the leaders of the Companies to acknowledge a distinction between the “old” and the “new” professed, but not wanting to force the former to make vows or to discourage them from continuing to live their consecration to the Lord (cf. 1959, 16-19).

The third emphasis regards a very important dimension for the vocational and charismatic (thus spiritual) experience of the daughters of Saint Angela, that of the apostolate. In the statutory framework discussed from 1952 on, the theme of the apostolate was swiftly addressed, in the awareness that it describes in a particular way the consecration of persons who live the radical demands of the Gospel – not in the form of flight from the world – in the midst of the world and for the world, for its integral promotion, for its redemption. This apostolate would have required, according to this statutory framework, an imprint that would be pastoral-devotional and at the same time social, and also related to community besides being personal and individual: “According to the Rule of the Institute, the virgins enrolled

in this Company teach Christian Doctrine; through spiritual practices they prepare young girls for their First Communion; they direct and assist the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary, Sunday schools, nursery schools, and working women's mutual assistance societies; they help the sick; they provide vestments and sacred furnishings for the Church; they distribute good books; through prayer, word, and example they gain souls for Christ. Besides these apostolic works carried out individually ... there are also those conducted by the diocesan Companies per se: nursery schools, elementary and middle schools, boarding schools, houses for minor girls, re-educational institutes for underage youth, family-housing with life-skills training, orphanages, workshops, dining rooms for students and workers, etc.” (p. 34). In the retreat preached to the superiors of the Italian diocesan Companies in July 1959 by Bishop Bosetti, superior of the Company of Brescia, this convergence between an apostolate of a pastoral and devotional character and an apostolate with a more missionary character, that is, directed to situations not exclusively within the horizon of ecclesial or parochial life, was repeated as an expression of the intertwining of contemplation and action indicated by the spirituality of Saint Angela's daughters. Bishop Bosetti noted that the active apostolate should not presume to be enough for itself or on account of itself, since the apostolate “carried out with prayer, sacrifice, penance remains useful, or rather necessary” (p. 55). However, the apostolate in the world is the qualifying motive for choosing to consecrate oneself in a form of life which is so difficult to understand and appreciate, like “secular” consecration: “One remains secular [precisely] for an apostolic motive (Parliament, City Council)” (p. 55), Bishop Bosetti advised. Political and administrative activities, examples suggested by the preacher in parentheses, strike a chord. Who knows whether there were Ursulines in Parliament or public administration then? Perhaps Bishop Bosetti was thinking about famous public figures such as Lazzati and Giorgio La Pira, who could have been obvious examples for Ursulines. These men imprinted their way of understanding and living their secular consecration. They took their consecration into an “apostolate” more and more specifically missionary, one that committed them as

individuals, not as a group or an institute, not in common and community “works” but also in “undertakings” that pushed them individually into *pagan lands*, like *lambs in the midst of wolves*. If “the Church desires secularity for an apostolic purpose” (p. 55), then it is necessary – according to Bishop Bosetti – to become (not simply to remain) ever more secular, that is, immersed in the world, certainly not to accommodate oneself to the world in its worldliness, but to transform it from within. Some years later, the Council, defining secular institutes in the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, n. 11, would speak of their intention to carry out “in and, as it were, from the world the apostolate for which they were founded.” Obviously this was not yet in Bishop Bosetti’s explicit awareness. But perhaps he had an intuition of something “desired by the Church,” which in fact would soon become awareness and even conciliar teaching. Finally, in these 1959 retreat conferences, Bishop Bosetti placed “the apostolate of professional duty” second only to “the apostolate of prayer” and “the apostolate of patience and sacrifice” (p. 56). On the eve of Vatican II, the term “profession,” in the words of this influential “superior,” finally stopped betraying anxiety about “religious” profession and finally referred to the job, occupation, trade, or profession of each daughter of Saint Angela. In this way the fundamentally anthropological dimension of work entered into the profile of professional and charismatic reality, and therefore into the spiritual life, of Saint Angela’s daughters. (It is significant that in German the words meaning “work” or “profession” and “vocation” share the same etymological and semantic root: *Beruf*-work and *Berufung*-vocation.)

3. In light of the three emphases above, we can continue to retrace the journey of Merician spirituality in the years of the Federation just after the Council. The Council itself had asked all the ancient orders, the congregations, and the religious institutes (also groups in other forms of consecrated life, like societies of apostolic life and secular institutes) to review their constitutions and statutes in the light of their original rules, and to recover their Gospel roots. With this call, the Merician Federation too rethought its own Constitutions, creating a

new text that was approved by the Holy See in 1967. These Constitutions formed a very important and definitive clarification of the identity of the Company of Saint Ursula, not only from a canonical point of view (at that point recognized as a secular institute of pontifical right organized by dioceses; later also organized on an interdiocesan level, and then national and international), but also and above all from a theological-spiritual point of view. In the first chapter of the 1967 Constitutions there is, in fact, already the essential that must be said about the Company's charismatic identity, its "nature," and its "end": right away in art. 2, "the practice of the evangelical counsels" is referred to and the "spirit of the Rule" (followed by specific reference to the writings of Saint Angela: the Rule, but also the Counsels and Testament). The "specific end," in art. 3, immediately mentions being "in the midst of the world" to "spread the practice of perfection in consecrated virginity." In this case, the "world" is the "family" in one sense, the "social milieu" in another. This "apostolate" constitutes the vocational and charismatic "identifying factor" of the daughters of Saint Angela, for which they agree to consecrate themselves (cf. art. 7). It comes about first of all "in all the forms and activities called for by the needs of the times and by the needs of souls" and "in particular" in the education of youth, in the "works" of the Company, in parish activities carried out in assisting the clergy (art. 4). These first recommendations in the Constitutions lack any reference to each member's work, craft, or profession, which we had already encountered in Bishop Bosetti's spiritual exhortations of 1959. But this dimension – very distinctive for the "secular" and "lay" spirituality of the daughters of Saint Angela, it seems to me – would be recovered in Chapter 4, which speaks of the members' formation and spirit of consecration. On such a subject, art. 30 is very interesting: "The state of perfection in the world requires discreet assimilation of all the world offers of what is good and permissible, the prudent usage of all that is necessary in one's milieu for good social relationships and for the accomplishment of the duties of one's state of life, as well as an effective sanctifying influence." For this it is necessary "to develop a deep, staunch, complete, and solid spiritual formation [in the school of the foundress, we could add here,

picking up art. 29, and therefore a formation for “lively sisterly union”]; [but also] distinct professional formation; rich human formation; clear, strong, and generous apostolic formation.” It seems to me that here indeed is a synthesis of the Council’s lesson drawn from the wisely human and humanistic tone expressed in *Gaudium et Spes*. Since those consecrated in the world are not at all religious and thus do not stop being truly lay, that lesson is also interwoven with the theological sense of the Christian laity in *Lumen Gentium* 31: “What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature.... The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.” In this passage from the Council there is a pearl of great price that must be retrieved so that we may invest it in our reflection on what distinguishes the “secular” spirituality of Saint Angela’s daughters. According to the Council, by their specific vocation lay people so are called to sanctify the world from within – and consecrated lay people even more so. This “within” is not merely a portion of the world. If one considers the conciliar teaching according to its permeating and supporting logic of the Incarnation, “within the world,” where lay persons are called to spend themselves for the world’s redemption, is a properly theological dimension. It is the place where God has been chosen, in Jesus Christ; the place where, transcending his own transcendence, God graciously became present. This means that lay people live a mission that begins in God himself. As such it is an authentic ecclesial mission, not a pale shadow of mission nor a substitute for it. This means that the spirituality of the daughters of Saint Angela should be primarily Christological and Christocentric. Precisely this fundamental orientation to Christ would emerge more and more in the various reformulations of the Merician

Constitutions, until it reaches its greatest manifestation in the Constitutions of 1994, as Father Ezio Bolis noted in his comment.

To turn to the Constitutions of 1967, we can say that already the principal lines of the Merician spiritual idea appear in them. Above all is sisterly union. This typically ecclesial trait therefore assimilates the Merician Company into the complex reality that is the Church itself, according to *Lumen Gentium* 8, involving it in the Church's nature and mission: "like a sacrament ... of the unity of the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium* 1). Furthermore, secularity, a Christic trait which also represents the specific apostolate of the daughters of Saint Angela, must become "the form of its life" (art. 52). Certainly, these hints would have to mature in awareness and, before appearing in the Constitutions, would have to be linked more firmly to Merician sources and, above all, to the message of the Gospel. In the Constitutions of 1967 this reference is certainly underneath the surface but is not yet made explicit with appropriate and adequate quotations. The quotations from Saint Angela's writings appear almost solely in the chapter dedicated to the vows. (It mentions the vow and "virtue" of obedience and chastity, and the vow and "spirit" of poverty.) The quotations are used especially to signal the substantial connection between the vow of chastity and the "firm intention" of virginity. Gospel quotations are almost absent, and references to the Biblical message still take a back seat to the so-called "exercises of piety," mentioned with a devotional tone in Chapter Six.

4. The quotations, however, become explicit and systematically woven into the text of the 1977 Constitutions, as a guarantee of their authentic Merician and evangelical inspiration. In the first chapter, the "general and specific end" of the Company of St. Ursula is once more clarified: its members are called to exercise "the practice of the evangelical counsels, lived in the world according to the spirit of the special Merician vocation" (art. 2). This means to "promote the coming of the kingdom of Christ in the world by working at the heart of terrestrial reality according to the charism of Saint Angela," to manifest to the world the beauty and the goodness of Christian virginity in an apostolate extended to the "familial, professional, religious, and social

milieu” by being “the yeast of communion” everywhere (art. 3). In these first directions reemerge the two traits of Merician spirituality already observed in the 1967 Constitutions: being a leaven of sisterhood, instruments of union and communion; being in the world, “incarnated” in each dimension of the world, sanctifying it from within and valuing its best resources. In this way the gradual but more and more complete recovery of the “foundress’s spirituality” advances. According to art. 4, it is “a spirituality preeminently evangelical, contemplative and apostolic.” To me this last expression seems to combine not only the echo of a long and important spiritual tradition (roughly recalling the early monasticism of Benedictine origins) but also – more basically – the reverberation of the Gospel images of the sisters in Bethany, who together represent the perfection of discipleship, between the service of prayerful listening and the service of concrete action. Already in the beginning of the 1900s the bishop of Caltanissetta, Bishop Intreccialagli, wrote to his spiritual disciples (among them the Venerable Marianna Amico Roxas) to encourage them to “take Mary’s role without forgetting Martha’s.”

The spirituality of the Company, then, according to art. 4 of the 1977 Constitutions, is fundamentally that “expressed” in the writings of Saint Angela, and “summarized for the consecrated member in piety toward the Father, love of Christ crucified, and docility to the Holy Spirit.” This Trinitarian tone once more implicitly recalls the conciliar teaching according to which the Church herself is entirely Trinitarian (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 4). It is significant that the formula of consecration, laid out in art. 25, begins “in the name of the most holy Trinity” (as it had already begun in the 1958 Constitutions, art. 63). The Constitutions of 1977 achieve a further interpretive emphasis regarding the “world” which seems to me very important for defining Merician spirituality. According to art. 4, this spirituality “is not realized in a flight from the world but in a separation from the ‘darkness’ of the world, by an attitude of respect and service toward earthly values.” This explicit quotation from the Prologue to Saint Angela’s Rule serves as an interpretive key for reevaluating the reality of the “world,” now understood not as intrinsically sinful, but as something that, even

though it is threatened by human sinfulness, should be taken as a special-delivery coming from its Creator. In this same perspective, art. 20 of the Constitutions reaffirms: “The life of secular consecration requires discreet assimilation of all the world offers of [what is] good and permissible.” I insist on these “secular” notes because I remain convinced that the true spiritual core of your vocational experience is precisely on the horizons of your Christian presence in the world and of your Gospel witness to it. In the formula of consecration contained in art. 25 of the 1977 Constitutions, there is a clear reference to the teaching of the Teacher of Nazareth contained in the “Sermon on the Mount” in the Gospel of Matthew: “May the Lord Christ help me to be salt, light, and leaven among my brothers and sisters, on the paths of the world” (says the daughter of Saint Angela). The salt for seasoning the world, the leaven for giving it substance (to make it as “high” as its Creator intended), the light for illumining it, actually echo a Gospel passage that is emblematic for St. Angela’s daughters and for all members of secular institutes in general. So the Ursuline lay woman, to “fit the vocation” she has received, and having agreed to enter into the “mystery of the Redemption” (art. 35), “will live contemplatively even in the most intense action, attentive and faithful to the voice of the Holy Spirit” (art. 35). Therefore “she will commit herself to an authentic prayer life corresponding to the rhythm of life of a consecrated person immersed in the common condition of humanity” (art. 36).

As these references show, there is here a great “spiritual” advance beyond the earlier Constitutions. Now the spirituality itself is no longer intended and experienced as an ethical and ascetical exertion, but as a stewardship of oneself and obedience to the Spirit of God. In my opinion, all this is the positive outcome of rebalancing the Company’s formative priorities. The 1977 Constitutions establish these in art. 21: no longer only or primarily pious practices and mortifications, but rather “profound study of the Bible” and “study of the Rule, Reminders and Legacies of St. Angela Merici” besides “the documents of the Church, and especially of the documents which treat of Secular Institutes,” linked with daily participation in the Eucharistic liturgy and Liturgy of the Hours (art. 21). This return to biblical and

Merician sources allows the 1977 Constitutions to escape the canonical tendency to force an oppositional choice between vows and firm commitments. Instead, the Constitutions reach the point of speaking more of the “obligations of consecration” (the title of Chapter 3), assumed “with vow or other sacred bond” according to the customs of the various Companies (art. 10). Beyond the terminology, which remains a question of juridical ranking, is the spiritual sense of the three evangelical counsels, rediscovered and re-expressed in a way consistent with the particular vocation of the daughters of Saint Angela. In the text of the 1977 Constitutions, obedience, chastity, and poverty are always presented in reference to “the example of Christ” and imitation of him. The outcome is indeed at a deep level. Jesus is the paradigm presented in the quotation of Philippians 2:8. Obedience is above all “docility to the Holy Spirit” and means “to live in an active and responsible way.” We could add: creative “obedience in all circumstances and within ecclesiastical and civil structures” (art. 12), since – recalling with Saint Paul – all authority comes from God. Chastity is “practiced through love” and brings about “charity” (art. 14). Poverty “must be spiritual before being material” and consists not only in “detachment” from earthly goods, but also in availability “to give others of her time, counsel, prayer, money...” (art. 16).

5. The Constitutions of 1994, now in force, lay out again these spiritual lines, which turn out to be particularly efficacious not because they say something newer than the previous ones, but because they repeat in new words what, after all, the 1977 Constitutions had already demonstrated. Perhaps we could speak of updated language, closer to current speech. For example, in the 1994 Constitutions, Saint Angela’s Legacies are cited as her “Testament” instead. But the linguistic freshness is not merely on the literal level. It seems to me that the beauty of the current Constitutions comes from the “poetic” quality of the language with which they were drafted. Precisely because of its symbolic richness and its literary polish, the language quite effectively recalls both biblical and Merician language, conveying better than previous versions the quotations drawn from the sources. Perhaps the

texts are a bit too wordy, but certainly less canonical and legalistic than those of the 1950s and 1960s, less dogmatic and less imperative. Formulated in the first person plural (“we”), they are therefore more communicative and involving than the Constitutions of 1977. The advantage of this new language is that it permits the retrieval of the intrinsic “biblical quality” in the writings of the foundress, thus revealing the spiritual potential inherent in the Merician sources. One example of what I want to say can be found in art. 4.2: “The Holy Spirit, who is always at work in us, will make us capable of silence, wonder, and wisdom like Anna, daughter of Phanuel, and will give us the strength and zeal of Judith.” These implied biblical references are drawn not so much from the Bible as from Saint Angela’s Rule, referred to in the footnote to the text.

The most significant outcome of these linguistic choices appears in the pages dedicated to taking on the evangelical counsels “either with a ‘firm intention’ or with a vow or with a promise.” For example, for the daughters of Saint Angela, obedience, lived as “filial,” “in union with Christ,” is above all a matter of listening to the Word of God and then to the teaching that interprets it. But it also includes obedience to every other authority, even earthly – if “not contrary to a conscience enlightened by faith.” The summation of obedience “to every creature, for love of God,” can already be read in the Rule of Saint Angela. Obedience, therefore, must be learned through the art of discernment and “can never exonerate each of us from personally assuming our own responsibilities” (art. 19). The tendency to personalize the spiritual experience as much as possible appears in this type of recommendation. It must not and cannot make Saint Angela’s daughter stand out in the environment where she lives concretely, not in the abstract. The text encourages an appealing response to the demands of the Gospel. It can be observed in all the members equally, but in the context of different life-styles, in different situations, facing ever-changing challenges.

Furthermore, in light of the fresh language of the 1994 Constitutions, it must be noted that the first chapter no longer speaks about the “nature and end” of the Company (the first chapter of the 1958 Constitutions being titled “Nature and laws of the Company”), but

rather about “charism.” This Ursuline charism is obviously original and particular among the other charisms with which the Spirit of God animates the Church. The daughters of Saint Angela know that they are “consecrated seculars” (art. 3.3), “consecrated lay women” (art. 4.3). As such they know that they are called to participate in “the mission of Christ Jesus, priest, king, and prophet” (art. 22.1). The commitment that flows through them is best expressed in art. 22: “In union with Christ ... in our family and in our profession, in the civil and ecclesial communities ... we will keep alive our hope for heaven, where Jesus lives at the right of the Father. Our work will be carried out with a great sense of responsibility, with competence, seriousness and honesty. Wherever we are, we will try to be builders of peace; we will be open to the needs of our sisters and brothers, and to our commitment to build the city of humanity in solidarity, and in the defense of truth and justice.” Here, once more, is an illustration of a principally Christic spirituality (Christological and Christocentric), which reinterprets secular consecration as participation in Christ’s Incarnation, endowing the world with value and experiencing the same solidarity that Jesus had with the human race. Secularity and open sisterhood (“at the margins,” we could say with Pope Francis), are not confined within the Company’s ambit (cf. art. 4.4). They distinguish the “spiritual journey” of Saint Angela’s daughters, today as four centuries ago, and make of it a “style of life” (art. 4.1, an expression which fascinates contemporary theology, from Hans Urs von Balthasar to Christoph Theobald).

This is the “grace of the vocation” to which the daughters of Saint Angela must “respond,” according to their present Constitutions (Chapter 3). For them it is not a matter of neglecting all the other aspects of Christian spiritual experience, among which they should usually prioritize Eucharistic devotion, reconsidered in an explicitly liturgical key, as the “source and climax of the life of the Church” (art. 13.1) and as the Paschal celebration of the mystery of Christ found in the “liturgical year” (art. 13.3). It is not a matter of downplaying the value of traditional asceticism, even to reinterpret it as “continual conversion” (art. 14.2). It is not a matter of snubbing the ancient devotions, especially Marian devotions, through which the daughters of

Saint Angela rediscover in Mary of Nazareth the “model” of their “life as consecrated women in the world” (art. 16). It is not at all a matter of forgetting the spousal dimension that calls them to know themselves as “‘true and virginal spouses’ of the Son of God” (art. 3.1), as Saint Angela had expressed in the prologue of her Rule. (Many interpreters of the present Constitutions insist on this spousal dimension, it seems to me.)

Rather, it seems to me, it is a matter of remaining faithful to the charismatic, identifying quality that re-emerges ever more brightly in the Merician writings and in the Constitutions revised and reformulated after the Council: participation in the mystery of Christ, experienced as giving a witness of holiness in the world and for the world and as service in solidarity and sisterhood with the entire human race.



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Secular Institutes: Lay/Consecrated and Vatican Council II

Gian Carlo Rocca
Director of the Dictionary of Institutes of Perfection



Introduction

The publication of *Provida Mater* in 1947 officially opened in the Church a new way to follow the evangelical counsels. The general structure of the secular institute was clearly defined: the institute had to be centralized with general governance, with the possibility of spreading everywhere and of being divided in provinces. In addition, the institute had to operate in the world, without a common canonical life, without

a distinctive dress and without its own works, in order to differentiate itself from religious congregations. The absence in the Code of Canon Law of 1917 of any regulations for secular institutes or even the possibility of approving a new type of life in the following Christ raised the issue regarding its judicial configuration. Because they could not be recognized with a religious status as defined by the Code (*Part 2, About religious*), the legislator deemed it appropriate to include them among associations of the faithful (*Part 3, About the laity*). In order to distinguish them from generic lay associations, the legislator gave them the name “secular institutes” and made them depend on the Sacred Congregation (S. C.) of Religious. However, entrance into a secular institute would have followed the standard rules of associations. Thus, if one entered an association (for example, one of the Third Orders), he or she would remain lay if he or she were lay, and cleric if he were cleric. There would be no change of status.

However, not everything was so simple. In fact, members of secular institute pronounced vows and wanted to do so. As a

consequence, a question arose: were they really lay? Wasn't their status closer to religious than to associations of the faithful? If they remained lay, why should they depend on the S. C. of Religious? In this article, I will try to outline the general environment in which the discussion on an aspect of secular institutes developed.

The Conciliar Debate

a) *The dependence of secular institutes on the S. C. of the Council.* The secular institutes arrived at the Council with the main characteristic of not being in the canonical state of perfection typical of religious institutes. When the pre-conciliar work began, the possibility of revising the Code of Canon Law had to be kept in mind, as Pope John XXIII said in 1959. In this way, all issues could have been readjusted.

The proposals prepared by the S. C. of the Council and by the S. C. of Religious for the Second Vatican Council were clearly different on the nature of secular institutes and their dependence on pontifical departments. In 1960, the texts presented by the two departments for the pre-conciliar work could not have been more explicit. The S. C. of the Council defended their qualification as an association, thus, their lay state, while the S. C. of Religious was slowly distancing itself from their inclusion among associations of the faithful, bringing them closer to the state of perfection.

Through an examination of all the texts having any connection with religious which the S. C. of Religious had thought to collect for its consulters (*Excerpta. Sacra Congregatio Concilii*), it is possible to understand the points of discussion. De facto, the S. C. of the Council, in its proposals, remarked that the lay person totally engaged in apostolic works did not change his canonical state. According to them, the canonical state of a believer did not change when he entered a secular institute; he remained cleric or lay, as before. Moreover, secular institutes always remained associations of the faithful, even though at that time these depended on the S. C. for Religious.

The note that secular institutes enjoyed a *juridical* status approved by the Church was perhaps recalled from the teaching of Fr. Arcadio

Larraona and Fr. Anastasio Gutiérrez. They had distinguished between the *juridical* status (which referred to documents in which the Holy See had approved secular institutes) and the *canonical* status (namely in the Code of Canon law). The annotation regarding the lay person engaged in apostolic works was a direct criticism of Karl Rahner's thought, specifically mentioned by the S. C. of the Council. According to this Congregation, Pius XII himself would have rejected Rahner's thesis. However, it is important to point out that Rahner had in mind the lay person "religiously" committed with vows, not an ordinary lay person. Apart from that, the main interest is to understand which of the positions mentioned above the two papal departments influenced.

In general, we could say that the S. C. of Religious had included secular institutes in the state of perfection, classifying them as the last arrival and affirming, as a consequence, its jurisdiction over them. In this way, clearly distinguishing them from the religious state and from the societies of common life, the decision was closer to Rahner's idea and that of all who preferred to find a common denominator between secular institutes and the other states of perfection, but differentiating them in their characteristics.

On the contrary, the S. C. of the Council insisted on considering secular institutes as associations of the faithful. Their ideas were closer to those of Larraona and Gutiérrez as well as of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who intervened on the matter affirming that secular institutes' members were lay people. Curiously, the S. C. of the Council defended secular institutes as they had been recognized by the S. C. of Religious in 1947-1948, namely as associations of the faithful, of which they were one type. On the other hand, the S. C. of Religious was distancing itself from the common denominator of association, which it had previously considered basic, and reasoned using as common denominator the state of perfection divided into three types.

Based on pontifical guidelines, the issue of secular institutes was not among the arguments discussed by S. C. of Religious while preparing for the Second Vatican Council. Pope John XXIII had four topics to discuss: the renewal of religious life, union or federation of religious institutes, dispensation, and the religious habit.

However, among the arguments that could be treated in preparation for the Second Vatican Council, the Pontifical Commission for Religious pointed out in the *Observations* of October 11, 1960, that besides *Questions asked* by Pope John XXIII, the Commission could add *Additional questions* that seemed useful to treat, and *Related questions* that, even if handled by other committees, could have some connections with religious.

In particular, in the *Observations* it was specified that all states of perfection must be discussed in a single block, thus including secular institutes. The second point concerned the dependence of secular institutes on the S. C. of the Council, as a result of the published text of March 26, 1960. It was clearly the intention of the S. C. of the Council to have secular institutes under its control. Although it was already established in *Provida Mater*, it was highlighted that secularity, the second key point of the S. C. of the Council, was not the only characteristic of secular institutes, since they preferred to emphasize the profession of evangelical perfection. Moreover, the observations by the S. C. of the Council were also recognized as valid, under which it would be appropriate for secular institutes to have a common life, a specific apostolate and a quasi-religious habit. Therefore, they would definitely belong among religious institutes or societies of common life. At the end, the Pontifical Commission for Religious recommended that the question of secular institutes – not entrusted to any Preparatory Commission – be properly studied in depth.

As a consequence, the so-called *Additional question* on secular institutes was created (initially number #2 and later #11). It was given to Don Alvaro del Portillo, a member of *Opus Dei*. (This gave the researcher an additional advantage: to know what *Opus Dei*'s thoughts were in those years when it was still a secular institute, before becoming a personal prelature.)

However, the discussion of secular institutes was not addressed in any meetings of the Pontifical Commission for Religious in preparation for the Second Vatican Council.

In the first meeting, held on November 9, 1960, Alvaro del Portillo, referring to secular institutes, sought to distinguish between

religious life in the strict sense and consecrated life, expressing concern that two states of life were equated with each other.

In the fourth meeting, which took place November 16, 1960, two points were discussed. The first concerned whether the distinction between *juridical status* and *canonical status* was still valid, with the consequence, if accepted, of putting secular institutes in a different state from the other institutes that were part of the state of perfection.

The second point was the dependence of secular institutes on the S. C. of the Council. In this regard, in his five-page speech, Alvaro del Portillo insisted that he was of the opinion that secular institutes continued to depend on the S. C. for Religious, while others emphasized that they were part of the Papal Curia, namely an operational tool available to the Pope. Thus, only he could answer the question.

Since the inquiries did not seem clear, the study of the *Additional question* n. 11 was entrusted to three consultants: Fr. Andrea Baron; Fr. Robert Svoboda, of the Camillians; and Fr. Romeo O'Brien, of the Carmelites. In a *Mandatum*, they were asked to respond by February 25, 1961. The document summarized the issues to be examined, those mentioned above: first, whether the distinction between *juridical status* and *canonical status* was really justifiable; and second, on which department secular institutes should depend. The secretary, however, still spoke out against the possibility that the issue of dependence on the S. C. of the Council should be proposed to the Second Vatican Council. He repeated that papal departments were the *long hand* of the Pope for the government of the Church, and thus the Pope had the competence to settle the question.

The first to respond was Fr. Robert Svoboda, who cast his vote on December 9, 1960 (Prot. 319/60). The second was Fr. Romeo O'Brien (prot. 320/60 and 110/61), and the third was Don Andrea Baron (prot. 125/61).

Fr. Svoboda expressed the desire that secular institutes depend on the S. C. for Religious, especially if they changed the name to S. C. for the states of perfection.

Fr. O'Brien was the only one to extensively discuss the canonical aspects of the matter. Above all, he rejected the distinction

between *juridical status* and *canonical status* as non-existent in the history of Canon Law and without any basis in *Provida Mater*, to which Larraona and Gutiérrez were referring. He denied that secular institutes were a simple association of the faithful. If they were, what sense did it make to oblige them to pursue evangelical perfection in celibacy? Therefore, they should continue to depend on the S. C. for Religious.

According to Don Andrea Baron, the question of secular institutes was already clear, based on *Provida Mater*, which had amplified the *religious* concept. For Don Andrea Baron, members of secular institutes were consecrated, thus religious in a new sense, but religious and dependent on the S. C. for Religious.

On March 15, 1961, Alvaro del Portillo's report, 34 pages long, was delivered to the Commission. In his reply, he criticized the structure of vows as proposed by Svoboda, Baron and O'Brien, considering it not in compliance with what was stipulated in the law for secular institutes until that period (*Provida Mater* and successive pontifical documents). Alvaro del Portillo recalled that the distinction between *juridical status* and *canonical status* was in the papal documents, citing *Provida Mater* and *Primo Feliciter*. However, he was ready to let go of this terminology if a distinction among "religious status," "status of common life without vows," and "secular status of perfection" was made. Furthermore, he mentioned that members of secular institutes preserved the standing they had before entering the institute; that consecration in secular institutes was not public; that a revision of the Code of Canon Law for secular institutes could be arranged in the section "On secular institutes and other associations of the faithful"; and finally that they were basically an association of the faithful.

The *folium officii* of March 27, 1961, recorded observations that some consultants moved to Alvaro del Portillo's report and, in particular, the fact that he had omitted the words *as long as truly religious* that in general were in *Provida Mater* (n. 9) and in the letter *Primo Feliciter* (n. II). These words defined the nature of the consecration in secular institutes. At the meeting of March 28, 1961, faced with the difficulty of defining the meaning of the terms *publicly* and *canonically*, the

secretary suggested omitting them. However, he proposed for secular institutes the formula “They are plainly distinguished by these things: insofar as they make a true and essentially complete profession of the evangelical counsels.” This solution was well accepted but opened a certain degree of uncertainty that would be found in other versions of the outline of *Perfectae Caritatis*.

In the meeting of June 21, 1961, there was, finally, a new text (described as *reconsidered and still to be further reconsidered*) that clearly distinguishes secular institutes from associations of the faithful. Moreover, secular institutes were inserted among the states of perfection recognized by the Church, together with religious. As a consequence, the possibility that secular institutes could depend on the S. C. of the Council was diminished.

It would be easy at this point, following the presentations of Alvaro del Portillo, to observe how he consistently opposed those formulas that somehow could obscure the legal and secular nature of secular institutes as understood by him:

- In the meeting of October 27, 1961, he proposed changing the title of the second section that said “Of lay institutes and in particular secular institutes” into Section 2: Of some institutes of the state of perfection in particular.... Chapter IX About secular institutes.”
- In the meeting of November 21, 1961, he asked to delete the word *public*: “I would suppress the word *public*. For the text sounds as though, without discussion, it approves a teaching according to which the specific state of secular institutes, as a state of perfection, is a *public* state....”
- In the meeting of November 29, 1961, he requested that, when speaking of secular institutes, the word *juridically* be added to distinguish them from the *canonical* of religious institutes; “I would write: ‘it is meaningful to say that one professes the evangelical counsels *juridically*’” to distinguish them from *canonically*, which is proper to religious institutes.

The numerous other presentations of Alvaro del Portillo in favor of the distinction between *public* and *juridical* did not convince the Commission. In fact, in its meeting of March 28, 1962, despite the intervention of Fr. Peter Tocanel, of the Friars Minor Conventual, who had supported Alvaro del Portillo's thesis arguing that "Secular institutes are in a fully juridical state of perfection," the secretary of the Commission concluded that "If 'fully *juridical*' is said, confusion remains."

The question of the dependence of secular institutes on the S. C. of the Council, on the contrary, appeared to have found a solution. In the meeting of the joint Commission on secular institutes on October 16, 1961, this matter was once again discussed. The two hypotheses were on the table: the choice of their dependence upon one department or the other, based not on the inclusion of secular institutes among associations, as the S. C. of the Council asserted, but on their nature. If it was said that they professed the evangelical counsels, they had to depend on the S. C. of Religious; otherwise, if they were not professed, they were simple faithful, under the control of S. C. of the Council. In the meeting of the Commission for Religious on November 29, 1961, the Secretary concluded by saying that he could now deal with the issue regardless of the department on which secular institutes depended.

The Commission did not solve a final issue: the title it had given to the outline "On states for acquiring perfection." Having inserted in the title, as the basis of all, the word *state*, strong from a legal point of view, then defining it with *perfection*, the Commission was necessarily required to assert the juridical status of members. With this background the outline on religious entered into the conciliar work.

b) *The Council's work* (August 6, 1962-October 1964). The question of which Papal department secular institutes should depend on was already set aside. What remained was the question of their nature, and it was clear that the more their profession of vows was pressed, the more the probability of their control by the S. C. of the Council was pushed away. The outline "On states for acquiring perfection," about 100 pages, was ready for December 1962. This document succeeded in

defending the term *religious*, which could be extended to all the states of perfection, including secular institutes. However, in the second part of the document, in Chapter VII, secular institutes still seemed to resemble associations of the faithful: using the word *juridical*, but specifying that they had no *canonical* common life, their vows were not public and their nature was secular. In conclusion, they used Fr. Larraona's and Fr. Gutiérrez's explanations.

The Council, however, intended to abbreviate all the texts that the various committees had submitted to the Council Fathers. Following these requests (repeated three times), the text on religious was reduced to only 19 articles, condensed into a few pages. However, to put an end to the discussions on the title of the outline, an intervention of Pope Paul, on March 4, 1964 imposed the title *About religious*. On April 27, 1964, the 19 propositions were submitted to the Council Fathers.

The question of the title was settled through authority. But criticisms still remained and a subsequent change (October 1964) was made. It was changed to "On the adaptation and renewal of religious life."

This change had twofold advantages. First, it responded to the numerous Council Fathers who had asked for an updating of religious life, which was considered too anchored to old patterns. The second was the final abolition of the expression *state of perfection*. In this way, they avoided entering into problematic legal issues related to both the word *state* – which obliged them to distinguish somehow among the religious state, the state of societies of common life, and the state of secular institutes – and the word *perfection*. This word was difficult to understand since it was implied that religious were the custodians of perfection, after the repeated assertions of many Council Fathers that holiness or perfection should be the task and the desire of all Christians.

Meanwhile, other scholars continued their reflections in search of a satisfactory solution, at least to clarify the matter of vocabulary. In 1964, the Jesuit Jean Beyer proposed the terms *consecrated person* and *consecrated life* for all the states of perfection.

c) *The discussion in the hall* (November 10, 1964-October 28, 1965). The observations of the Fathers on the new outline were stopped because secular institutes were only mentioned in the preamble, and the new title, “Renewal of Religious Life,” was confusing. If the overall title were “religious life,” secular institutes could not fit into this scheme. At this point, it is important to recall the objections in the General Congregation CXX of November 11, 1964, by Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini, Cardinal Paul Richaud and Bishop Peter Fiordelli.

Taking into account the comments of the Council Fathers, it was decided to add a number to “On the adaptation and renewal of religious life,” number 11 on secular institutes, presented to the Council Fathers on September 16, 1965. However, it was considered appropriate not to change the title, already accepted by the vast majority of the Council Fathers. As a result, there was still something uncertain, because secular institutes were considered within the world of religious life. However, at the last moment, when according to the rules the Council Fathers

could no longer modify texts, a personal intervention by Pope Paul VI, presented on October 27, 1965, allowed him to insert into number 11 the famous words on secular institutes, “although [they are] not religious institutes,” that preserved their characteristics.

Conclusion

The two questions posed in the pre-conciliar and conciliar years – namely on which papal department secular institutes should depend and what was their nature – were solved. The first was resolved fairly quickly, making clear that within the Papal Curia the decision belonged exclusively to the Pope.



However, the second question experienced a troubled path. Initially, secular institutes were inserted among associations of the faithful, not finding a suitable place in the Code of Canon Law of 1917. In fact, secular institutes were based on the profession of the evangelical counsels, and secularity was their way to live this profession. It was necessary, therefore, to insist on the element of consecration, which would allow secular institutes to be brought closer to the “state of perfection” and the “religious life.” In this way, secular institutes were moving away from the possibility that they could depend on the S. C. of the Council.

This was the path taken in the various pre-conciliar outlines, which led to the expression “consecrated life” as a common denominator for all the various forms of institutes that were committed to living the evangelical counsels.



The Merician Charism in the Experience of the Federation

Adriano Tessarollo

Bishop of Chioggia – Ecclesiastical Assistant to the Council of the Federation



Particularly in the last thirty years, the Federation has occupied itself with revisiting the Merician charism, bringing into greater clarity its original meaning and intention and offering it to many women living in different cultures in every part of the world, in harmony with a missionary Church incarnated in many situations. Pope Francis would say “a

Church on the margins” and “with the odor of the sheep,” that is, a Church that announces and proposes the Gospel as a joyous experience of salvation to every man and woman, in his/her real life circumstances.

Some events have stimulated and impelled this process:

- Conciliar and post-Conciliar teaching on the calling to holiness that comes from living in the ways proper and specific to different states of life: clergy, religious, laity, and the renewed understanding of “Consecrated Life” through the practice of the evangelical counsels in the lay state, and of a clear distinction between the practice of the evangelical counsels in religious life and in secular life.
- the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law in 1983, which affirms that a lay person, by the force of his/her consecration in secularity is inserted by title of a new and special vocation into the laity. Such a consecrated person does not abandon and cannot abandon the lay state if s/he wishes to experience the grace of his/her vocation and life consecration. In this way Beyer commented on Canon 711: “It can be concluded that Canon 711 expresses forcefully and indisputably the vocation to consecrated secularity as consecration and presence, like yeast in the environment and a reinforcement of that state of life within

which this call was heard and in which the consecration should be lived” (Il Diritto della Vita Consacrata, Ancora, 1989, p. 452).

- The invitation to give attention to knowledge about their own founders and about their charism has also marked a return to the Merician wellspring (Rule, Counsels, Testament), to the life of Saint Angela, and to the historic context in which she lived and in which the Company originated. A notable contribution to this research came from the volume *Angela Merici: Contribution towards a biography* (Mariani-Tarolli-Seynaeve. Ancora 1986 [English edition 1989]).

There was a desire to have the history of the Companies through the centuries in which the Merician charism has been lived, and that wish is now being brought to completion in the work of Prof. Gheda.

The principal manifestation of the renewed understanding of the Merician charism is found in the **Constitutions of the Company of St. Ursula, Secular Institute of Saint Angela Merici, Federation**, approved in August 1994.

In fact, the preparation of the Constitutions, accomplished with the dedication of the Companies both before and after the approval, required and fostered great interest and research on the Merician charism. This process had been shared by the Companies through study, meetings, assemblies, gatherings of the leaders and of formation personnel and young members, and in a new reformulation of what had been gathered in the three preceding editions (1958, 1967, 1977).

The research and the sharing were centered on several fundamental points. Here I will list five, around which I can outline the features or the identity of the Merician charism.



1. Saint Angela originated a new reality, which she named the Company of St. Ursula, to offer women the opportunity of a “new life” in the Church: that is, to live consecration in secularity “united together” according to the path traced out by the Rule. “United together” was understood and expressed in the light of sisterhood in secularity and not as the common life proper to the religious state. This includes

clarification of the issue of “reserve,” as well as the difficulty of a Company’s having shared works, given a consecrated single woman’s having a job and her own living situation and work in the world.

This increased awareness has made it possible to overcome the difficulty experienced by Companies of the past, reinforcing the choice to journey united in the same charism in the “Company of St. Ursula, Secular Institute of Saint Angela Merici, Federation.” Such a form is surely unique and it allows for further revisions along the way “as the times and conditions require.”

2. A great impulse and renewal in the understanding of the Merician charism came from **returning to the figure of Saint Angela**, to her writings – Rule, Counsels, Testament – and to the historical context of the Company’s birth. Contributions from pre- and post-Conciliar reflections on the laity and on consecration in secularity shed light on this process, as we have said, but with continual reference to the Word of God, to the life of Jesus, and to a relationship with him. This is what Saint Angela does in her writings, either citing or alluding or interpreting.

3. By reference to Saint Angela’s life and from her writings, the Merician charism was gleaned and better defined in **the specific relationship of the “daughter of Saint Angela” with Christ**, expressed in the Merician category of “espousal.” Through espousal, each member of the Company defines herself through her relationship of consecration to Christ, and through him in a filial relationship with the Father, in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Thus the woman “consecrated in secularity” lives her response to the call of a “disciple of Christ” and of witness in the world, in the style of the Incarnation, “by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God” (LG 31), sharing the same charism with the other “daughters.”

The relationship of reciprocity – total and faithful belonging and self-giving – between God and the consecrated woman, defined as espousal (God the “Beloved” or the “Lover” and the consecrated

woman the “spouse of the Most High”) is expressed fully in virginity, experienced as a concrete response of love in the practice of the commandments, summed up in the commandment of love. In this way the virgin becomes also a “servant,” that is, a hard-working and intimate participant in the plans and mission of Jesus, in the sense of his words, “I no longer call you servants but friends.” The relationship of the consecrated woman with God, expressed through the image of “spouse, virgin, and servant” confers on her “a new and wondrous dignity” (Prologue to the Rule, 8). Her dignity is grounded in this relationship with Christ and the Trinity.

4. **Nuptial spirituality** characterizes the practice of the Evangelical Counsels by the woman consecrated in secularity and in the Company: her relationship with earthly goods (poverty), the total and joyful commitment of self-gift to God and to one’s brothers and sisters (virginity), Jesus’ way of searching for and accepting the Father’s will (obedience), while she awaits the definitive encounter with the Spouse.



5. This also gives shape to the whole **life of prayer** typical of committed laity with commitments in personal, social, and ecclesial life and in one’s institute. It is a spiritual life nourished by daily prayer: hearing the Word and liturgical, sacramental, and personal prayer, through which to experience

communion with the Spouse and to bear witness to one’s consecration and dedication to God’s Kingdom while waiting to meet him.

Despite the recent decades’ strong numerical drop among older Companies, the new spiritual energy of the “Company of St. Ursula, Secular Institute of Saint Angela Merici, Federation” has encouraged the sprouting of “new sprigs” on the ancient tree around the world, promising a renewed vitality even for the Companies of the Old Continent.

THE GROUPS OF THE COMPANY IN AFRICA

Geneviève Chambris



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In Africa there are eight groups belonging to the Secular Institute of Saint Angela Merici.

The first group, in Ethiopia, dates back to 1985, followed by Eritrea, Madagascar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroun, Nigeria, Burundi and Kenya.

Generally the Federation, through one of the its Councillors,

monitors the groups; however, Cameroun and the Democratic Republic of Congo depend on the French Company and, during the last two years, also needed the support of the Federation. At inception, one can often identify an Italian priest already conversant with Saint Angela and her charism. The support of these priests is therefore very valuable.

Only two groups have their own house. In general, to respect their secular life, meetings are held in one of the residences of the sisters or in religious institutions (parishes, institutes of women religious, houses of spirituality).

The sisters have great difficulty in meeting because of the great distances involved. Some of them have to travel by taxi in the bush for days. Others have to catch a plane, the sole means of transport, to attend a meeting; thus their regular means of contact are either by email or the telephone.

Some groups, particularly in Madagascar, Ethiopia and Burundi, have translated the Constitutions and the Writings of Saint Angela in their language. For the other countries, the Italian texts (formation outlines and “In the same charism”....) are translated into French and English. For those sisters who use English, other books written in that language, are very valuable for formation. The Federation’s bulletin is of great help for formation and as a means of getting to know each other across the continents.

Periodic visits allow them to keep in touch and get to know each other better. Some of the sisters have also participated in the annual general meeting in order to meet the members of the Federation and the Sisters of the other countries, and to benefit from the opportunities for formation on these occasions. The linguistic difficulty remains. Apart from their native languages, a few sisters from Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea speak English whilst those from Cameroun, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar and Burundi speak French.

The archives are kept by the Federation or by the responsible councillors; those for Cameroun and the Democratic Republic of Congo, by the French Company.

Most groups are acknowledged and encouraged by the local bishops who may also appoint an Assistant to help them. In certain countries secular institutes hold yearly regular meetings. Besides their jobs, all the sisters are involved in parochial activities.

At present there are about 150 members in Africa; their ages range from 35 to 50 years, with a median age much lower than that of sisters in Europe.

Their occupations vary; there are farmers, needlework teachers (cutting out and sewing), managers of health centres, orphanages and tailors’ shops; they also render services in the parishes.

They work mostly with the poorest people; helping orphans and street children, educating women.

In Africa, where family life is given primary importance, secular life is not understood. Leading a lay consecrated life in the world is not taken seriously in these countries, which are accustomed to traditional

religious life. Over time, their way of life among the poor is a credible testimony and increasing vocations are proof of this.

ETHIOPIA

In September 1985, while Father Stéphane Kidane, the Superior of the Cistercian monks in Mendida, was attending a congress of his order in Pavia, Italy, he met Santina Fiorani, one of the Daughters of Saint Angela. She gave him a copy of the

Rule of Saint Angela that he took with him to Ethiopia and later to Eritrea.

On his return to Mendida in Ethiopia, he wanted to meet Maddalena Zergaw to let her know that, according to him, the Rule was what she was looking for and he would be happy for her to join the Company.

After long talks with him, Maddalena concluded that Saint Angela's way was her way and she eventually became Saint Angela's first daughter in Africa.

The group, monitored by the Federation, is made up of nine members, three of whom are consecrated for life. Two are in their 20s and three between 30 and 50 years of age.

Because of the long distances it is quite difficult to hold meetings; still, meetings are held with some regularity. These meetings, the way these members are made welcome in Italy when they attend international meetings and periods of formation, help them to become more responsible and joyfully follow the path of the Company. In their own country, they are actively helped by priests and nuns.

The Rule was translated in Amharic, the language of Ethiopia; it was also printed and given to anyone interested in undertaking this



spiritual journey. The members also use the Rule and the Constitutions in English.

The Group of Ethiopia depends on the Council of the Federation. The President is the person in charge of it.

ERITREA

Just like the Group of Ethiopia, that of Eritrea owes its origin to Father Stéphane Kidane, who had met a Company member while he was in Pavia. He brought with him to Eritrea the written texts about the



Company and in January 1986 delivered them to Asmara.

In May 1987, Minnia Ammar travelled to Rome to meet Lina Moser, then President of the Federation, and decided to join the Institute. On her return to Eritrea, Minnia organised a meeting for a group of women who, like herself, wanted to make a life-commitment. Father Stéphane continued to offer encouragement.

With the help of The Company of Trent, the group managed to buy a small house.

The telephone and e-mail are the primary means of communication with the Federation.

The local church respects their Merician charism, and in turn they help in the apostolic work as much as they can.

At present the group is made up of eleven members, four of whom are over sixty; the others are between thirty and fifty years of age.

For them Angela is a shining light. She is the guide and teaches them to be true spouses of the Son of God.

The Group of Eritrea depends on the Council of the Federation. The President is the person in charge of it.

MADAGASCAR

It was Father Attilio Monbelli, a Vincentian missionary priest and the brother of a Daughter of Saint Angela of the Company of Como, who proposed secular consecration to a group of women who cared for the poor. After meeting Father Attilio for a few times she made a brief visit to Italy to become acquainted and to begin formation (with the Company of Como and in Brescia with Elisa Tarolli, the President at that time) and to attend several meetings. Then Cassilde Agnes Ravaomalala began a journey in the Institute while still keeping her job. She made her first consecration in December 2013. Gradually others joined and the number increased.



At the beginning only the Italian missionary priests sustained the group and spread awareness of the Merician vocation. Today, the nuns and priests of the country are beginning to know and care about them.

The Madagascar group is directly accompanied by means of letters, printed material such as articles that help in formation, telephone calls and visits. The missionary priests are always ready and willing to help the group through meetings and sharing.

At present, the group is made up of eight members; Cassilde is 70 years old but the ages of the majority range



between 25 and 45 years of age. Two young members have already returned to the Father's house. The sisters of the group have different occupations, but all are dedicated to helping the very poor: a social worker, a teacher, a nurse and those who work with former street children. The group recognizes the advantage and the necessity of being part of a federated institute. Voahangy, who has attended international meetings of the Federation, keeps in touch with the many Italian sisters she met there.

Cassilde, who from the beginning has been the local liaison, continues to fulfill her service and, despite illness, leads the group in its growth and in formation and offers individual members lengthy hospitality in her own house.

The Constitutions have been translated into Malagasy. They read other documents in French, the second language of the country.

We can say that many are attracted by the spirituality of the charism even if, at times, they find it hard to understand the real meaning of secularity: nuns can be identified and live in convents. Our charism must be incarnated in a particular place; this requires time and patience.

In this poor country, travelling involves enormous problems. Some sisters live at least 500 kilometers apart and must undertake difficult trips, travelling by makeshift means with few financial resources: by taxi through the bush on unpaved roads.

The Group of Madagascar depends on the Council of the Federation, which has delegated Maria Rosa Bernasconi of the Company of Como to follow them directly and steadily. Other Councillors and the President have gone to Madagascar to maintain the relationship when Maria Rosa Bernasconi was temporarily unable to go in person.

CAMEROUN

The Group in Cameroun dates back to the years 1993-1994 in Yaoundé,



thanks to a group of young international students who wanted to consecrate themselves, following the footsteps of Christ in secular life. These students, from the western region of France, were familiar with documents concerning Pier Giorgio Frassati and Saint Angela Merici. They had read about the latter's foundation in a newspaper article and had contacted Jeanne Lagrave, the Directress of the French Company at the time. One of the students also was in contact with a group of women of Yaoundé who wanted to be consecrated to God in secular life.

After contacting the ecclesiastical authorities, the Ecclesiastical Assistant of the French Company, Father Jouneau, and Jeanne Lagrave travelled to Yaoundé, where they met four lay women, one of whom was a Franciscan tertiary, and thus established the first nucleus. Monsignor Jérôme Mimboë, Bishop of Obala; Monsignor Ndzana, Bishop of Mbalmayo; and Monsignor Jean Zoa, Archbishop of Yaoundé, always showed attention and consideration towards the group that developed after 1994.

Jeanne, Father Jouneau, and other members of the French Company visited them regularly for annual spiritual exercises and had the opportunity to explain to them the Rule and the Constitutions, and new members joined the first small group of four. At present the Group is made up of ten members, six of whom have made their consecration for life, two have made temporary commitment, and two are in the period of formation. Their age ranges between 45 and 70 years. They all live in Yaoundé; the Group has neither a house nor works in common.

Their occupations vary: head of a preschool, clerk at the Ministry of Labor, a teacher.... Some are retired and work in the parish as catechists.

The bulletins of the Federation, those of the French Company, and all the formation materials are regularly sent by the French Company to the sisters and their assistant. They have also received donations of books to help them deepen their knowledge about the spirituality of Saint Angela and various methods of prayer and novenas.

Four members have taken part in the Federation's annual international meetings and in some meetings in France.

They also participate in meetings among secular institutes in Yaoundé.

On March 12, 2013, Monsignor Tonye Bakot, Archbishop of Yaoundé, officially recognized the presence of the members of the Company of Saint Ursula in his diocese.

The Group of Cameroun is not yet an autonomous Company; its members belong to the Company of France. Therefore, Jeanne Lagrave keeps all the written material in the archives in France, where one can find the correspondence with the members and with the bishops, as well as many photos.



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The first group of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) dates back to the sad tribal clashes between Katanga and Kasai in the southern part of

Congo-Kinshasa in 1993. Many inhabitants of Kasai, including some priests and women religious, had to leave Katanga to go to live in Kasai. Two of these religious sought to join a secular institute. They turned to Monsignor Tshibangu, Bishop of Mbuji-Mayi, and then to Marie-Bernadette Mbuyi-Beya, a Congolese living in Lubumbashi, asking to be put in touch with the secular Ursulines in Italy, who sent them the address of Jeanne Lagrave in France.

Jeanne Lagrave immediately contacted these two young women and Monsignor Tshimbangu, who was very positive and welcoming.

Six years later, in 1999, notwithstanding the war in Congo, Jeanne Lagrave, Germaine Denis, Father Victor Jouneau and Marie-Bernadette Mbuyi-Beya travelled to Mbuji-Mayi to meet the future companions and to organize a retreat regarding formation in preparation

for the consecration of the first two daughters of Saint Angela. Subsequently, other Congolese women expressed their wish to undergo formation and enter the Institute.

At present in Congo there are four groups with a distance of 1000 kilometres separating them. These are found in Mbuji-Mayi, the place for initial formation; Lubumbashi; Kinshasa, the capital city; and Kisangani. Every group meets once a month and is helped by an assistant named by the bishop.

The French leaders visit the DRC group every year. At the beginning, the members used to meet either in Mbuji-Mayi or in Lubumbashi, but as they grew in number they had to give up these meetings. For the past two years, with the help of the Federation, it was possible to gather all the daughters of Saint Angela in one place: Lubumbashi.

As a lay consecrated woman in the world, every member tries to become part of her surroundings and work especially in close contact with the needy. Some work in health centres, in orphanages and schools, in the parish and even in television. Every member is creative in bearing witness to the Gospel, wherever she finds herself.

At present there are 23 women in the DRC, eight of whom are consecrated for life. They are recognized by the bishops of their dioceses and are very involved in the local Church.

The different groups keep in contact with one another and with France through the Internet or by telephone, as there is no postal service. Many have been to France and have attended international meetings in Italy.

The Group of the DRC is preparing to become an autonomous Company (anticipated in 2016), having reached the number of twelve established by the Constitutions.

The Federation will then welcome a new inter-diocesan Company of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

KENYA

The Group of Kenya began in 2012, in response to the request of a Kenyan woman, Perpetua Bonaneri Nyakundi, who had become aware of the Secular Institute through the book *Angela Merici's Journey of the Heart: The Rule the Way* and through contact with the author, Mary-Cabrini Durkin of the United States.

Perpetua, born in 1962, was an Ursuline religious of the Irish Ursuline Union until 2011. She works in the eye-health section of the Kenyan national Department of Health and lives in Nairobi. Having learned about the Company and about the secular vocation, Perpetua asked to join the Institute in 2012 and was admitted by the Council of the Federation in September 2012. On the request of the Council, her formation was entrusted to Mary-Cabrini, a Federation councilor. The period of formation began with the help of Skype. Mary-Cabrini visited Nairobi in 2013 and in 2014 to deepen the formation and their knowledge of one another.

In spring 2014, Eunice Anyango Maugo, born in 1977 in Eldoret and a teacher in the School of St. Ursula in Kitale, asked to join Perpetua. Eunice had been a religious in temporary profession with the Servants of the Holy Child Jesus.

The ceremony of temporary consecration of Perpetua (two years) and the admission of Eunice into the initial journey took place in September 2014 in Nairobi. Mary-Cabrini was delegated by the President to



receive the consecration. Meanwhile, Most Rev. Cornelius Arap Korir, bishop of the Diocese of Eldoret, read the Constitutions given to him by Perpetua, recognized the presence of the first members, and

was favorable to the birth of the Company in Kenya. No priests were involved with the Group's beginning.

From a juridical point of view, the little Group depends on the Council of the Federation, which has entrusted its guidance and the formation of its members to Mary-Cabrini.



BURUNDI

The group, as a form of secular consecrated life, was set up on the feast of Saint Lucy in 1956 as a result of the desire and insight of Father Pietro Nkundwa, a priest of the diocese of Gitega.

This “Father Founder” supervised and accompanied the group until he drew his last breath at the end of Mass in May 2006.

But how did this priest know about Saint Angela? It might be that he managed to obtain information from an Italian missionary priest from Brescia. It all remains to be clarified.

Father Modesto, a Xavierian missionary priest from Trent, encountered the group in Burundi. He was already familiar with the secular Ursulines of the Company of the Daughters of Saint Angela in Trent. Thanks to him, some of the sisters from Trent, together with Jeanne Lagrave of France, visited the group in Burundi in 2006. The objective of this visit was to inform them that consecrated seculars founded by Saint Angela Merici existed on several continents, now united in a secular institute of pontifical right as the Company of Saint Ursula.

Monsignor Simon Ntanuwana, Bishop of Gitega, spoke in Rome at the 2007 international meeting marking the bicentenary of the canonisation of Saint Angela Merici. He requested the Federation to look into the possibility of incorporating these Burundian consecrated women into the secular institute.

The hope was that their dignity as persons consecrated to God might come to be recognized, both that all the good done by these simple women, called “Bene Angela” (Daughters of Angela) might be recognized and that a canonical configuration might be identified in which they might be recognized within the Church.

Thus began the travels launching the “journey” of incorporation into the Institute, so that, as the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life suggested to the President, each person enters individually... and group entrances do not take place.

So the candidates, who already made a “private” consecration, request admission to the Institute, and the formation journey begins for each one according to the stages envisioned by the Constitutions.

Paulina Minyurano and Pascaline Nsimirimana, two Burundians of the first group admitted to the period of trial, who had made their first temporary consecration in March 2012, were welcomed for two years in Trent by the Company of Trent in order to learn Italian and experience formation for the life of the Company. Now, they can serve the newborn Company in Burundi as interpreters, maintain the connection with the President and the Council, and translate the documents they receive.

Now there are 58 who have made their temporary consecration, and 68 are in the period of initial trial. Members of the group are quite young: 42 of the consecrated members are not yet 50. They are often involved in the pastoral work of the parish, in service to the base communities which are the cells of Christian life of many parishes of the dioceses of Gitega and Bujumbura. There they share the Word of God in order to live as one community, as Church. They dedicate themselves especially to charity toward the most needy, like orphans and widows.

The Group is recognized and appreciated by the Archbishop of Gitega. The Constitutions and the writings of Saint Angela have been translated in Kirundi. Some sisters know French and receive the Federation’s bulletin in this language.

The Group depends juridically upon the Council of the Federation. The President and Vice-president are directly involved with them.

The country is now rather insecure politically and administratively.



NIGERIA

The Group of Nigeria, a Group of the Company of Padua, was begun in 2010 after the return of Angela Anonaba Ukachi to her motherland. Angela had been received and formed by the Company of Padua for six years. Owing to serious family problems, Angela had to return

to Nigeria, but she continued to be followed by telephone and Internet until she made her consecration for life.

As soon as she went back to Nigeria in 2010, Angela began to introduce the Institute to the bishops and the women she thought would be interested. Very soon, some of them proved to be interested and, after a short time, this first group of aspirants asked the Directress and the Council of the Company of Padua for a distinctive sign they could wear. The negative answer was accompanied by letters from the President and from the Company of Padua, translated into English, to explain the reason behind the refusal and the importance of our life style without any explicit external signs. (In Africa, it is very difficult to understand and to live a consecrated secular life.) Many drifted away. Some, however, persevered, and others have joined them.

At the very beginning, the Group was guided by Angela's cousin, Father Hyginus Egern Aghaulor, a diocesan priest. Father Hyginus, having lived for some time in Italy, knew and esteemed the Padua Company; he can speak Italian.

Angela, who is the contact person for the Group, made her house available, and the group held their monthly meetings there for two years. The members also spend a few days together at Christmas and Easter.

In 2013, Angela, Agnes, and Father Hyginus spent 25 days in Padua for a period of formation about Saint Angela and her charism, starting with the Rule and the Constitutions. They met the President Maria Razza and the Assistant of the Federation Council, Monsignor Tessarollo. They also made a pilgrimage to Desenzano, Brescia, and Rome. Angela took part in some of the Federation's international meetings. She is in contact with members of Congo, Cameroun, and Eritrea and also with a Nigerian member of the Company of Toronto.

Together with Angela, who has made her consecration for life, there are three companions in the period of formation, one who has just asked to be consecrated, and some aspirants.

They are between 40 and 60 years of age, and nearly all of them had an earlier experience of religious life. Some are merchants, nurses and teachers. With the help of other lay people, one of them founded an association to help poor people. They are respected and held in high esteem in the places where they live.

It is very important to highlight that, for reasons of security, it is not possible to visit them in Nigeria. This is the main stumbling block for the Company of Padua, since it hinders monitoring and following the group.

Language is another difficulty since it is not easy to communicate with everyone. As Angela and Father Hyginus speak Italian, they can translate the documents into English, a language common to all, and pass them on. The sisters have the writings of Saint Angela, the Constitutions, the life of Saint Angela, and the bulletin "In the same Charism" in English. They also use the Federation's website.

Notwithstanding the fact that in Nigeria there is an increasing element of fear and instability, the courageous sisters of this Group are determined to live as Christians and consecrated women. This is a great witness for the whole Company of Padua.

THE COMPANY IN ASIA

Mary-Cabrini Durkin

Allow me to express my gratitude to the kind people who have contributed information and news for this summary of their histories.

The histories of the Companies and Groups in Asia and in the Americas are stories of a vocation experienced in interpersonal relationships, and amid many challenges....



INDONESIA

Seeing many women interested in living Merician spirituality without becoming religious, Sr. Jeannette Krista, OSU, then Provincial of the

Roman Union's Province of Indonesia, asked Sr. Emmanuel Gunanto, then studying in Rome, to gather information about the secular Ursulines. In late 1988, Elisa Tarolli was staying at the Roman Union's Generalate in Rome, writing the book *Angela Merici: Contribution towards a Biography*, in collaboration with Sr. Luciana Mariani, OSU, and Sr. Marie Seynaeve, OSU.

For two months Elisa, with great passion, instructed Sr. Emmanuel on the life of secular Ursulines in the Federation.

In June 1989, a meeting on Merician spirituality was held in Bandung for young women. They felt the need to organize themselves. Three possibilities arose.

1. Ursuline Associates – collaborators of Ursuline Sisters
2. The Daughters of St. Angela (Putri Santa Angela – PSA), a self-made secular group

3. The Company of St. Ursula, a group under the Company of St. Ursula of Brescia.

On June 29 the Group of Indonesia was born, consisting of six young women from five dioceses: Paulina Rosana Wiriaraharja of Bandung, Margaretha Siti Asiyah of Madiun, Chatrine Maria Supriyani of Malang, Maria Dolorosa da Silva of Kupang, and Stephanie Enny Johan and Yustina Mahyanti Rahmat of Jakarta. From the beginning the Group was interdiocesan. It is recognized by the Church at the national level, now as an interdiocesan Company.

On July 22, 1989, these six members were officially accepted by the Company of Brescia, of which Maria Marchetti was the directress. Sr. Emmanuel was appointed their formation guide. Elisa, who was then the President of the Federation, reported the existence of this new Group to the Holy See. Elisa arrived in 1990 to lead a week of formation. She attended the Group's annual meetings until 2003. During those meetings Elisa was the sole resource person. She spoke in French, translated by Sr. Emmanuel into Indonesian. Elisa gave the Group a solid formation and spiritual nourishment and is remembered with gratitude for her guidance and love.

This method bore its first fruit in 1991, with the consecration of Maria Dolorosa and Margaretha, who are still esteemed as the original members. Margaretha has devoted herself to pastoral work in the parish, especially among the poor. Maria Dolorosa was a lecturer at the Catholic University in Kupang, who contributed much to the faith-life of her students before her retirement.



Bishop Alexander Djajasiswaja of Bandung was the ecclesiastical assistant from 1991 until his death in 2006.

Some members came and went. The challenges of consecrated life in the world have proved difficult, especially in a country where it is not common for women to remain single in the world.

Yet the Group continued to grow. By 2002 twelve members had made their consecration and Elisa considered it close to readiness for autonomy. Unfortunately, the social and political situation made it unadvisable for her to visit the country in 2004. Declining health prohibited further trips, yet her dream for Indonesia was to be realized before her death in 2005.

In 2004 three members were elected as leaders in different zones: Maria Dolorosa da Silva in Kupang on Timor; Catharina Maria Supriyani in Malang on East Java; Meity Wijaya in Jakarta. The Federation's president, Caterina Dalmasso, and councilor Doris Cordina were present for the new Company's first Assembly, held in Bandung in 2005. Margaretha Meity Wijaya was elected the first Directress and Maria Dolorosa da Silva the Vice-directress. Lena Mulyana was elected secretary and Chatrine Maria Supriyani a councilor.

The current officers, elected in 2011 in the second Assembly, held in Bali, are Margaretha Meity Wijaya, Directress; Maria Raring, Vice-directress; Yohana Eny Prihatiningsih, secretary; and Cresentiana Ona, councilor. The present ecclesiastical assistant is Bishop Anton Subianto, OSC, of Bandung. The Company's center is in Bandung. Its archives are housed partially there and partially in the home of the Directress in Jakarta.

Annual meetings offer opportunities for the widely scattered members to spend several days together in prayer, reflection, and sisterhood. The Ursuline sisters often host these gatherings, and Sister Emmanuel provides spiritual leadership.

Today the Company of Indonesia includes fourteen members who have made their consecration for life, one in temporary consecration, and two in the period of initial trial. Members are variously employed in settings such as school, parish, orphanage, convent, factory, and shop. Three have retired. Most are active in their parishes. There are three associated faithful.

The Company's spirituality is deeply inspired by St. Angela's relationship with Jesus; the members treasure her name for him: "Amatore," Lover, and make it their own.

This June the Company celebrated its silver anniversary, twenty-five years after Elisa Tarolli's first visit.

SINGAPORE

The Group of Singapore depends upon the Company of France. It began in 2003, thanks to H  l  ne de Beauregard, of the Company of France, who was in Thailand teaching French in the university.

H  l  ne met Josephine Liow of Singapore during a retreat led by Fr. Iker Villanueva, SJ, in a Jesuit center in Thailand in 2002.

Josephine was interested in the Company and requested to be admitted. Soon she came to know Ebba Fernandez, also of Singapore, who was also admitted into the new Group.

This first nucleus began their formation guided by H  l  ne, delegate of the Company of France. The members now belong to the Company of France.

H  l  ne visits them annually in Singapore. She also maintains contact by phone and internet and sends them readings to nourish their spiritual development. They draw upon the writings of St. Angela, her biography, and other publications. Josephine and Ebba made their first consecration in 2005 and their consecration for life in 2010.

Monica Vaughan of **Australia** joined the Group in 2008. She

made her first consecration in January 2010 and her consecration for life in 2014.

Members meet yearly with the Company of Indonesia during its annual conference. They follow the activities of the Federation



through the publication *United in the same charism...with responsibility*. Before their final consecration, Josephine and Ebba attended the international congress.

Josephine maintained a blogsite on behalf of the Group, but it is no longer active.

The members in Singapore have been sharing their vocation stories in church groups and parishes. They consider it important to make themselves known, as there are many single women who are unaware of the lay consecrated life. One fruit of this effort was the admission of Victoria Regis to the period of initial trial in 2015.

Monica maintains a website. She earned a Master of Theology degree at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, hoping to share awareness of the Company there and at retreat centres.

The members in Singapore meet monthly, joined by Monica once or twice per year. They want to be joyful witnesses in their homes, work places, and the groups that they belong too. They seek to deepen their relationship with Jesus and with one another. Singapore offers many rich opportunities and resources for spiritual development and growth.

Josephine left the Company in 2015. Thus there are three members between the ages of 52 and 62. Ebba, a speech therapist, is an active member of the Neo Catechumenal Way. She is the main caregiver for her elderly parents. Victoria, a contract cleaner, is active her parish. She lives alone. Monica lives alone but provides daily support to her elderly parents in a nursing home. She works as a business manager in an Ursuline school and a local parish.

These members found their way to the Company after trying other paths: religious life, marriage, and a semi-contemplative group. All had been inspired by St. Angela's creative initiative of consecrated lay life. Happy to be sisters and to witness to their way of life, they pray that more women will join them.

The Archdiocese of Sydney has recently listed the Company on its website. The Archdiocese of Singapore has a moratorium on public recognitions.

THE PHILIPPINES

Through its Great Lakes Group, the Company of Canada brought about a new planting in the Philippines. Now that the Company of Toronto is autonomous, the Group of the Philippines is dependent on it.

A Filipina widow, Elsie Tajon, made an extended visit to her adult daughter, a Canadian citizen, in Toronto in 2008. There she met Eugenia Viernes and was drawn to the Company of St. Ursula. She entered the Company of Canada that year.

Elsie had been widowed with three young children, whom she struggled to support

as a junior statistician with the Filipino government and various side jobs. All are now grown and married. In the Company she sees an opportunity to invite women to serve God and be witnesses to God's kindness and goodness to all. Elsie returned to the Philippines in 2008 with the approval of



the leaders in Canada to begin the Company in Davao.

The new Group had a strong beginning. Eight widows and four mature single women began the period of initial journey in 2009. Seven made their first consecrations in 2012 (one having died). Three more entered in 2010. Father Randy Diamante, SVD, has been their spiritual director since then.

The members occasionally invite diocesan priests to speak to them about St. Angela and consecrated life or to offer a time of retreat. They have paid one educational visit to the Ursuline sisters of the

Roman Union in Mati, Davao Oriental. Their involvement in the Federation is meager. For the first time, Elsie and Lourdes attended the annual meeting of the Company of Indonesia in June 2015.

Eugenia, the Directress in Toronto, visited the Group in 2012 and plans to be present in Davao again for Elsie's final consecration in 2015.

Besides parish activities, many members are volunteers in the Christian Life Program for women of the Couples for Christ, in a medical mission for the poor, and on behalf of senior citizens. They see Saint Angela as a model of active faith and of responsibility for others, especially with the poor.



Some members suffered directly from calamitous flooding in Davao in June 2012. This disaster destroyed the Group's materials and the archives. They are attempting to resume this project and to reassemble resources of inspiration and information for other women interested in this vocation.

The fourteen members range in age from the fifties to the eighties. As they prepare for lifelong consecration, these women express the hearty "desire to be consecrated to the Company of St. Ursula, to live according to her ideals of consecrated life in this world."

BANGLADESH

The Group in Bangladesh began as the work of Father Arturo Speziale, PIME, a missionary from Como. From 1993 to 1995, he began to present this form of life to young women, at the same time translating into Bengali the life of St. Angela, her writings, and some prayers.

In September 2000 the Group began. The Constitutions were also translated into Bengali.

In August 2003 the Federation's President Caterina Dalmasso and the Vice-president, Luciella Campi, whom the Council had charged with following the Group, traveled to Bangladesh for the first time. The same year they met Father Francesco Rapachioli, PIME, originally from Piacenza, who would later become superior of his own institute in Bangladesh and would be designated to follow the Group.

In 2005 Luciella and Kate traveled to Bangladesh for the first consecrations.



The President Maria Razza and Luciella would return in January 2010.

Many of the first members have departed through the years. Now only Jhunu, who has made her consecration for life, remains.

Designated by the Council of the Federation, Luciella Campi of the Company of Crema and Father Franco Cagnasso, PIME, the present superior of his institute in Bangladesh, provide continuing formation.

THAILAND

In May 2015 the Council of the Federation admitted two women in Thailand who knew about Saint Angela and the Company through association with Ursuline religious of the Roman Union. Both are in their 60s. One is a widow. Hélène de Beauregard of France is guiding their formation, appointed by the Council of the Federation.

All is in a phase of evolution, and we pray that the Lord Jesus and Saint Angela remain close to this fragile little “sprout,” so that God’s will may be fulfilled.

The Company in the Americas

Mary Cabrini Durkin



North America

CANADA - QUEBEC

The Companies of North America owe their founding impulse to the call of the Second Vatican Council, which asked all institutes of consecrated life to “return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes...” (*Perfectae Caritatis* 2).

When those words of the Council were promulgated, Jacqueline Morin was an Ursuline nun of Rimouski in Canada. Like many Ursuline religious, she thirsted to understand St. Angela’s original foundation and to drink from the fountain of the foundress’s authentic spirituality. Jacqueline sought to return to the sources and to explore the original way of Ursuline life within the Company. On the basis of this inspiration, she began a journey toward the Company of St. Ursula, making a canonical transfer to the Company of Brescia in 1966. She spent a year of probation in Italy, learning the life of a secular Ursuline while visiting and forming life-long friendships with many Companies. In 1967 Bishop Luigi Morstabilini of Brescia and the Company there gave her the approval to begin a new Company in Canada, confirmed by pontifical authority the same year. Jacqueline moved to Quebec City. Father Jacques Choquette, CSC, whom she had met in Rome, became the ecclesiastical assistant.

This new Company also returned to the institute’s origins in a second way. Her acquaintance with many Companies had shown Jacqueline the historical developments that had grown up over time.

She decided that the Company of Canada would not replicate these historical accretions. Rather, it would be based more simply on St. Angela's words and on the discoveries of post-Conciliar scholarship about the original Company.

Born in Rimouski in 1925, Jacqueline Morin served as an educator in the Ursulines of Rimouski, the religious community that she entered in 1947. After her transfer to the Company, she continued to teach until her retirement. To her role of leadership she brought energy, a big heart, passion, intelligence, insight, skill in writing, and fluency in three languages (French, English, Italian).

By 1969 five more members had entered: a single woman, another Ursuline of Rimouski, and three Auxiliaries of the Clergy of Montreal, a group of dedicated lay women. In the early 1970s, both Gaetana Campanello and Angela Alaimo of the Company of Caltanissetta, having emigrated from Sicily, joined the Company. So did Teresa Calvi, one of the original members of the Company of Cornato, Bari. The interdiocesan Company of St. Ursula of Canada was granted autonomy within the Federation in 1977.

Its official seat is in the Archdiocese of Quebec City. There the Company's archives are kept. The Company was incorporated in civil law in 1989. It participates in the Canadian Conference of Secular Institutes.

Jacqueline served the Federation as a member of its Council from 1976 to 1988. In that capacity she developed formation materials for use by Federation Companies. She also published reflections on contemporary themes from the perspective of St.



Angela's spirituality: *Angèle Merici: Une Sainte d'hier pour aujourd'hui* (also translated into Italian) and *À la suite de Jésus sur les pas d'Angèle*. For many years she wrote an annual circular letter with the intent of fostering unity among the world's many Ursuline entities, both religious and secular.

In 1976, Marcella Hinz contacted the Company. She was an English-speaking Ursuline religious, a member of the Ursulines of Bruno, Saskatchewan, much farther west in Canada. She spent a year (1977-1978) with Jacqueline in Quebec, being formed in secular Ursuline life. She then settled in Toronto, where several women began to come together as the Group of the Great Lakes. Jacqueline's fluency in English equipped her to direct their formation. Marcella was their local leader.

The Company of Canada thus included two language groups, plus the Italians. Furthermore, in addition to the Italian immigrants, two United States citizens also joined: Phyllis Fitzgerald, a widow, and Liliane Dozois, a former Ursuline religious.

Distance and language posed challenges to the Company's unity and sense of shared identity. The leaders developed several ways of addressing these difficulties. An annual meeting gathers all those who are able to attend. Business was conducted and prayer was offered in both French and English with, at times, translation into Italian as well. Both Jacqueline and Father Jacques, the assistant, were fluent in French, Italian, and English. A monthly bulletin is produced by one of the members in French and has been translated into English to guide the members in their monthly day of recollection. This fosters a unified approach to continuing formation. It draws upon the annual theme of the Company's annual gathering, the spirituality of St. Angela, the Constitutions of the Federation, and ecclesial documents. A thrice-yearly publication, *La Glaneuse*, shared articles and commentary contributed by the members in French, English, or Italian. *La Glaneuse* ceased publication last year.

During the annual meetings, the members have rejoiced together in their spousal commitment to Christ and their filial love for St. Angela, whose words and example are valuable for our time. St. Angela

also encourages their shared love of the Word of God in sacred Scripture.

The Federation has been firmly connected with the Company. When Pope John Paul II visited Canada, in 1984, the Company welcomed Monsignor Gianno Cielo, Assistant of the Federation Council, who concelebrated with the Holy Father and priests of the local clergy. Elisa Tarolli, then Councilor of the Federation, accompanied him. In 1987, the president of the Federation, Lina Moser, visited Quebec with a companion, Adelma Pettarin, to celebrate the Company's twentieth anniversary. For the thirtieth anniversary, the president Caterina Dalmasso and a counselor, Mariarosa Bernasconi, participated in the festivities in 1997.

The new millennium opened with an awareness of the need for transition. In 2001, a plan was set out for the retirement of Jacqueline as directress and for the eventual autonomy of the Great Lakes Group. This plan was accomplished by 2014.



In 2004, Jacqueline resigned as Directress. She remained treasurer and secretary until 2013.

Thérèse Bolduc was elected the Company's second directress. A teacher and a former religious, she had been one of the early members, entering in 1973. Elected Vice-directress in 1983, she was well prepared to assume this role. She has participated in several international meetings of the Federation, including leading a group of eight from Canada for the bicentennial of St. Angela's canonization in 2007.

Much beloved by the members, Father Choquette retired in 2006 and died in 2014. During an interval of serving his congregation abroad, he had been replaced by Father Bartolomeo Milone, IMC, from 1976 to 1979. Father Choquette was followed by Father Claude Mayer, OMI (2007-2013) and currently by Father Jean-Claude Hould. From 1974 to

1976 and from 2001 to 2007, Father Réal Forgues, RSV, served as the vice-assistant.

In 2006, Kathleen Hallinan and Mary-Cabrini Durkin became part of the Company of Canada. Therese received them with a mandate to begin a Group in their home country, the United States. Mary-Cabrini now serves on the Federation Council. More will be said later about this Group.

An intercontinental development occurred in 2008, when a Filipina, Elsie Tajon, joined the Great Lakes Group. On her return to her homeland, she invited other women into what has become the Group of the Philippines. More will be said about this Group during the report on the Company in Asia.

This multi-national, multi-lingual, multi-cultural Company has struggled with many challenges; it would be false to pretend otherwise. But this diverse reality also exemplifies the power of “insieme,” of sincere striving for unity in Christ.

On the inspiration of Marcella, an Association of Friends of St. Angela Merici was launched in 1985, in order to share the spirituality of St. Angela more widely. United in prayer with the Company, these men and women gathered annually and received an occasional circular letter from Jacqueline.

Since the Great Lakes group achieved autonomy as the Company of Toronto in 2014, the Company of Canada now consists of eleven members in Canada and in the United States. Most of the members in Canada are retired. They participate in volunteer services, mostly in their parishes (catechesis, liturgy...). The Company of St. Ursula of Canada is approaching its fiftieth anniversary in 2017. It has planted seeds of the Company in several countries. Though small, it has contributed much to the Federation and to the Ursuline world.

TORONTO



As mentioned earlier, the Company of Toronto was planted by the Company of Canada, under the leadership of Jacqueline Morin.

Marcella Hinz was an Ursuline religious of Bruno, Saskatchewan, who experienced a call to the original Ursuline vocation and contacted

the Company of Canada in 1976. She spent a year of exclaustation in Quebec to learn more about the Company (1977-1978).

Marcella was an adventurer. Launching into lay life, she knew that she needed to enhance her income quickly and took a teaching position among the First Nations People in a remote northern location that could be reached only by air.

She settled in Toronto and began to form the Great Lakes Group, dependent upon the Company of Canada. Marcella's canonical transfer to the Company was approved in 1980. Under Jacqueline's guidance, Marcella was the local leader. Her large heart extended a warm and wide welcome to women of many national origins in Toronto, which is known for its diverse population. Most of the new members were immigrants, coming from Poland, China, the Philippines, and Nigeria. Because of their geographic proximity to Toronto, the three Italian members of the Company of Canada participated in this Group. Angela lived in Toronto, Gaetana and Teresa in the State of New York in the United States.

The Group continued to grow. It was blessed by having a Basilian, Father Frederick Black, as the ecclesiastical assistant from 1988 until his death in 2000.

The Group mourned the ill health that would soon force Marcella to return to her birthplace in Saskatchewan in 2002, to the care of her family. The responsibility for formation reverted to Jacqueline, an unsatisfactory situation in light of the distance between Quebec and Toronto.

The Great Lakes Group was approaching a new horizon: autonomy. However, the path of transition was not clear. In view of Marcella's declining health, the Council appointed Eugenia Viernes as local leader in 2001. Jacqueline continued to be responsible for formation. It was necessary to develop leadership and guidance for formation among the English-speakers. In 2007, as the whole Company of Canada met in Quebec to celebrate its fortieth anniversary, Thérèse and Jacqueline met with the Group to propose the assistance of an Ursuline religious living in Toronto. The Group, however, asked to meet among themselves. They developed a different working plan, which was discussed, modified slightly, and agreed upon. Shortly thereafter, several candidates emerged, a good sign. The members of the Group were taking responsibility for their future.

Mention has already been made to the sprouting of a Filipino Group led by Elsie Tajon, who joined the Great Lakes Group in 2008. The Group of the Philippines will be treated in more detail during the report on the Company in Asia.

In 2008 the Council appointed Eugenia Viernes as the delegate of the Directress. Eugenia is a Canadian citizen who immigrated from the Philippines and a retired teacher assistant at Toronto Catholic District School Board. She had joined the Company in Toronto in 1992.

As more women joined, the Great Lakes Group reached the Constitution's benchmark of twelve consecrated members. In 2013, Thérèse and her Council petitioned the Federation's General Council for their autonomy as the Company of Toronto. The petition was approved and forwarded to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. It was pending when Marcella's death in January 2014 evoked deep mourning among those who had counted her as a spiritual mother and local initiator, along with Jacqueline. Marcella's sister Cathy reported that to the end the mention

of “her” Company never failed to bring a smile to Marcella’s lips. Soon after her death the news arrived from Rome: the Company of St. Ursula of Toronto had received final ecclesiastical approval on February 10, 2014.

A quorum of its members arrived in Quebec City for the annual meeting of the Company of Canada. There, on August 16, 2014, the Company of Toronto held its first formal Assembly and elected Eugenia Viernes as the first Directress, Angela Alaimo as Vice-directress, and four Councilors: Sabina Abiaka, Rosa Chung, Gemma Fronteras, and Barbara Kulczycki.

The new Company’s center is in the Archdiocese of Toronto, where it is formally registered. After Father Black’s death, assistants have been Father Peter Kim Loy Chin, CSsR (2003-2004), Father Daniel Chui (2007-2012), and now Father Daniel Callam, CSB (2014). The Group of the Philippines is now dependent on the Company of Toronto.

Most members live close enough to participate in monthly gatherings. The twelve consecrated members are between their 50s and 70s. Four final consecrations are anticipated in August 2015. One woman is in the period of initial trial.

Linguistic differences can be challenging, but the members pray together and conduct business in English, their common second language. They see their families as their first field of mission. Most of them are employed in secular occupations, though some have retired. They are all active in their parishes, some in various liturgical or catechetical ministries, others in pastoral or other supportive services. Devotion to St. Angela as a spiritual mother is deeply shared. The sisters see her as their guide in their evangelical consecration as a self-gift to Jesus Christ, who has first loved them.

TEXAS



Prompted by Father Ade Windisch, SM, in 1968, Ursulines of the Roman Union formed a commission to

explore beginning a Company in the United States. After two meetings of the commission, Sr. Mary Walden, OSU (Central USA Province) was chosen in 1973 to assist a future group. It began the same year with Juline Lamb of Ft. Worth, Texas. By 1977, five other women had joined her (though two soon left). Jacqueline Morin visited and encouraged the Group in 1976.

Despite their unanimous vote in November 1978 to accept an invitation extended by the Company of Canada, they were directed by the Federation Council to connect with it. Sponsorship by the Roman Union ended. Eight women made their first consecration on November 25, 1979. Lina Moser, the President, traveled to Texas in June 1980. During her visit, the group elected Juline as coordinator. Members came and went in the following years.

Juline made her consecration for life in 1983. She served on the board of the United States Conference of Secular Institutes and visited Italy to meet the leaders of the Federation. She was elected to the Council of the Federation. Juline was diagnosed in 1992 with cancer, which was treated but recurred. She died in 1996, during her term as Federation councilor.

Of the Group, only Regina Ramey remains, linked to the Council of the Federation through Doris Cordina.



UNITED STATES

On November 25, 2000, Mary-Cabrini Durkin of Cincinnati, Ohio, and Kathleen Hallinan of San Francisco, California, made an informal but deeply intentional beginning of a Company in Cincinnati. Mary-Cabrini had been an Ursuline religious of Cincinnati. Her

community had decided to foster the Company in the United States, and she received the call from God to actualize that decision. Kathleen had

been an Ursuline of the Roman Union (USA Western Province) until the early 1990s and had left in search of the primitive form of Ursuline life.

They kept a close, sisterly relationship with the Company of Canada, participating in annual meetings and mentored by Jacqueline Morin. However, they decided to “plant” this seed of the Company in US soil before joining Canada or the Federation. In 2005 they visited Italy to offer their seedling there and to drink from the wellspring of St. Angela’s spirit.

Meanwhile, Liliane Dozois of Maine, USA, had joined the Company of Canada, where she made her final consecration in 2009 and was later elected to the Council.

In 2006, on the invitation of the Directress and Jacqueline, Mary-Cabrini and Kathleen visited Quebec to discuss joining the Company of Canada. Thérèse Bolduc gave them a mandate to begin a Group in their country. They began their initial formation. Mary-Cabrini made her first consecration in the Sanctuary of St. Angela, Brescia, on November 25, 2007, into the hands of Thérèse. However, Kathleen had suffered a stroke in the previous month, followed by a sequence of illnesses. She made her first consecration on January 27, 2008, and died on February 19.

Liliane began to participate in the new Group of the USA. She served as the treasurer of the US Conference of Secular Institutes. Two candidates came and went, one before first consecration and the other after two years of temporary consecration. In order to receive a legacy from Kathleen, the Company formed a non-profit corporation in the State of Ohio, registered with the federal government under the aegis of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

At this time, the Group has one member in the period of initial trial and a candidate. Mary-Cabrini, leader of the Group, is a member of the Federation Council.



MEXICO

Silvia Alonso Medina of Matamoros, Mexico, encountered St. Angela through an inter-congregational mission of Ursuline religious in Brownsville, Texas, across the border from Matamoros. Through Sister Norma Raupple, OSU, of Youngstown, Ohio, and Mary-Cabrini Durkin, she was linked to the Federation.

Mirella Turri of the Company of Trent was commissioned to undertake Silvia's formation. Mirella speaks Spanish and has had experience in Latin America as a missionary to Bolivia. For several years, Sister Josefina, OSU, an Ursuline religious of the Roman Union in Mexico, has collaborated with the Company of Trent to support Silvia's formation.

She made her first consecration in 2010 as a member of the Company of Trent and went to Trent to renew it in 2012 (above, Silvia in white). The President of the Federation, Maria Rosa Razza, visited her in 2008 along with Mirella and Maria Rosa Duchi of Trent.



South America

BRAZIL SOUTH

The two Companies existing in Brazil today began with an initiative of Marie Nicole Jeandot soon after the Second Vatican Council.

With the Ursulines of the Roman Union, she arrived from France in 1960 to teach French in Rio de Janeiro. In 1966 she and Mother Xavier Echaniz, OSU, traveled to Rome and, on January 27, to Brescia. There they met Miss Marchetti, Elisa Tarolli, and the bishop who was the assistant to the Company. They gave Nicole a relic of Saint Angela, which now rests in the altar stone of the Chapel of Saint Angela in Suzano, São Paulo.

After her return to Brazil, Cardinal Agnelo Rossi encouraged Nicole to establish a Company in the Archdiocese of São Paulo, giving his formal approval on December 23, 1968. In three nearby dioceses, she discovered three Daughters of Saint Angela: Carmela Rapé of Palermo, Francesca Caruso of Catania, and Emma Maschi of Verona.

The Brazilian Group's first formal meeting took place on April 24, 1969. Father Alcindo Castilho attended as the first ecclesiastical assistant, a role he continued to fill for several years.

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Nicole made her consecration for life in Siena in summer of 1969, charged by Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti to begin a Company of the Institute in Brazil. She then represented her country at the Federation's international meeting.

Two other women joined. Nivalda de Lima, a young woman of Guarulhos, made her first consecration in 1975. Margarida Enedina de Souza of Ilheus, Bahia, began her formation in 1976 and



made her consecration for life in 1981. Six more women sought to join, including three in the Diocese of St. André, one in Guarulhos, and Maria Jose Almeida Souza (Zelita) in Jéquié, Bahia. Four more came from Minas Gerais.

The Group was faithful to its annual retreat together, despite distances and expenses. Nicole developed a monthly journal, *O Liame*, to support their formation and connection.

Returning to Suzano from a trip in 1977, Nicole encountered people struggling with the devastation of a flood. Their plight inspired her to initiate a social service which she named Istituzione Sociale di Amparo ao Menor. Called ISAM, its initial letters also suggest the Istituto Sant'Angela Merici, though it is not actually a work of the Company.

A plot of land was acquired for a church and for a building to accommodate ISAM and to serve as a meeting place and as a center for the Daughters. Bishop Emilio Pignoli, a friend of the Company, blessed its opening in 1979. By 1981 fifty children between six months and four years were receiving care and early-childhood education and a second building was needed.

By 1985 it had grown to four buildings, offering integral formation for life. In 2014 more than a thousand youngsters were being instructed: eleven play schools; adolescents and youth involved in sports, art, music, computer training, art with recycled materials, and Brazilian art forms. The management is now in the hands of Caritas and a religious congregation. Nicole, in her nineties, lives in a small apartment within the Center that she created, praying in the little chapel that preserves the relic of Saint Angela from so long ago in 1966.

The Federation and several companies in Italy have offered presence and support to their sisters in Brazil: Rita Blandi of Trent and Gemma Croce in 1980; Lidia of Trent in 1981. Lina Moser, President, and the Council's Ecclesiastical Assistant Don Adriano Tessarollo visited the Group in São Paulo in 1986. That visit catalyzed the Group's request to be established as an interdiocesan Company, a development which occurred in October 1986. The new Company's first Assembly elected Nicole Jeandot as its first directress in January 1987. At the Assembly of 1999, the fourteen members present in Ilheus elected Maria José Directress, Margarida Vice-directress, and Nicole and Gillette councilors.

Vocations multiplied in Ilheus, Jéquié, and Salvador. A group of ten women of Novo Hamburgo sought entrance in 2001.

In 2002 Father Roberto de Oliveira began to gather single women and widows in Novo Hamburgo, Rio Grande do Sul. Educated by Ursuline religious, he was familiar with Saint Angela and the Company, and invited Nicole to direct a retreat for these women in January 2003. In that period, Nicole traveled to Bahia every three months to guide their formation, trips of twenty-six hours each way by bus. She would conduct a session of a day and a half and then return. Several began formation in the Company. Four women made their first consecration in 2004.

At its Assembly of 2005, Julia Maria da Soledade (who had made her first consecration in 1998) was elected Directress to succeed Nicole and served until 2011, when she was too ill to be reelected. Ursula Ines Schmitz was elected in 2011. (Julia died in 2013.)

When five members made their consecration for life in 2009, the Company of the South welcomed Maria Rosa Razza, President of the Federation; Caterina Dalmasso; and Angelica Chiavacci.

In 2015, the Company of the South includes nine members consecrated for life, two in temporary consecration, and two in initial formation. The Company's archives are divided between Suzano and São Paulo.

Links with the Federation include the Institute's publications, which are translated by Nicole and published in *O Liame*. Some Brazilian members have studied the Italian language to speak and to translate into Portuguese for their sisters. Nicole participated in the international meetings for many years and served as a member of the Council of the Federation. Several others have also attended. Presentations at these meetings, translated into Portuguese, form part of the members' continuing formation, assisting them to live their consecration inserted into society with a global vision.

When the International Conference of Secular Institutes met in São Paulo in 1996, the Federation's representatives, Caterina Dalmasso, Cristina Barbieri, Jacqueline Morin, and Maria Dravecka, also visited their Brazilian sisters. This year (2015), President Maria Rosa Razza and Councilor Maria Rocca visited in July. This year (2015), President Maria Rosa Razza and Councilor Maria Rocca visited in July.

BRAZIL NORTHEAST



Vocations multiplied in Ilheus, Jéquié, and Salvador.

With the growth, problems of distance made it necessary to consider a division into two Companies. By November 2004 there were enough members in and around San Salvador to form a second Company, and the petition was submitted. The Holy See confirmed the autonomous Company of Brazil Northeast in December 2005. In its first Assembly Maria José and Margarida were reelected, now as leaders of the new Company of the Northeast.

Maria José's illness precipitated another extraordinary Assembly in 2009, which elected Herbene Cerqueira Nery as Directress and Edesia Vilas Boas Tourinho as Vice-directress, serving till today. Maria Rosa Razza, President; Caterina Dalmasso; and Angelica Chiavacci were present at this election.

The Company of the Northeast today includes twenty-one members consecrated for life, twelve in temporary consecration, and several in initial formation. The two localized groups – in Salvador and in Jéquié – gather annually to make a retreat together. The Company recently rejoiced in the episcopal consecration of its Ecclesiastical Assistant, Antônio Mourinho Neto, who is also the son of Edesia.

The Two Companies in Brazil

Members of both Companies are involved in social and pastoral services: with children, with health needs of the poorest and with the Church (Catechesis, Eucharistic ministries...).

In keeping with their secular vocation, each serves in her local environment. They address the great challenge of political participation for transformation of the social milieu where they are called to offer daily witness and experience.

They participate actively in the Conference of Brazilian Secular Institutes and its regional division. As a co-organizer of the Latin American Conference of Secular Institutes, Nicole has participated in Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru.

The President and Federation Councilor Maria Rocca visited both Companies this July.

The figure and thought of Saint Angela inspire her daughters of both Brazilian Companies, offering a new sense of life. At every meeting and home visit, the Mother Foundress is invoked as they seek her assistance, entrust to her their concerns, welcome one another in her spirit, and accompany her on life's pilgrimage. Her relic in the chapel at Suzano and her portrait in the community at Novo Hamburgo are inviting others to follow her example and to pray for her guidance in carving out new paths in daily life.

Members pray together for the Company and experience their unity as sisters, especially with those who suffer. The journal *In the same charism...with responsibility* brings the global Merician family into the Brazilian reality.

Their prayer is **“Let Jesus Christ be our only Treasure.”**



GROUPS AND COMPANIES IN EUROPE

Mária Dravecká

The spread of Companies of Saint Ursula in Europe can be divided into three phases: before 1900, in the first half of the 20th century and those founded after the approval of the Federation (after 1958).

European Companies started differently but we can find two major ways leading to their foundation: through acquaintance and contact with sisters of Italian Companies and through collaboration with Ursuline nuns.

In this report I will present the non-Italian Companies in Europe both chronologically and in respect to their reciprocal relations.

SWITZERLAND

The beginning resembles that of the Italian Companies. Daughters of Saint Angela were already present in the Canton of Mendrisiotto in 1600. The Company of Ticino, Switzerland, was part of the Federation, but since February 2003, on account of diminishing numbers, it has been part of the interdiocesan Company of Como.

A small group begun around 1950 in Grigioni had already been part of the Company of Como. At present two sisters from Ticino and two from Grigioni belong to the inter-diocesan Company of Como.

COMPANY OF MALTA

A few years after his ordination as a Maltese priest, Mons Isidore Formosa, while on a visit to Brescia, met the sisters Elisabetta and Maddalena Girelli.



He was immediately impressed by the Merician style of consecration, and when he went back to Malta he corresponded with the Girelli sisters. He was the spiritual director of the Association 'Figlie di Maria' (Daughters of Mary), and he suggested this way of life to two ladies from this group.

The Company of Saint Ursula of Malta was established on May 30, 1884, and approved by the bishop. This was the first foundation of consecrated secular life on the island.

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foundation of consecrated secular life on the island. At its inception, there were four members, but later the number increased to twenty-six.



The Company collaborated with the Italian Companies. One member, Doris Cordina, who speaks Italian, English and French well, always took part in international meetings, desiring to mature in consecrated secular life.

For this purpose, Malta has been has been part of the Federation since the very beginning.

Doris was a member of the Council of the Federation and was instrumental in communicating with English-speaking sisters. She was

of invaluable help to me as a translator in my first years of attending meetings.

The Company of Malta, made up of five members with some associates, is active in the local Church, collaborates with other secular institutes and promotes initiatives to raise awareness of secular consecrated life according to the Merician charism.

COMPANY OF FRANCE



Although contacts with the neighbouring Italian Companies had been established since the end of the 16th century, the French Company that exists today was not founded until 1920.

Several early Companies in France, on account of political pressures, were transformed into religious institutes, opening schools for girls. These Ursuline religious spread throughout France.

This fact was important for the French Company, because many of its members became acquainted with Saint Angela thanks to Ursuline nuns of the Roman Union.

Countess Marie-Annunciata de Maistre, residing near Turin, was the most significant person for the birth of the Company right from the start. She got to know about the Company of Saint Ursula thanks to Josephine, her lady in waiting and companion, who was a member of the Company of Turin. Marie de Maistre made her consecration at Brescia in 1907 and was entrusted by Maddelena Girelli with the mission of beginning the Company in France.

For family reasons, Marie went to live in Lyons. The first professions of the newly formed French Company were made in Turin, but considering the growing number of members who joined the

Company, others were made in Lyons. A small group in Lyons was formed under the name of the Pious Union “Company of Saint Ursula,” which obtained canonical approval on April 17, 1929.

On March 3, 1968, Emilienne Berger, the superior of the diocesan Company of Lyons since 1959, requested that the diocesan group of Lyons might become part of the Secular Institute of Saint Angela Merici – Federation. As a result, the Sacred Congregation established the Company of Lyons as an autonomous, diocesan company in the Federation on December 20, 1968.

Denise Bouquier, who had been an Ursuline nun and since 1965 had belonged to the Company of Brescia, was soon elected Directress. Before her election, in December 1967 she had been named national delegate for France by the Federation’s President Annamaria Toniolatti.

Beginning in 1971, candidates from many different towns asked to be admitted. Thus the Company is inter-diocesan, present in different French regions as far as Thailand, where one of the sisters taught French at the University of Chingmai.

This Company has so many important activities that it is impossible to mention each and every one. I can only say that the French Company has always collaborated with the Council of the Federation. Jeanne Lagrave and Michelle Langlois have been successive Council members of the Federation. Geneviève Chambris, presently a councillor, is the directress of the French Company.

In July 2005 the French Company hosted the international meeting of the Federation at Lyons; it also arranged visits and important pilgrimages on that occasion.

The French Company has also rendered great service for Africa and Asia; we will hear about this in more detail in other presentations.

The enthusiasm for the charism of Saint Angela and for



selfless service to the global Company does the French group much credit considering that there are only sixteen members. Their age varies from three under 60 years of age, still employed, to the oldest, who is 100 years old! They are all still very active in different modes. Their apostolate is first of all the witness of their life: patient listening and attentiveness to others. Also deserving mention are their commitment to the poor, visiting the sick, service in parishes; work with families, in hospitals, classes, unions and elsewhere.



COMPANY OF GERMANY

Trent is the “mother Company” of the Company of Germany. Before World War II, Amabile Nicoletti, an Italian immigrant and daughter of Saint Angela from the Company of Trent, wanted to spread the spirituality of Saint Angela in Germany.

Dr. Plazidus Glogger, OSB, the pastor of the immigrants from Trent, was helpful in the establishment of the Company in

Augsburg as a Pious Union on November 2, 1936.

Up to 1940, there were nineteen sisters. It was not easy to live in the German society; at times the sisters even suffered persecution. Regardless, by the way they lived they tried to give good example to others at their workplaces.

On May 20, 1964, the Company of Augsburg was incorporated to the Federation.

By 1966 ten new members had joined the Company, and in 1968 they were joined by a group of seven in northern Germany; in this way the Company became inter-diocesan. Three new sisters had joined by 1986.

Today the situation is reversed.

All the sisters in Augsburg except one have died. As Trent is nearer than northern Germany, she asked and obtained permission to be transferred to the Company of Trent.

Today there are only three sisters in Germany, all in Flensburg.

The German Company has given dynamic witness to the vitality of Saint Angela's charism during persecutions.

An ecumenical experience also deserves mention: Margarete, a woman in Flensburg who was an associate of the Company for many years, belonged to an evangelical church. Through their friendship and spiritual closeness, she and Angela Mann, a daughter of Saint Angela, together have given powerful witness of openness and hospitality to the community of Catholics and evangelicals. After becoming a Catholic, Margarete began the process culminating in her consecration for life in the Company.

Teresa Hofle of Augsburg, who was a member of the Council of the Federation, rendered the services of contact and formation with a consecrated secular Ursuline in Austria. A leaflet with the addresses of German-speaking secular institutes, found in a church in Innsbruck, helped Sylvia learn about the Augsburg Company.

She made a connection with Augsburg, with Teresa Hoffler, and with the Company of Trent. Since she is alone in Austria, she made her temporary consecration for life in 2000 in Trent; the President of the Federation was present for the ceremony.

There is one secular Ursuline in **Slovenia**; the federated Company of Brescia has been following her.



COMPANY OF POLAND

In 1953 the Ursuline nuns of the Roman Union began to meet with a group of six young catechists to

promote
knowledge of
sacred Scripture
and the Writings of
Saint Angela
Merici.

At that time
it was very
difficult to be in
touch with other
countries. But in
1969, with the help
of the Roman



Union nuns of both Poland and Slovakia, this little group received information about the Company of Saint Ursula, Secular Institute of Saint Angela Merici.

On January 1, 1972, nine women made their first temporary consecrations and, being Polish, were followed by the Council of the Federation. At the same time they also made personal contacts with Italy.

The Company of Saint Ursula in Poland was recognized by the Holy See on January 2, 1985. The first Directress was Maria Drzezla. Subsequently, Polish sisters continued their trips to Italy and their collaboration with the nuns. The Company gratefully remembers the visits to Poland by the Presidents of the Federation: Lina Moser, Kate Dalmasso and Mariarosa Razza.

The number of members slowly increased to twenty, and members joined from other dioceses. Besides their respective jobs, most members were also catechists. They helped in the parishes and involved themselves in social issues like unions. During the Communist era, they gave strong witness.

At present there are fourteen members, most being retired. Those who live in retirement homes are a great example because they live their old age with a Christian spirit. The others serve in parishes or care for their relatives. There are considerations about setting up groups

to help other single or abandoned women, thereby giving them the opportunity to live in Christian confidence.

The greatest problem is the lack of vocations, particularly since Poles are not familiar with the charism of Saint Angela, although the sisters participate in as many activities as they can.

Of great help are the contacts with Italy, international meetings and contacts with the Company of Slovakia. Slovakia is very close to Poland, not only geographically and linguistically, but also because it too is a post-Communist country.

Since many people know German in Rybnik, where the Company has its centre, contacts have also been made with Germany.

COMPANY OF SLOVAKIA

The origin and history of the Company of Slovakia are similar to Poland's.



After the “Prague Spring” of 1968 it became easier to form small religious communities for women. The Ursuline nuns of the Roman Union were in the cities of Trnava and Kosice, and their national superior was free to travel to Rome.

The nuns were able to organize discrete meetings with young women and taught them to familiarise themselves with and love Saint Angela and her charism.

Sister Desponsata had met Elisa Tarolli (Vice-president of the Federation) in Rome and learned of the existence of secular Ursulines in Poland. Therefore, in 1979 we received the Constitutions in Polish.

Lina Moser, the President of the Federation at that time, authorised Sister Desponsata to form two small groups in Slovakia.

The first consecration for life by four members occurred in Trnave in 1987. The following year, on my trip to Italy, I visited Brescia and met Elisa Tarolli.

After November 1987 the situation in Czechoslovakia (of which Slovakia formed part) changed drastically. In May 1990, Elisa Tarolli came to visit for our annual meeting.

On August 30, 1990, we received approval from the Holy See as the Company of Saint Ursula of Czechoslovakia. In 2015 we are celebrating our 25th anniversary as a Company and part of the Federation. As a result of the political division of our country, we are now called “Company of Slovakia.”

As part of the 25th anniversary celebrations, we are happy that a group of nine – though not all the members – could make a pilgrimage as the Company of Slovakia and follow Saint Angela’s footsteps in Brescia. We are very grateful to God and to all the sisters!



Contacts with the Federation have been very important for the development of our Company. These have included Elisa Tarolli’s three visits, the visit of

Kate Dalmasso and Maria Rosa Razza, international meetings, the pilgrimage to the Holy Land and the CMIS meeting in Sao Paolo, Brazil (1996).

I have learned a great deal from my experience as a councillor of the Federation and from meeting the Polish Sisters. Without the support of the Federation and especially of the Company of Trent during the years of difficulty that our country went through, it would not have been possible to achieve most of the things we did. For this we are grateful!

Our inter-diocesan Company has its centre in Kosice. We are 22 sisters in Slovakia but also have three consecrated sisters and two in the period of initial trial in England.

ENGLAND



The English group of secular Ursulines is the most recent to be formed in Europe.

In 2007 while Sister Zela of the Roman Union was giving talks in her parish in Lancaster about

the spirituality of Saint Angela Merici, she met women who were interested in secular consecration.

Sister Zela posed to the President of the Federation the question of undertaking the formation of these women. The Council sought how to address this.

Because someone in the Company of Slovakia spoke English, the Directress and her Council gave their consent and the sisters from Lancaster now belong to our Company.

Sister Zela provides spiritual accompaniment in their formation, and we keep in contact with them by visits, telephone and email.

Two members, both named Mary, made their consecration for life on November 25, 2014, during a beautiful celebration. Five years earlier to the day, the group in England had been born. Let us pray for them!

I am sorry that I could not give you more information about the way of life the sisters lead and what their activities are, especially during this year dedicated to consecrated life

However, we all want to live the charism of Saint Angela with joy, patience and friendship. We want to make the beauty of the Gospel, spiritual maternity and the beautiful Merician charism of our mother Saint Angela known to others. We wish to work closely with the local Church in all situations. We want to accord God his proper place in our surroundings, and we want to invite Jesus into our life.

Finally a word of thanks for their important contributions to the secular Ursuline experience in Europe, in sisterly closeness: to Brescia, Trent, Como... Maddalena Girelli, Lina Moser, Elisa Tarolli and many others, and so many Ursuline nuns.

We are all proof that secular life consecrated to God according to the Merician charism is something very beautiful. Even in times of difficulty it is a prolific and creative life. I am sure that it will be very significant and important for the world and for the Church in the future. We are not afraid; instead we are full of hope!

Thank you!



Conclusions

Francesco Bonini – President of the LUMSA University Rome

At the conclusion of this rich and lively meeting, together with all of you, I would like to remember some important key words, thanking all of you for the invitation. This conference has been for me an important occasion to learn: from speakers, from your experience and from your spiritual life and apostolate.



1.

If there is a contemporary aspect of today's society it is indeed the process of **becoming worldwide** (a concept that I prefer to globalization). In some of its manifestations (such as migrations of the last few weeks in the Mediterranean) it is a macroscopic process that affects all of us, even the more peripheral and smaller realities. Even our personal and community experience is like this.

This process of widening has been well demonstrated in these days and clearly interpreted along two axes. Obviously, one is **space**. We really did a “world tour” which was even more effective because it was experienced through faces, works and concrete experiences. We have also had the axis of **time**. From Saint Angela Merici in 1535, as we read in our logo, we have gathered the long time of your roots. In the same way, we covered the twentieth century, with its sudden transformations and the Council. We have evaluated the Council's significance, importance and the direction it offers for us today.

2.

On this broad, expanded horizon, concretely experienced and not simply endured (and this element must be underlined), some major points of intersection are located, connected with contemporaneity.

These can be understood in all the contexts and have run through all the presentations and discussions of these intense days. I would like to point out three:

- **feminine identity** above all.

Today more than ever it is a key point, in Italy, in western society and in the world. Through woman all the major challenges of our future pass. On the other hand, this is a characteristic of your history, your identity, your company of women not characterized by being “wife of,” as said this morning, but rather by a choice, a project. On this topic, I believe, you have many things to say and many possibilities for concrete witness;

- **freedom**, the second point, is the consequence, basically woman’s freedom of choice, uttered in the experience of the incarnation. And then the third point:

- the witness and the service expressed in your **secularity**, another key element of your identity, extremely appropriate for our complicated contemporary life.

3.

We are now approaching another group of themes, more internal to the ecclesial dynamic, but not less crucial for the Company and its contribution, starting from what has been defined:

- The “new word” **consecrated**. After a few decades, what has happened to this “new word” in the life of Church and in the world?

- To answer this question requires measuring it against the “new reality” (an expression also remembered in this morning’s presentation about Saint Angela Merici) of **sisterhood**. This is the circumstance in which to bring about a program of life and service. It requires perspective.

- For this reason, I would like to finish with a final word, a concept that emerged forcefully in the contribution of Monsignor Tessarollo: **eschatology**. It is a synthetic expression that connects



aspects of Mary and of Martha – distinctive elements of your Company, commitment and waiting. “Eschatology” gives us perspective and rest.

4.

Therefore, this eschatological angle is the right way to have, in every kind of circumstance, even in those apparently more ordinary, the ability to look forward that makes us creatively present on the expanded horizon where we receive our motivations. In this way, everything becomes absolutely concrete.

The same is true for the presence and the contribution of a secular institute like the Company in an ecclesial area of extraordinary and growing complexity. Pope Francis never tires of reminding us, inviting us to synthesis and to the essential, that the complexity and at times the very struggle of the Church and within the Church are meaningless if ending in themselves. However, it should allow us to follow an increasingly complex and fragmented reality, as well as fast, confused and sometimes even indecipherable movements. A plurality of voices, ancient and new, is required precisely to be constantly and creatively called back to the identity that has characterized these beautiful and lively meeting days, for which, once again, I thank you.



Homily at the Mass for the Company of Saint Ursula Cardinal Pietro Parolin

Basilica of St. Peter, August 5, 2015 – Our Lady of the Snows



Your Excellency,
Reverent concelebrants,
Leaders and sisters of the
international Federation of the
Company of St. Ursula, Secular
Institute of Saint Angela Merici,
Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today the liturgy shows us two glimpses that offer us the occasion to reflect on the importance and the centrality of faith. They make us realize clearly how vital it is to be endowed with a faith-filled way of looking at reality and how this way of seeing concretely influences one's life.

In the passage drawn from the Book of Numbers we encounter the People of Israel, now far from Pharaoh and close to entering the Promised Land. On different occasions they had already abundantly experienced the power and the providence of the Lord's direct intervention that, "with strong hand and outstretched arm" (Dt 26:4,8), had liberated the multitude of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Innumerable prodigies worked in their favor had proved the Lord's fidelity and benevolence in fulfilling his promises, in leading the course of events to overturn situations and what seem like dead-ends.

So now all they have to do is entrust themselves to him, have faith, welcome gratefully the gift that the Lord is ready to give them: to enter the Promised Land. Instead, lack of faith makes them timid, anguished about a future that seems uncertain and overwhelming. Even after the return of the explorers – who praise the land they have visited, extolling its wealth but at the same time emphasizing the difficulty and the dangers of the effort to conquer it – the people weep. Just a few steps away from fulfilling all their hopes, for which they have suffered

so much and worked so hard, they do not succeed in reaching the goal. Full of fear, they stop and lament about what they should have been rejoicing over. For forty more years they would have to wander in the desert before being able to enter the Promised Land.

In the Gospel we meet a Canaanite woman. She is an outsider to the history and the life of the Hebrew people, whose basic traditions and norms she is unfamiliar with. Apparently she is in a distant place, inconvenient for imagining that she



could obtain from Jesus the gift of a miraculous healing for her daughter. However, this foreign woman's faith wipes out all barriers and distances and obtains from Jesus the favor she has so hoped for, so sought and trusted. Furthermore, Jesus gives this poor woman a stupendous compliment: "Woman, great is your faith" (Matthew 15: 28a).

These two glimpses refer to one another and speak to us of the paradoxical effects that faith has on the lot of human beings. On one hand, a sequence of events that appear close to a positive conclusion gets unexpectedly complicated, tangled in a series of unforeseen obstacles. What should be a tranquil and serene development is overturned in a blockaded situation on a path of rapid downslide full of traps, with an uncertain outcome.

On the other hand, a humanly irremediable situation, completely paralyzed, is unexpectedly and radically transformed. Sickness is cured, sadness is changed into joy, tears into a smile. And faith is the true protagonist. It determines which path will be taken. Faith and prayer can strengthen the character of the human person and dispose him/her to

accept swiftly and gratefully the gift that God wants to give. It truly moves mountains. In contrast, lack of faith weakens us deeply, leaves us alone and at the mercy of the emotions of the moment, without a true and trustworthy compass, weak in the face of life's trials. Faith is a precious treasure that must be guarded diligently because, like a lamp, it can shed light within and around us, like a torch that lights our way and keeps us out of dead-ends.

Besides the Canaanite women, I would like to recall two other women whose great faith has brought us reason for gratitude.



The first and the greatest of all is Mary, the mother of Jesus. By trusting and abandoning herself to the divine action in her, she made possible the Incarnation and thus our salvation. The world's Creator was pleased to make the fulfillment of his loving design dependent upon a virgin in Nazareth. With her "yes" she became the Mother of God. For an instant the destiny of all humanity was in Mary's hands. Her faith, in giving us her Son, made us her children. Permitting God to become human, she opened the road so that humanity could live with God and, with the help of his grace, could become divine. God's whole design depended on Mary's "yes." Faith has, then, made the impossible possible, allowing God to act in history and to lead history to safe harbor, revealing that faith is a decisive instrument and power.

If we are attentive and vigilant, we can verify it today too. I respect the different commitments intrinsic to family life and to single life, carried out with the gift of perseverance to those freely assumed commitments as we face the trials and difficulties of life. If we pass through the desert able to stop along the way in the oasis of faith, we will find the nourishment we need so as not to lose our sense of direction and of the final destination. At times we can be astonished, as by an August snowfall, and can receive help to build our lives on the solid rock that is Christ, the delicate and yet powerful help of his mother, Mary.

Faith is a valuable compass that points to the polar star and helps us face every difficulty. Without faith we go astray. We could be close to the finish line, like the Hebrews in the desert of Paran, and be so fearful and anxious that we miss the objective. We could be surrounded by so many good things yet have many false securities, but without faith we can lose our way and regain our bearings, without even understanding why, all alone on a dark pathway.

Another woman of great faith, who let herself be guided by Providence and knew how to transform devotion into charity and charity into mission, is your foundress, Saint Angela Merici. She lived a pilgrimage. Faith gave her a special energy, conferring on her a particular mission, which proceeded bit by bit to the foundation, in 1535, of the Company of St. Ursula. She crafted a new form of life – for the times – a female association of consecrated virgins living in the world, which anticipated the future congregations with simple vows and the secular institutes.

Your foundress, in her holy restlessness, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and Providence found ways to make her understand that, under the Cross of Christ, each corner of this earth has become a Holy Land and at the same time the earth needs to be sanctified by witness and by the following of the Lord. Her robust faith and her charisms, demonstrated at the time, permitted her to give form to an institution that offered a valid and profound religious experience united to a commitment to education.

Her charisms and her charity were so transparent and well recognized that in Desenzano, her birthplace, in Venice, Milan, and Rome, when she visited those places, there were efforts to persuade her to stay there. Something similar happened the day after her death, when the Canons of Saint Afra and those of the cathedral of Brescia competed for her mortal remains.



The saint, in one of her mystical experiences, saw a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels and women come down it. This dream prefigured the specific vocation of Angela Merici, the future first leader of the Company of St. Ursula. From that time, in the “Company” multitudes of virgins have manifested their love for neighbor for the love of God and have become fine educators of an incalculable number of girls. By their example they have taught a sure way to be good Christians and educated and cultured people. I believe that it would not be wrong to affirm that the ladder seen by Saint Angela in the dream properly represents faith. A ladder like this facilitates communication between Heaven and earth. It brings Heaven down onto earth and lifts earth to Heaven. This is basically the mission of all saints, each one with her particular and original characteristics, because God does not want robots that repeat a teaching that is not understood, but persons who are free and strong in his grace. In ever new ways, they try to bring about goodness by evangelizing with one’s life more than with words, making Jesus our Savior known and loved.

Today we have met three women of great faith: Mary the Mother of Christ, who made snow fall in August on the place where a basilica dedicated to her should be built; the Canaanite woman, who obtained the healing of her daughter; and Saint Angela Merici, who made her life a pilgrimage of faith and began your “Company.”



May Saint Angela Merici assist you every day of your life and in your mission. May she enlighten you to understand the best way to live the Merician charism in our time and to make it attractive. May she help you to move hearts and to give yourselves joyfully, to receive the hundredfold reward and eternal life.

Our participation in the Holy Father's audience Wednesday, August 5, 2015

