

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_2016@libero.it](mailto:fed.comp_2016@libero.it)

International Meeting

Consecrated Secularity *- Living in the World -*



Villafranca Verona Hotel Expo
July 19-23, 2016

ACTS



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TO THE READERS



Living with style. . .

I have “stolen” this title from the assembly held in my diocese at the beginning of the pastoral year. It strikes me as being in harmony with what we are living as Church and as Company.

In July we celebrated a meeting on the theme: *Consecrated secularity – Living in the world*. Offered here to readers are the Acts of this meeting so this material may become a resource for formation and a school of life. Together with the Company of Brescia we have planned another meeting for November on the theme *Living in our here-and-now*.

To live is therefore one of the verbs chosen for our life and our vocation. Nonetheless, is it necessary *to live with style. . .* what will be our style? I took our Constitutions in hand and found the answer in a subtitle of Chapter One: *Our style of life*.

Living with style. . .the style of Jesus

We live in the world and history as did Jesus Christ, *who truly became one of us, like unto us in all things except sin*. Thus no evasion, no flight from the world, but inserted, immersed in daily life *in a continuous stretching towards Christ*.

Living with style. . .the style of Saint Angela and our early sisters

It is a matter of being in the world in the *admirable integration of action and contemplation*, as Cozzano reminds us: “*being in the world, sharing in the active life, they enjoy the contemplative life, and in an admirable way, join action to contemplation; the height of contemplation does not deter action, nor does activity hinder a taste for heavenly things.*”

Living with style...with the force of the Spirit ever at work within us

This will be the style of *silence, wonder and wisdom*, like the woman in the Bible, *Anna, the daughter of Phanuel*. It will be a style of *strength and zeal, like Judith*.

Living with style. . .as witnesses

It is not a matter of preaching, but rather of Living in daily life with commitment and responsibility *in order to be witnesses of charity, faith and hope in the heart of the world.* In responsibility we can engage in *a wise discernment of lights and shadows present in the human person and in history.*

Living with style . . .an ecclesial and secular style

We are people of God, and hence we are part of the universal Church and live in the local Church. In this Church we are called to evangelize, *making our contribution as consecrated laywomen. Praying intensely for this Church that God may not abandon His Church, but may reform it according to His pleasure.*

Living with style. . .the style of company

Company is a deeply felt need for those Living in a world which is often the product of solitude, marginalization and abandonment. The Company is a resource if we know how to live it intensely. It is a resource for *seeking, building and safeguarding the spirit of unity and communion.* This spirit of company will be a *sign of the authenticity of our communion with God and certainty of being on the “way that is good and pleasing to God.”* Even more, this style of company will help us live in the world *manifesting to the world that we are disciples of the Lord.*

Living with style. . .during this earthly pilgrimage

In the style of company we will find *help in order to live according to the Spirit in our personal, social and ecclesial life, and support for overcoming the trials of our earthly pilgrimage.*

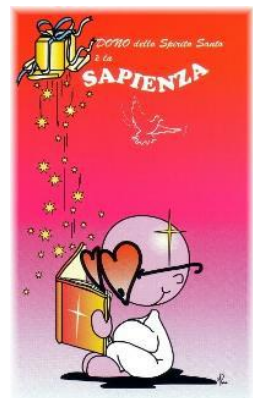
Living with style. . .the style of wisdom

In unison with Him, the source of true wisdom, we can pray:

“Grant me wisdom. . . .

***Dispatch her from the holy heavens,
from your throne of glory,
to assist me and toil with me and teach me
what is pleasing to you.***

***She knows and understands everything:
She will guide me prudently in my undertakings
and protect me by her glory” (Ws 9).***



Caterina Dalmasso

GREETING AND INTRODUCTION TO THE MEETING

Maria Razza, President of the Federation



My most heartfelt and sisterly welcome to one and all, together with affectionate greetings!

Particular words of thanks to the reverend Assistants and the other priests present here: your participation is very important for us and bears witness to the interest and attention you have for the Companies you

accompany, for the Federation and for its Council.

Consecrated secularity – Living in the world is the title we have chosen for our 2016 meeting.

Open to all Members, the annual international meeting is a fundamental moment for our Companies, the Groups now taking shape and growing, for each Sister, and for our Assistants, because our Charism is so dear to each one of us, bringing us to live in the world as laywomen consecrated to God in secularity so that this charism may be understood and lived in ever more fidelity and dynamism by each Daughter and Sister.

Organized by the Council of the Federation each year, this meeting is intended to be a response to the following mandate assigned to the Council itself by the Constitutions: “. . . *support initiatives for a deepening of the Rule and the Constitutions*” (Const. 32.2) so that we may be more and more open to the charism of St. Angela “. . . *which the Holy Spirit continually renews in fidelity to its origins and the expectations of the Church*” (Const. 2.3).

The word “world” is also the central theme of this meeting, which is linked with previous meetings by a continuity of ideas.

Once again, the aim is to help one another in an ongoing study of this vocation of ours, enriching it with greater understanding and new motivation.

To this end we are going to be assisted by two speakers, Msgr. Adriano Tessarollo and the theologian Assunta Steccanella, who will offer us food for thought and serious analysis.

It is necessary for us to be rooted in Christ and in His Word, in the teaching of the Church and in reflection upon it in order to direct the road we are called to live as consecrated laywomen “. . . in the world that God loves, because after creating it, ‘He saw it was good’, and which He summons us as well to love with passion and to place therein our whole life in order to help it discover its true origin anew”.

Making our meeting all the more ‘family-like’ will be the testimonials of a few Sisters, who, in all authenticity and simplicity, will share with us their experience regarding the five verbs that were the *leit motif* of the latest meeting in Florence.

Present with us the evening of Thursday the 21st, will be Prof. Gheda, who will present his book on the history of the Federation. We considered it opportune to take advantage of this opportunity to let a larger number of Sisters and Assistants know about this book.

In brief, a meeting abounding with inspiration and content. . .

In my mind, however, the greatest value of all is to be seen in our being able to experience this moment together, in sharing news about ourselves, in the joy of ‘informal’ moments, in serious reflection, and in the impromptu exchange of views and thoughts in a style of sisterhood and simplicity. May this be an excellent meeting for one and all!



A CHURCH THAT SPEAKS TO THE WORLD

**Most Rev. Adriano Tessarollo, Bishop of Chioggia and
Ecclesiastical Assistant to the Council of the Federation**

The present meeting is intended to offer new encouragement for participating in consecrated life in secularity for the Church's mission in conversation with the world, in the light of the ideas of the recent gathering of the Italian Church in Florence with the theme "A new way of understanding humanity in Christ." Living consecration in secular life requires not only being in the world but taking responsibility, because the Gospel is known by the world through the witness of Gospel living. Therefore – not flight from the world, perceived as a place of danger and temptation, but immersion in the world as the place of one's mission, without letting oneself be led astray by the world. Secular spirituality flows from the spirituality of the Incarnation, by which Jesus, *"though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness"* (Philippians 2:6-7). Therefore it means dedicating one's life to "Living in the world" as did Jesus in Nazareth, during what is generally called the "hidden life." It was really the life of all people, with all people: infancy, childhood, youth, adulthood working at home and in his "father" Joseph's shop, participating in the life of his people. In that life "of all" Jesus also learned to "live in the world," to be with people, to live and work as they did and to listen to their needs and aspirations. From that way of living flowed his mission, entrusted to him by the Father: not to leave the world but to encounter the world, encounter humanity, so as to respond to its deepest desires for liberation from evil, from every evil; its desire for solidarity, for merciful love, for hope. To encounter a world that was in danger, and always is in danger, of *"losing the sense of the human."*

Mercy as relationship: the style of Jesus in daily life.

*“At the sight of the crowds, his heart was **moved with pity** for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36).*

*“When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was **moved with pity** for them, and he cured their sick” (Mt 14:14).*

*“Jesus summoned his disciples and said, ‘**My heart is moved with pity for the crowd**’” (Mt 15:32).*

Jesus displayed God’s love as “a relationship of merciful love,” that is, of love that motivates a sharing in the “*The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties*” (*Gaudium et Spes* 1) of humanity, of every human being, proclaiming the value and the dignity of all, without regard to their race, age, social, religious, economic, or physical situation. This is the source of his encounter with all, for whom:

- he entered the cities and the synagogues and the Temple (Mk 1:21: “*Then they came to Capernaum, and on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught*”; Lk 4:16: “*He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day*”; Lk 19:1: “*He entered the city of Jericho*);

- he entered the houses of all (Mt 8:14: “*He entered Peter’s house*”; Mt 9:10: “*While he was at table in [Matthew’s] house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples*”; Mt 9:23: “*Jesus arrived at the [synagogue] official’s house*”; Mt 26:6: “*Jesus was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper*”; Mk 2:16: “*Some scribes who were Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors and said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’*”; Mk 3:20: “*He came home. Again [the] crowd gathered, making it impossible for them even to eat*”; Mk 7:17: “*When he got home away from the crowd his disciples questioned him about the parable*”; Mk 7:24: “*He entered a house and wanted no one to know about it, but he could not escape notice*”; Lk 7:36: “*A Pharisee invited him to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city ...*”; Lk 10:38: “*As they continued their journey he entered a village where a woman whose*

name was Martha welcomed him”; Lk 14:1: *“On a sabbath he went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees”*; Lk 19:5-7: *“When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.’ And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, ‘He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner’”*);

- he passed along the roads and along the seashore (Mk 2:13: *“Once again he went out along the sea. All the crowd came to him and he taught them”*; Mk 4:1: *“On another occasion he began to teach by the sea”*; Mk 5:1: *“They came to the other side of the sea, to the territory of the Gerasenes”*; Mk 5:21: *“When Jesus had crossed again [in the boat] to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him, and he stayed close to the sea”*; Mk 7:6: *“Jesus went around to the villages in the vicinity teaching”*; Mk 7:31: *“Again he left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, into the district of the Decapolis.”*)

Today there is a need for relationships, particularly to vanquish separation and isolation. The sense of intergenerational solidarity in the family is re-emerging, the need to create environments that foster social relationships and promote human dignity. This contributes to creating a network of healthy and reassuring relationships, where someone may offer the gift of time and talents, the kind that addresses ultimate and nearly ultimate realities with skillful service that shows openness of heart in simple deeds. Today these Gospel-type experiences of relationship are concrete signs that open up hope and possible paths for proclaiming a Gospel that is the fullness of humanity.

The meeting in Florence pointed out some “challenges” through which the Church today can relate to the world. Outstanding leaders in meeting these challenges can be found in consecrated secular life, precisely as they are participants in the life of the world.

Listening and concrete action: *“Bearing witness to Christ through deeds flowing from renewed life and diverse humanity”*

From Jesus' style the Christian should learn the ability and the way to listen and to respond concretely to the cries of today's people. Not abstract theories and empty words, but listening to the real and concrete needs of human beings, to the sense of emptiness and isolation that many people experience. Listening to experience is the starting point for a relationship that can initiate processes, mobilize resources, and combat indifference with attention to the other, as Pope Francis suggests in *The Joy of the Gospel* 224, a relationship that offers concrete responses to today's challenges. Aware of their limitations, Christians know how to listen and recognize needs, even small ones, and to look for active ways of responding without obsessing over efficiency. Instead, they have a welcoming attitude, illuminated by the Gospel and animated by the strength of the Spirit. Light and strength are obtained from the Lord through prayer and are offered in the form of merciful brotherly and sisterly love that spring from faith.

In dialogue with humanity on the margins where God comes in Christ: Plurality and spirituality

The vision of humanity today, even in our local areas, is no longer monolithic but is characterized by a multi-faceted and richly shaded understanding of humanity, like a prism, one might say. Ordinarily, concrete and daily relationships do not involve theories. Rather, they involve particular faces: of babies and elders, of people who are serene or are suffering, of Italian citizens and immigrants from far away. In these faces we are called to see the face of Jesus Christ – to love, help, serve, and heal him. Seen “in the light of the Gospel,” as *Gaudium et Spes* 46 suggests, these faces reveal the plurality within the human family, marked by a “conviviality of differences,” as Bishop Tonino Bello has said: differences between generations and among peoples. It is possible to create bonds of family among them, each knowing “I am my brother's keeper,” especially where weakness and sufferings are greater.

The Christian vision of humanity is based on the recognition that “the human person comes forth from deep within God,” as we read in

the second-century “Letter to Diognetus.” God is not only the source but also the destination of every human person. We share the same origin and the same destiny, walking in the same direction. “Without God, human beings don’t know how they should walk,” Benedict XVI remarked, “and none manage to understand who they are” (“Charity in Truth” 78). A question: in daily life, at home, in their local setting, how could consecrated seculars raise, facilitate or assert questions about light, about God’s Word? How could they foster reflection for the many who could be interested and who desire or need this “bread” or companionship or guidance on the path of life? Perhaps even in parish communities today there is an increasing need for the presence of lay people who encourage the interior spiritual journey of believers who are confused or at a loss about following Christ and his good news. Who can do it better than those who have consecrated their lives to be Christ’s witnesses among their own brothers and sisters in everyday life?

Conditions for speaking to the world: the five ways

Going forth

Pope Francis: “The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice.... An evangelizing community is also supportive.... finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear” (“The Joy of the Gospel” 24).

Let us try for a moment to free ourselves from the way we have previously experienced and now experience secular consecration. Let us open ourselves to listen and to hear the needs that resonate in our people today and perhaps even in our own hearts. Let us open ourselves to the light that Pope Francis points to when he speaks of “going forth”: listening to people’s bewilderment, gathering them, tenderly caring for them, and acting kindly in difficult situations and settings, demonstrating our closeness, along with inklings of faith that may raise questions. We can be convinced that even through us our God opens up pathways of light and hope. How do we “go forth” to open up new

roads for the Good News of salvation given to us by God through Jesus Christ?

Proclaiming

Today there is a need for people who with “words and deeds” provoke others to lift their gaze and their desire to God. Pope Francis shows the simplicity and the power of a certain form and style both of dealing with people and of proclaiming the Gospel. He succeeds in communicating, stimulating a search for meaning, inviting people to reflect and to revise their attitudes, leading them toward conversion and toward understanding the truth of things.

Will we be able to review the form and the style of our own lives as consecrated persons, to be proclaimers of the Gospel, and to profess our own faith in public, without fear? How do we kindle in believers the desire for communion, for prayer, and for brotherly/sisterly exchange?

Living

The consecrated secular woman lives her immersion in her territory and her presence, elbow to elbow, with her own people. Our past has bequeathed us a considerable number of institutions, structures, entities, and assistive and educational works which incarnate a response to the Gospel. Today the changed situations of society and of our Companies require a transformation of lifestyles that do not distance us from sharing with the poor and do not weaken our presence and our links with society and with the Church. Today it is considered more suitable not to be committed as Companies in actions or programs of social promotion and assistance but rather to cultivate and promote attention to our brothers and sisters. Pope Francis’s invitation to be a poor Church among the poor is essentially a plan of life rooted in Jesus’ explicit preaching to the little people and the poor. It concerns the Church’s inner self and its activities.

How do we think about the future of the Companies and of their members so that they may achieve a charitable and missionary

dimension among the people and amid current changes, especially for women? How do we keep faith with this inspiration of Saint Angela?

Educating

Saint Angela has inspired people and communities with a particular concern for education, which has its own urgency today. Today's culture seems to want liberation from all tradition and from the values that tradition transmits. Today education occupies a central place in reflection on the human person and on a new understanding of humanity that involves human life, the shape of the family, the meaning of giving life, the meaning of tradition, the relationship with the environment, the use of resources of all types, the common good, the economy, finances, labor and production, politics, and rights. Education is an art: it is necessary that each one, immersed in this context of transformation, keep learning about it in order to respond to this mission.

How can Companies educate themselves and others for a lifestyle that expresses the new understanding of humanity and knows how to draw close especially to people in fragile and conflictual relationships?

Transfiguring

Transfiguring means looking at each reality with the **gaze of faith**, a "different" way of seeing human reality in the world and in history. Transfiguring means making all that exists, the entire creation, as human as possible according to the measure, the stature, and the figure of Christ Jesus crucified and risen, the hope of the world. For this, "transfiguring" represents the synthesis of the four preceding ways, which are themselves the result of journeys of transfiguration.

Transfiguring is a **relationship with the mystery of Christ** that the believer cultivates in personal, intimate prayer and in that shared liturgical experience by which one's daily experience is transformed. "*I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me*" (Gal 2:20). In these words of the Apostle we find the

paschal meaning of “transfiguring,” that is, the gospel experience in which human persons, even in their limits and their weaknesses, become aware and capable of their better selves and their more noble possibilities. Christian communities are nourished and transformed in faith thanks to their liturgical and sacramental life and thanks to prayer. There is an intrinsic relationship between faith and charity: the divine shines through the human and the human is transfigured into the divine. The life of the sacraments and prayer permits us to express something of God and something of the human. This is what characterizes a Christian understanding of humanity. “Transfiguring” means being led as a Church to discernment in the midst of the world, being in the world without being worldly, giving form and substance to the style of a Christian.

Another question: What space and care do personal and liturgical prayer and contemplation of the mystery of Christ and of God’s word occupy in the life of consecrated women immersed in the world, so that our way of seeing and thinking may always be more configured to Christ’s way, and so that our way of being in the world does not wind up being “worldly,” but instead can lead to humanizing the world according to Christ’s understanding of humanity?

Conclusion

These reflections – inspired by the gathering in Florence and by several encouragements from Pope Francis himself – can open up some new horizons, even for the lives of women consecrated in secularity, faithful to the Merician charism. We rediscover the path for our own life of personal holiness and at the same time open ourselves to the “missionary” dimension, so as to be witnesses in the world to Christ’s love for all people, becoming in our turn a call through which others can encounter and follow him.



IMMERSED IN THE WORLD: LIVING BAPTISM TODAY

Assunta Steccanella
Lecturer, Theology Faculty, Triveneto

1. INTRODUCTION

The title of this detailed study evokes different dimensions which are in a complex relationship with each other: our character as baptized Christians, the reality of the world, and the challenges of our time, and addressing them as women and as consecrated women¹.



1.1 Baptized

We, as baptized, have been made *holy* in essence and by vocation (cf. Rm 1:7 *to all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy*= to the baptized): the word 'holy' [Italian: *santi*] comes from the

¹ The report is primarily structured on: E. Norelli, to Diognetus, Paoline, Milano 1991 (from now on aD); M.T. Porcile Santiso, *With woman's eyes. Identity, ministry, spirituality, contemplation, word*, EDB, Bologna 1999 (henceforth Santiso 1999); Id., *Woman as Space for Salvation*, EDB, Bologna 1994 (henceforth Santiso 1994); Benedict XVI, Meeting with Catholics active in the Church and in society. Freiburg, September 25, 2011, in https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/it/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110925_catholics-freiburg.html Access 06/10/2016; Ambrose, *The Mysteries*, Ambrosiana-New City, Milan-Rome 1982.

Latin *sanctus* , past participle of the verb *sancire*, understood in the meanings of *separate, reserve, dedicate*...

We are taken from the world and separated, dedicated, God chose us for himself ...

We Christians therefore are not simply *come into the world*: since we were baptized we are in the world in a specific way, with a specific vocation, to make concrete and real the holiness that, through grace, we have been given as a gift.

In a famous speech in Freiburg, Pope Benedict XVI stated:

“As Pope Paul VI said, ‘The Church’s...struggles to model itself on Christ’s ideal can only result in its acting and thinking quite differently from the world around it, which it is nevertheless striving to influence’ (encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 60). To fulfill its mission, it must also constantly distance itself from its environment, will have to, as it were, be detached from the world”².

We the baptized form the Church, as the people of God, , but then, to live our baptism do we need to immerse ourselves in the world or be separated?

And is there something that specifies this path for us as women? How is consecration inserted into this state of affairs?

The path chosen to seek clarity is structured around two fundamental coordinates: the first is a letter to Diognetus; the second is the attempt to inflect it for women through dialogue with the thought of a Latin American theologian, Maria Teresa Porcile Santiso (1943-2001)³.

² BENEDICT XVI, *Incontro*, cit..

³ Maria Teresa Porcile Santiso (1943-2001) was born in Montevideo, Uruguay. To study the Bible thoroughly she learned Hebrew, studying at the Institute of Montevideo’s institute of Jewish culture. She obtained a degree in pedagogy, is a doctor of theology and philosophy, and was a teacher at the Catholic University of Montevideo and at the University of Freiburg. Engaged in teaching and research, she gained significant intercultural, interreligious and ecumenical experience. She was the only woman expert of the Third Assembly of the Latin American bishops in Puebla (ecumenism section). She has always been interested in issues related to women and the presence of women in the Church.

1.2 To Diognetus

The author of the paper tries to answer the question “which religion enables Christians to despise the world (or be detached, as Benedict XVI would seem to say).’ It is a burning question that is given an evangelical response: “Christians live in the world, but they are not of the world” (aD 6.3).

The reference to John's Gospel is obvious (Jn 15:19) and to the perspective that characterizes him, anticipated from the prologue (the world created by the Logos - the world that did not recognize him):

"Therefore the world in all created reality, especially human, is the theater of human history, the scene of revelation and finally as a final stage, especially in the discourses of the Last Supper and in the priestly prayer, where the world is seen as a subject and diabolical power, in fact the ideal place for those who not only reject Christ, but also who hate and oppose those who believe in him. In this final phase the Johannine community is presented as a citadel, besieged by the enemy world"⁴.

The author of To Diognetus concretely takes this perspective, with a choice whose origin we understand: Christians actually live in a hostile reality ("the world hates Christians," aD 6,5), they are being persecuted and killed in because of their faith.

Yet, in such a difficult condition, the description of the way in which they live *in the world without being of the world* is famous for its beauty:

“Neither by country, nor language, nor customs are they distinguished from other people; adapting to the customs of the place in clothing, food and the rest, they demonstrate a wonderful and undoubtedly paradoxical way of living in society. They marry like everyone else and produce children, but do not throw away their newborns. They share their meals, but not the bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live according to the

⁴ A. Cannizzo, *Four Johannine concepts. In the margins of the debate on Gaudium et Spes*, in Galantino N. (ed.), *The Council twenty years later*. 3. The Church-world relationship, A.V.E., Rome 1986, 106-115, here 108.

flesh. They dwell on earth, but they have their Citizenship in heaven. They obey the established laws, and with their life surpass the laws. They love all, and are persecuted by all"(cf. 5.1 to 17 aD).

It should be emphasized that it is not appropriate to read these passages isolating them from the context of the letter, otherwise the risk of mistaking their significance. What Christians live is not the result of an ethical choice, and theirs is not simply a good example to follow: all this is rooted in the mystery of God which is given to man to enable him to embody love. And the Spirit of God who becomes *shadow and fire* and transforms them according to his image, according to his plan.

In any case, what we might call a tension, a polarity between the Church and the world has been repeated in various forms throughout history, taking a particularly harsh character with modernity. Church and the modern world seemed irreconcilable⁵.

And only from the Council does a clear change in this state of affairs take place, "the new element consisted, so to speak, in the perception that the problems of the modern world challenged the church not only from the point of view of doctrine or apostolate, but also about the theological status of its presence in the world and in history"⁶. Through the conciliar reflections, the approach to the reality of the world then becomes more complex and leads to the awareness that Christians do not constitute a category 'apart,' but they are called to live in the earthly order of things, characterized by its specific nature and by its own laws. The human family in its unity and diversity always carries in itself both a sign of the presence and love of God and the signs of denial and renunciation for the sake of such love, and these mutually contradictory elements take on, in each historical moment, specific characters and the most diverse forms, which Christians must necessarily confront.

⁵ Cf. for example the Syllabus (1864) of Pius IX sanctioning the breach between the Church and modernity.

⁶ G. TURBANTI, *Un concilio per il mondo moderno. La redazione della costituzione pastorale "Gaudium et spes" of Vaticano II*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2000, 84; cf. also *ibid.*, 170-171; cf. *Gaudium et spes* 40-45.

In the context of such a complex situation, what is the kind of relationship that exists between the Church and the world?

The Council recalls that, by its nature, the Church is present and living in the world and, like Christ, carries it in itself. On the other hand, “in some way it is distinguished and is separated from it, but only to the extent that, in the spirit of poverty, self-denial and humility, it performs its mission”⁷.

The Church is separated from the world only to the extent that it fulfills its mission: it is to this kind of detachment that Pope Benedict alluded, calling Christians to not fall in line with the worldly logic but to be fully immersed in history by responding to their vocation.

It is a high calling: to be holy as the Father⁸ who “loved men, made the world for them...to them has sent His only begotten Son” (Jn 3:16) (aD 10,1-2) . And because of this love every baptized person is taking care of the world in which he is immersed, both when encountering signs of God and the most painful opposites. In this way, at different times, what is already stressed by the author of To Diognetus comes about: “what the soul is in the body, Christians are in the world.... The soul is imprisoned in the body, but it is what holds the body together: so are the Christians...they hold together the world” (aD 6,1.7).

Hold together the world: Is there a specific way in which baptized women can perform this action of weaving together the different dimensions that are interwoven in daily life, the ordinariness of secular life, apostolic labors, family and friendships, the relationship with the Lord?

⁷ Cf. A. STECCANELLA, *Alla scuola del Concilio per leggere i “segni dei tempi”*, EMP-FTTr, Padova 2014, 217-222.

⁸ “Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” Lv 19:2 .

2.1 Livable space, living time, structured for giving

“Woman has a task to be accomplished, even before attempting a definition...of her spirituality: to discover it, which equates to knowing her spiritual identity”⁹.

In this brief statement we find the perspective that has guided much of the work of Maria Teresa Porcile Santiso, a theologian who has sought to understand the specificity of living as baptized women. Only through the discovery of this specificity, she said, can woman really enrich herself and the Church.

If indeed being faithful to their baptismal identity is the only way for Christians to be faithful to their vocation to holiness, this does not happen in the same way for men and women. It is from the particular ways of their being inhabited by the Spirit that women can think and act in and with the Church¹⁰.

Santiso has lived many experiences in the ecumenical field and has gotten to know the situation of women in various parts of the world. Looking for a female specificity, she has confronted the mutability and variability of cultural models that embody femininity in different

⁹ SANTISO 1999, 15. Speaking of spiritual identity, the theologian refers not so much to a generic inner attitude, but to the Holy Spirit, "who we say in the Creed gives life...seen as the feminine expression of God," Ibid., 24.

¹⁰ The fundamental interest of this research is ecclesiological even before anthropological. The Church has a feminine nature, and this has consequences which must lead to words, or risk not understanding the so much the potential as the direction of development: cf. Santiso 1994, 320-324. This theme is present in the tradition from the earliest centuries of Christianity (cf. K. Delhay, *Ecclesia mater chez les Peres des trois premiers siècles*, CERF, Paris, 1964); it also returns in the preaching of Pope Francis: "The Church is a woman, ["Church" as expressed in the feminine grammatical gender, not in the masculine]; the Church is the bride of Christ, is the mother of the holy faithful people of God. The Church is a woman, the women here are the image and the figure of the church and of the mother, expressing collaboration in a special way; to feminist claims (I answer) that Mary is far more important than the apostles." Francis, Meditation at the third world retreat for priests. June 12, 2015. Unlike the others, the text of this speech is not available on the site www.vatican.va; if they can find a journalistic summary: cf. p. e.g.

http://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/cronaca/papa-francesco-la-chiesa-e-donna-maria-piu-importante-degli-apostoli_2116459-201502a.shtml consulted 26/06/2016.

contexts; since “it is important to find female characteristics which are recognizable as such in the Uruguayan, European or African woman,” it is necessary to refer to the only language indisputably shared by all, the language of the body. In fact, “female specificity passes through the body of the woman”¹¹.

In dialogue with the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, Santiso reads the body as a symbol, something that refers to something else and feeds thought¹². Through this approach will come emphasis on the three dimensions that characterize femininity in itself so much that, consequently, it characterizes the vocation and spirituality of women in the Church. We approach his words before briefly analyzing them:

“If woman’s being is made for life, her ministry (service) will have as its purpose life. The woman knows in her body and in her flesh what it means to receive life, accept it, let it grow in her, give it birth, support it, feed it, accompany it. Woman knows this reality...because she feels that she possesses a living body, marked by the language of blood with a rhythm of fertility that targets life. More precisely, woman has a unique perception of the categories on which all reality is grafted: space and time. Woman has a space in her body, and, like time, has her own rhythm, unique, spiral-shaped, evolutionary, and gradual: time lived and experienced”¹³.

A livable space: every woman is structurally, even without becoming so actually, a space open to life¹⁴. In the past this receptivity has been interpreted almost exclusively in the sense of passivity: this perspective, however, represents a cultural limitation. In reality, being a livable space is the structure of being personal, free; it is not blind fate, so that there may be women who choose not to be mothers. So much so that God could not have been incarnated without the conscious and welcoming ‘Yes’ of Mary.

¹¹ SANTISO 1999, 191.

¹² SANTISO 1994, 215-220.

¹³ SANTISO 1999, 25.

¹⁴ SANTISO 1994, 226-228.

Then this biological structure, this always present 'emptiness', is expressed in a predisposition to live in a welcoming way, a possibility of openness:

“Everything in woman speaks of this opportunity to be inhabited, no matter if the house is actually filled or not. What matters is whether the woman integrates in her own way, in her style of being a woman, the language of a body that speaks of dwelling”¹⁵.

A living time: for woman the passage of time is not a simple chronological element. There is a rhythm which is expressed in her body, marked by the cycle of blood¹⁶. Its appearance inserts her into the world of those who can accept life, you realize that something happens, that she goes into a different 'status.' The monthly rhythm recalls for her the responsibility, the fullness of humanity, the possible gift. And then there's a time when this rhythm ceases, and the woman lives in anticipation of finitude. It is a constitutive experience of being a woman, accepted consciously; it becomes a pedagogy for herself and for others, enabling a woman to live with greater force and incorporate into her own experience generativity and limitation, life and joy, pain and death. It is a perspective that safeguards against the risk of the current fragmentation, because it predisposes to read the different moments of personal and social history as a unified reality.

Structured for giving: The body of woman is structured to preserve, protect, and give life¹⁷. Woman is vulnerable; in giving life she risks her own, knows that the life of another can demand her life, knows this as what she is and not just rationally. She knows that giving life means being separated from it, letting it go, thus releasing it: a salvation from

¹⁵ SANTISO 1999, 192.

¹⁶ SANTISO 1994, 228-234: “The woman experiences a cycle linked to nature, but this cycle is inscribed in human nature, and therefore can and should be personalized through awareness.” Ibid.

¹⁷ SANTISO 1994, 234-237.

the anxiety of possession¹⁸. And she is able to nourish it, this life, in that her body is the only one capable of becoming food, during gestation and breastfeeding. Such capacity for changing form, becoming food so that the other may have life, even if it is not put into practice, must be deep in its symbolic meanings and ecclesially in its Eucharistic meanings.

In stating these reference points we will seek to give concrete form to the call to live baptism today.

2. SECOND PART: LIVING BAPTISM TODAY

There is a passage in the To Diognetus that traces the path of a dual listening, to God and to human beings: “Whoever thinks he knows anything, without true knowledge demonstrated by life, does not know: he was deceived by the serpent, not having loved life” (aD 12,6).

The need to *ob-audire*, or *listen to* the richness of the dimensions that we come across in our life as the baptized, is the first step, which is essential in order to live our vocation to holiness.

There is a passage in the Gospel of Mark (7:31-37) that offers us an icon of what it means: it is the story of the healing of the deaf-mute.

“Again he left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, into the district of the Decapolis. And people brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man’s ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, ‘*Ephphatha!*’ (that is, “Be opened!”) And [immediately] the man’s ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly. He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. They were exceedingly astonished and they said, “He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and [the] mute speak.”

¹⁸ Incidentally, reflection on this dimension, in our time marked by the struggle by many men to let women go, would be useful and is urgent.

St. Ambrose calls this episode the *mystery of opening*, saying that it is renewed in the baptismal rite: “this we have indicated when, celebrating the mystery of opening, we said *effetha*, which *means open yourself* Christ celebrated this mystery in the Gospel, as we read when he healed the deaf-mute”¹⁹.

In baptism we are immersed not so much and not only in the water: through the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit we are immersed in the Risen Christ, and this encounter produces in us the mystery of opening, opening our ears and heart to the encounter with the other, our mouth to proclaim the good news.

But if being women means, biologically and ontologically, being a space open to life, to be able to embrace all, make it grow by giving themselves, baptism offers to this structure the horizon of eternity, and enhances it through the power of the Spirit.

Baptized women are called to – and in the Spirit can – visibly transform the communities in which they are immersed into a welcoming space of communication, dialogue and exchange; they will be promoters of a society which is a habitable space, alive with encounter and presence, able to provide and foster in its members times for personal growth and discovery of one's vocation²⁰: “this is the anthropological ministry of woman: in the Spirit, shadow and fire, with the blessing of the Father, to give birth to Jesus, salvation”²¹.

Consecration gives this ontological structure all the flesh of history: the consecrated woman lives in the world really as the spouse of the Most High, virgin and mother of all his children, even the weakest and most remote.

“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”²². With the Spirit's help our

¹⁹ Ambrose, *The Mysteries*, Ambrosiana - New City, Milan-Rome 1982 1.3. During the rite of Baptism, in the moment of “Effatà” (unfortunately underestimated today), this mystery is renewed when the priest touches the ears and lips of the baptized.

²⁰ Cf. SANTISO 1999, 24; cf. also 191 ss.

²¹ Santiso 1994, 346.

²² St. Angela Merici, *Rule*, Prologue

life will be one of commitment to being witnesses of charity, faith and hope in the heart of the world; of responsibility for a wise discernment of lights and shadows present in the human person and in history; of ‘instruction and edification’ for all through our daily actions which rise from a heart molded by the Gospel; of sharing in order to create structures of sisterhood and solidarity capable of helping others' freedom to be opened to the future of God” (Company of Saint Ursula – Constitutions 4.2).

The vocation to welcome opens the consecrated woman to listening, guides her to integrate the painful bits of many stories into a larger project, a higher horizon, and to nourish with hope the days of those who meet her.

She creates in herself and in the Church the image with which it was imagined: “But one who takes upon himself a neighbor’s burden and in what is superior seeks to benefit the inferior; who, giving to the needy what he has received from God, is like a God for those who benefit, this person is an imitator of God” (aD 10,6).



WITNESS OF A CONSECRATED WOMAN IN THE WORLD

**Giusy Pelucchi – Company of Brescia
Formation Leader**



First of all, I thank you for inviting me to share these reflections with you. I accepted not because I am aware of having something original to say, but because I feel that I'm "in the family" and therefore can rely most of all on your sense of welcome and good will.

I would like to make an introduction: even if the title does not require explicitly my own witness, but a generic "witness of consecrated women in the world," I cannot disregard my actual experience; in fact, my presentation is not a study ... it's a way of giving voice to some personal perceptions, and therefore what I say is completely my own opinion.

All the more so on a theme – such as secularity – on which I know I cannot be at all moderate, a bit because of my personal character and a bit because of how these very experiences have formed me in the Church and society.

I have the conviction that what we talk about, secularity, is not mainly an abstract issue; it concerns not only the skin, the external aspect or intellectual intuition, but it is mainly an existential question.

In the title of this conversation we talk about women, but I think what I will talk about involves not only the female gender.

Your holy name: be it blessed above the sands of the seas, above the drops of the waters, above the multitudes of stars (Rule, Ch. V, n. 26).

I would not want to scare you, but I want to anchor my speech beginning with the early passages of Genesis, which Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato Si* called the *Gospel of Creation*; I'm doing this not to guarantee this reflection a Biblical length, but to root it in the understanding of the world, of created reality, just as we can grasp it from the first verses in the sacred text, which in addition to providing the motivations for protecting creation, track the way for promoting a more just and relational world.

Without this understanding and without this light, we could not talk about consecration, nor could we – at least from my point of view – fully understand the value of secularity. (It is surely in the incarnation of the Son of God that everything acquires full light and arrives at fulfillment, but we cannot ignore the opening scene that can be read in the creative work, starting where God reveals to us his plan for humanity and the world from the *beginning*, a *beginning* that is not only chronological time, but *ontological*.)

The stories of creation, in fact, offer us a wise theological interpretation of history and shed light on the human condition, on its meaning. Even today's history and our “being inside,” which is also our vocation (or at least the understanding that I have of my personal vocation), are intelligible from this foundation.

In fact, we in particular are asked to express the reality of belonging to God alone, not estranging ourselves from the world and from history, but inserting ourselves deeply into it, taking on the world and the present moment as a mission, as places that God not only “supports” because he is good but in which he is extremely interested and where he wants to be present to bestow his gifts and to communicate himself.

It therefore seems crucial, as well as a great consolation, to glimpse the reality of the world starting from the exclamation of Genesis 1 “...and God saw that it was good...” which someone translates “and God saw that it was beautiful.” This is or should be the

basis for our vocational experience and our interior attitudes: a feeling rooted in awe at the beauty of creation, at the richness and complexity of human history and its unfolding. Awe at the fact that this creation continues – or better can continue – because God has entrusted it to the work, to the intelligence of the creature that he has made in his own image and likeness. *The Church in the Modern World* is extraordinarily explicit in this regard: “*By their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brother men [sic], and are contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan*” (34).

“...men have labored to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort.... considered in itself, this human activity accords with God's will.... This mandate concerns the whole of everyday activity as well. For while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women are performing their activities in a way which appropriately benefits society. They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brother men, and are contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan.”

How carefully God prepared the world, this house where we live! The sacred author leads us to closely follow the amazing scene of God's activity, staged for us, the conditions of life and history ... Over these he does not claim the exclusive rights, and in fact at the end of his work, in which he is very pleased, he entrusts the work of creation to humanity, which can continue the creative work of God, in time.

See: From this text it seems to me that the meaning of consecration and the meaning of secularity already emerge with a certain emphasis.

In fact, if the term “consecration” is meant to express belonging to God, the story of creation calls us immediately to this belonging: what is there that does not belong to him? If everything comes from God's creative action, everything is already his, everything belongs to him, even before all our awareness ... And if all this is already his, he thought of it as value, as beauty; it means that in the order of “secular”

things, i.e., that belong to the human, to time and to history, there is something great to understand, to accept and to live as a gift.

In what constitutes a secular consecration, it seems to me then that the tragic vision of a world marked by evil cannot prevail – as the first aspect and testimony – but wonder must necessarily emerge, beauty conscious of the gift, the deep sense of gratitude: creation (not only nature), but also history, the human, social, political structures, the places in which all human activity is expressed, are seen and welcomed in view of the original project and its fulfillment, and thus capable of expressing the good, the beautiful, in view of what we are called to become: sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, in the one Father who created us.

In short, contemplative reflection on history prevails in us, received and experienced as the place where God is mysteriously but really present and at work.

This is not a naive or optimistic view of life; it is clear that each of us every day, together with the beauty of created reality, experiences contradiction, difficulty. We all see that the world – and especially the world that each of us is – is marked by evil, by personal and collective selfishness, sin and violence; even we ourselves are inhabited by this evil which tends to cloud the truth, gives birth to envy, jealousy, misunderstanding, desires for possessions, for power and domination. Whether we are more or less aware (though it is better to be increasingly aware), these inclinations are very present in our lives.

But the extraordinary aspect of the mission to which we are called is that the concrete experience of the difficulty, contradiction, even our moral evil, not only does not substantially detract from the propensity to collect in us and in human activities (events and relationships) the “seeds of the Word of God” (that is, those aspects of truth and goodness hidden but present in the reality of things) but it enables us to bring them out from their concealment and change them with suitable means to implement the plans of God for the world and humanity.

We apply this task to the temporal realities in which we are inserted and in which we live: the family and family relationships,

school, health, finance, civil and political institutions, unions, community life, friendships... cannot be regarded only as areas marked by selfishness and sin.

And the meaning of our presence and our task in these realities is not simply to superimpose on them some explicitly religious action that might make them acceptable to God. Of course this is not ruled out, but the basic task related to our particular mission is to grasp, in the realities themselves, the positive purpose that corresponds to the original plan of God for humanity and the world and to make it not only explicit, but also effectively usable.

I hope to explain myself better with an example from my work experience: carrying out some [civic] administrative activity gives me little or no opportunity for contemplation; it is a dry task, full of tedious bureaucratic complications, sometimes threatened by pressures and sneaky disturbances. But my awareness that this specific instrument was intended to safeguard a community of persons or things always requires me to reawaken in myself the positive goal implicit in the matter that I'm dealing with and in the tools that I use, and to dedicate my best skill possible to this activity, so as to be able to restore it to God and to the human community. That sense of purpose remains hidden from others: that I completed this task as a response to a mission and as an offering (and therefore it can rightfully be an expression of an "act of worship" concrete and feasible on the secular horizon, outside of a temple...).

I do not know if I succeeded in explaining, but this aspect seems to me a first magnitude; it is a lofty mission entrusted to us, and it seems to me that it constitutes the special witness of the secular vocation.

This way of living reality, which is so ordinary and unseen, does not leave things as they are; it changes them; from within, and precisely with the means of the world. If it does not change them for the better, at least it holds back the worst. Of course, there is nothing sensational in our small actions and commitments: but – because of the way in which they are carried out – they can also become the "critical conscience" of

the superficiality and selfishness that sometimes seem to prevail in the different environments in which we live.

But the revelation of God's original plan is not enough to fully understand the meaning of our vocation and mission. That is fully revealed in the mystery of Jesus, the Son of God made man.

The kind of life that the Son of God brought to earth from the bosom of his eternal Father, and which he lived, and his Apostles, and many others of the early church, he has replanted through his faithful servant [Angela] now, almost at the end of the world, so that the end may be in conformity with the beginning, and be joined like a circle²³.

Fearing rightly that we do not interpret well or misinterpret his project for humanity and the world, God has given us – in Jesus – a model of fulfilled humanity, the greatest expression of full belonging to God and full assumption of what is human.... The Son of God took on everything in our human condition except sin. We never understand enough the mystery of the Incarnation and its implications.

Gaudium et Spes speaking in n. 22 of *Christ, the new man*, uses these beautiful expressions: *By his incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man*. (It does not say “every Christian”; it says “every man [i.e., human].”) *He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart.*

God-the-Son has not despised human nature and its implications; he has lived in all its registers, in all its undertones. How could we think of transcending it, considering it base? Being *spiritual* men and women presupposes the full acceptance of our humanity and of what follows; it is being guided by the *Spirit*, it is not a vague asceticism that tends to distract us from what we are concretely and from our personal and communitarian responsibilities.

The call to be *true and virginal spouses of the Son of God* puts us in close contact with this mystery; urges us – gently but firmly – to put on the mind of Jesus in relation to the Father, the world and all that is human. And also to replicate, in an attempt to be vitally close, which

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Gabriele Cozzano, *Epistola Confortatoria* [1966].

marked his choices, the methods and the tools he used. Our *being* (not merely our *work*) will thus take the line of the Gospel, will live the spirit of the *beatitudes*, and will travel the liberating path of the *evangelical counsels*.

Allow me then to highlight a few, limited connotations that it seems to me – as a consecrated secular – we are called to accept and to reproduce in ourselves.

1. The Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, did not disdain to assume the risk of the condition of being subject to the limits of time, of a culture, or of a people.

External conditions do not jeopardize our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters, nor jeopardize our vocation. Although you should always activate a healthy policy of prudence and vigilance with respect to the context in which you operate, you should also be able to conclude that there is no better time or place, no better culture, no better Christian community or Company in which we can fulfill our vocation to love. There is a real time, which is certainly never the ideal, and in which it is good to go with respect, on tiptoe, without privilege, available to testify to the “free” love of God. Where *free* actually means “free,” that is, without any insistence on gratification or recognition. Easy to say: it remains always an almost unattainable goal set before us and that we must request as a favor.

2. Nazareth: the mystery of the hidden life. I always wondered if these thirty years of life of which little or nothing is known of Jesus (we can only imagine it), have any significance in the order of salvation, and I answer: yes, they make sense of the apparent insignificance of life for millions of faceless and nameless people passing through this life while no one notices them (however well it goes...). And make sense of even the apparent marginalization of our life, the meaning of which remains mostly hidden from the eyes and understanding of others. It is true that the discreet style of our presence in the world does not match the demand for appearance and visibility that seem to haunt contemporary life, sometimes even ecclesial. The style of our vocation-mission does

not correspond to the canons of the *church triumphant*: it corresponds most to traits of the *work-a-day church*, which does not exceed, not glitter, not bother to assert itself. Nevertheless we must tackle a paradox which – as disciples – we are called to live; a paradox which refers to two contrasting images, both entrusted to us by Jesus (Mt 5:13-16): the image of the salt of the earth and the yeast (which, to fully perform their function, must just disappear, dissolve) and the city set on a hill (visible and recognizable). The polarity between concealment and visibility is not claimed as a dimension in opposition to one another, but it requires a fruitful tension (tension = movement = oscillation) (fruitful = bearing fruit) between them. How to combine these two requirements, both present with legitimate citizenship in the Christian life in general and in the experience of secular consecration (or consecrated secularity, as you call it...) in particular?

In the world environment in which we are present to *treat temporal realities according to God*, our deepest identity and our belonging to a secular institute must be protected, not only to avoid preconceptions which will adversely affect freedom of action, but also because it assumes the Incarnation as a style of presence, through which God chose and proposes the way of discretion. This however does not affect the witness of our Christian option, which should remain clear, with no screens. We live in the world, but with the full knowledge that the Church, with all that involves participation in the life of a specific Christian community: this membership is explicit and frequently has a public character, and is eloquent.

3. The means, places, ways of the proclamation. In Jesus the human chords really vibrate to the fullest. And they are translated into attitudes and very concrete decisions.

With regard to the places of the meetings of the Son of God with humanity: it was the life of every day – the most ordinary and for us the most unimaginable. This *occasion* was the starting point from which he revealed and gave salvation to the diverse humanity that he encountered. Let's try to touch on some of these *occasions* (the action and the words of Jesus are not always expressed in the temple or in the

synagogue): walks along the Sea of Galilee; in the context of daily work (while fishermen cast a net into the sea, or while Levi was at the tax office); at home (of Simon and Andrew, he heals the mother-in-law of Simon, the sick and the possessed, paralyzed, asks the disciples what they were arguing about on the way...); on the roads of Galilee (preaching and casting out demons); while he is at the table (with tax collectors and sinners, with the Pharisees); while walking in a field of wheat, or when he climbs a mountain (choice of the twelve, transfiguration); where he went, into villages or cities or countryside (they bring the sick to him), even in pagan lands (in Tyre he casts the demon out of daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman). Jesus teaches us the extraordinary fertility of the *occasion*.

Even a passage contained in the basic document of catechesis (n. 179. It is a document of the '70s, on the renewal of catechesis) expresses well this fruitfulness: *“An occasion is a very favorable educational situation, because it is a living moment charged with interest and spiritual openness. It can arise spontaneously ... and can occur suddenly.... Sometimes, however, it can and must be skillfully provoked.... Occasions must always be seized quickly and competently, so that the invitation that God addresses to all hours of the day may be welcomed: afterward, it may be too late.”* I guess that secularity requires – or at least should enable – the ability and the propensity to grasp the fertile occasion.

With regard to the means: They always respond specifically to that particular situation, to that particular gathering, but there is not an equal response for everything or for all. Sometimes the means to reawaken in humanity the full response to the saving plan of God is forgiveness, sometimes healing from an illness, sometimes a story, other times a dispute, other times the overthrow of tables in the Temple, other times prayer.... In any case there is always a focus on the person and the context. To us this mode says there is not one way that is good for all times or for all people²⁴. Not that what worked in the past can be

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applied without adaptations to today. We should nourish the attitude of a certain mental flexibility as to the means and ways....

About the ways: In relationships and concrete situations Jesus did not bother to hide or control his emotions or to make a mystery of them; he experienced and expressed them to the fullest: tenderness (toward children, the sick, the sinners); anger (against the merchants in the Temple); fear (of suffering); emotion (for the widow who lost her only son); wonder (at the faith of the centurion); joy (when the disciples returned from mission).... What a difference compared to our struggle not to feel....! I will not justify any excesses, but I have the impression at times that taking a “neutral” emotional attitude is a defensive, rather than a virtuous choice.

4. And finally, *last but not least* (... the maximum English that I can show off), the fundamental relationship, the one holding up everything: the filial relationship with the Father, present in every choice, in every response or situation. And that for us is expressed in the precious pearl of consecration – the specific mode of our relationship with Jesus – and in our constant reliance on the Holy Spirit.

What a beautiful synthesis Gabriele Cozzano offered to express the close link between contemplation and life, as he observed it from Angela Merici’s human experience and faith-filled witness! “So, being in the world and in the active life, they enjoy the contemplative life. And in a wonderful way they live out the one together with the other. The height of contemplation does not take away from their action, and their activities do not impede their taste of heaven. Nor does the light of heaven take away from their works...” (Reply). “Being in the active life, they were in the heavens, and the contemplative was in the active, and the active in the contemplative. A marvelous form of life!” (Letter of Consolation).

A synthesis is something different from the sum; and it greatly surprises me that this insight was expressed so clearly almost five centuries ago, when today it becomes so hard to understand how the link between faith and life should be characterized. Not something

superimposed or side by side as two distinct realities: the synthesis is carried out in the intertwining and merging of one vital reality with the other.

I guess it's here – fundamentally and beyond their different personal incarnations – the heart and *the grace* of our witness in the Church and in the world.



ANGELA MERICI: LIVING IN THE WORLD

Kate Dalmasso – Vice-president of the Federation



Living in the world as consecrated women is our vocation. However, has this always been taken for granted? Is it by now a fully indisputable fact?

Where to find the roots of this calling, the life-blood of this charism? Our Constitutions mention *“that admirable form of*

life that our Savior lived, and with Him, our Lady, the Apostles, the Virgins and many Christians of the early Church” (Constitutions 2.2).

The Constitutions, in the decree of approval, identify the Company as precursor of this vocation. Therefore I found it natural to go back to the roots, to Saint Angela Merici and, for these thoughts that I’m gladly sharing, I looked back to the fundamental guide of our life, as I find it stated in the Constitutions at 1.5: *“In the life of the Foundress, in the Rule, the Memoirs and the Testament, inserted into the current historical context by the present Constitutions, we find the fundamental guide of our life....”*

Then I decided to add some other thoughts from Gabriele Cozzano, the loyal secretary of Saint Angela Merici, a layman who was close to the Madre, the first sisters and the nascent Company.

In accordance with the other speakers, I also refer to the five keys to a new humanism, as they were presented at the ecclesial congress in Florence in November 2015. I try to do that from a “Merician” point of view, as if swimming in familiar waters: living in the world according to Saint Angela’s style.

1. GO OUT

In these days, marked by insecurity, fear, instability, anguish... rather than going out, the instinctive reaction is closing in, defending, building walls and establishing impassable borders.

Each time period has its roses and its thorns, and certainly also the age of Angela Merici was not perfect. In her life I can read some ways of going out:

Going out from the common mentality and practice:

Woman was considered a lifelong minor, needing a permanent guardian... marriage and cloister were established to handle this inferiority... not to respond to a vocation, but as a convenience and a decision made by others. Angela, on the contrary, would ask her daughters to join the Company *gladly and of [their] own free will*.

Going out from the countryside to the city, from her own world to the one in need, going out towards devotional destinations: Angela knew how to move around: Desenzano, Le Grezze, Salò, Brescia, Jerusalem, Venice, Rome, Varallo, Mantua, Cremona (and that was the 16th century!). Always ready to go out without establishing cloisters, structures, formalities... a free woman, able to create freedom.

Going out by all means of transportation: on foot, by boat, on horseback...

Going out from ways of thinking: from marriage or cloister to virginity for the Kingdom in the world; from the protection of the grille and of common houses to the world, in one's own dwelling; from a society constructed by men to a Company of free women, fulfilled, glad to belong to *the Lover of us all*; from clerical governance to female and lay governance; from responsibility held by some distant, elevated person to a group of responsible persons united by *a single Lover*: responsible women, virgins living in the same area, sharing the same ecclesial and civil citizenship, able to educate, witness, and accompany.

Going out from ourselves and from our homes as an experience of Company: *"Please go often to visit your dear daughter and sisters..."* (Fifth Counsel, 1). This too is secularity: meeting the sisters by visiting their homes, where they live and interact.

Going out with confidence: finding courage to walk the paths that all walk; finding the strength to develop meeting places and

to offer “companionship” by being close, by care and mercy to those who have been left on the roadside... in the world and also in the Company: *“If you see one faint-hearted and timid and inclined to despondency, encourage her... lift her heart with every consolation”* (Second Counsel, 8).

Going out must become a lifestyle: a lifestyle of each baptized human, especially if consecrated, a style of the whole Church together.

The style suggested by Saint Angela: *“Act, move, believe, strive, hope, cry out to him with all your heart, for without doubt you will see marvelous things....”* (Prologue to the Counsels, 17-18). As if to say that, to see marvelous things, one needs to go out, to walk, to hope, to cry out if necessary.... No holing up in our little nests, whatever those might be....

Going out how? With what precautions? *“Keep to the ancient way and live a new life.... Consider each one as good, but be prudent for your own good”* (cf Seventh Counsel).

Going out and even risking one’s life if necessary: Cozzano says that Saint Angela *“yearned so much for the salvation and benefit of the neighbor that she was ready to offer not only one, but a thousand lives, if she had that many, for the salvation of the smallest person. With maternal love she embraced each creature. Even the most sinful received the greatest kindness from her; if she could not succeed in converting such a person, at least she tried by her gentle love to persuade him to do a little good, or a little less evil.”*

Going out to console and bestow dignity: *[The members of the Company] “do not care about dowry or other similar things, do not build monasteries; the neighborhoods are comforted, the city is ennobled. They are ready to do good to everyone, are respectful of each wish and of each creature, as long as it is not against the honor of God”* (Cozzano).

2. PROCLAIM

Proclaiming who and what?

Proclaiming Jesus Christ, putting God’s Word at the center.

Proclaiming also means taking action, not making oneself the center, opening oneself to everybody... It also means “going out” on the streets of the world. After the resurrection, Jesus invites his disciples to be his witnesses, starting from Jerusalem, then through Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth. He shall remain with us to the end of days, and the Holy Spirit will accompany us.

Saint Angela, a charismatic woman, spiritual mother of both common and important people, proclaimed and practiced motherhood through her words: “*Her words were ardent, powerful, and gentle and spoken with so much grace, that everyone was compelled to say: God is here*” (Cozzano).

Angela was a messenger of peace and truth through proclamation; the eye-witnesses spoke about her burning and effective words. *She was like a throne for God, which instructed them.* Her word inspired good works and true belief: *everything for the glory of God and the advantage of the souls...she preached faith to everyone...*

A reassuring and clarifying word for everybody, for common people, for high-up persons, for preachers and theologians. “*Let their words be wise and reserved: not harsh, not rude, but compassionate and leading to concord and charity*” (Fifth Counsel, 12).

3. DWELL

Where did Angela Merici dwell? How can one describe her “dwelling”?

Born in a neighborhood at the foot of Desenzano’s castle; moving to Le Grezze in the countryside; farm life; the loss of her parents; being welcomed in an uncle’s home; belonging to the Third Order of Saint Francis...

Going out and dwelling: walking, standing, working, thinking... arriving in the city of Brescia in the home of a noblewoman who had lost her husband and three children (educating a little girl, establishing good friendships with other lay people: wealthy persons, diplomats, professors, merchants). Then moving to

another home to accompany and guide a young man 23 years old, as his spiritual mother and to handle housework.

Finding hospitality for a while in the home of an agronomist. Living alone, then with a friend, sharing a room belonging to the Lateran Canons at St. Afra Church.

Assembling the nascent Company without building houses, once more the guest of a young noblewoman on the Piazza Duomo.

Dwelling everywhere, dwelling in everyday life: no common apostolate, no common good works, rather yeast in the dough, light on the candle stand, flavorful salt. Dwelling with one's father, mother, family, other superiors, in relationships of kinship or friendship or work or duties... serious and balanced, prudent and aware.

The Company's virgins would keep living in their own or rented houses, or as guests, dressing like everyone else, earning a living with their jobs...

Dwelling as seedlings of virginity in the world: *"There was surely a need for potent and strong virtue in that difficult time, in order to sow plants of virginity scattered among the thorns of the world"* (Cozzano).

Dwelling and care for the world: **"To be guardians of the spouses of the Most High"** (Prologue to the Counsels, 8).

Dwelling in our environments: **"Behave well in homes, with good judgment, with prudence and modesty..."** (Fifth Counsel, 6).

Dwelling in humility and courtesy: **"Above all, let them be humble and gentle"** (First Counsel, 2). **"Be humble and gentle"** (Fifth Counsel, 17).

Dwelling in the Holy Spirit: **"May the strength and the true consolation of the Holy Spirit be in you all"** (Prologue to the Counsels, 3).

Dwelling in Jesus Christ: **"Without doubt, Jesus Christ will be in your midst, and as a true and good master, he will enlighten and teach you what you have to do"** (Last Legacy 5).

Dwelling in charity: to live on the earth with the company of heaven: *“Be bound to one another by the bond of charity, esteeming each other, helping each other, bearing with each other in Jesus Christ. For if you strive to be like this, without any doubt, the Lord God will be in your midst. You will have in your favor our Lady, the Apostles, all the Saints, the Angels, and finally all heaven and all the universe... And I shall always be in your midst...”* (Ninth Counsel 2-8; 20).

Dwelling as the Company: *“Have engraved in your mind and heart all your dear daughters one by one, not only their names but also their conditions, and character and their every situation and state”* (Second Legacy, 1-3).

Called to dwell in the world in holiness: *[The members of the Company]”do not cause disturbance and inconvenience to anyone. Fathers and mothers ... trust their chastity, rejoice in their holiness, are encouraged by their good example”* (Cozzano).

4. EDUCATE

Nowadays, we focus on the complete education of the person and on the credibility of the educator, who is presented first of all as a witness, “educated” by Christ and finding in him the meaning of life.

Each educator must first of all be humble: In order to accompany and not force a way to growth. Angela reminds the leaders: *“Regard yourselves as ministers and servants, reflecting that you have more need to serve them than they have to be served or governed by you”* (First Counsel, 3).

Each educator must be free and must educate for freedom: The educational task must be performed as a gift and for free, avoiding binding people to herself, but guiding them to and suggesting goodness, respecting their freedom. Angela knew this well when she exhorted the leaders: *“And above all, be on your guard not to want to get anything done by force, because God has given free will to everyone, and wants to force no one, but only proposes, invites and counsels”* (Third Legacy, 8-11).

Each educator needs to be prepared, to be developed:

Angela used to read a good many books (as reported by Agostino Gallo); above all she internalized God's Word, she counseled, she dictated her teachings. Theologians, preachers, religious and others came to consult her.

An education of the heart for the leaders and the daughters: The Company would not be about a mere list of things to do or of practices to carry out, but about loving Jesus Christ, their only treasure: *"Let them have Jesus Christ for their only treasure, for there also will be love"* (Fifth Counsel, 43).

Educating on everyday life: Angela was sought out for help in settling familial and parental discords, in sharing people's concerns about children, in making wills, in renewing faith. She listened to everyone, had a word for all; she gave a personalized catechesis. It is enough to think about the great pedagogical expertise contained in the Counsels for the leaders, above all the Fifth Counsel, where we find a summary of secular life.

Educating through witness – we too: *"Wherever they are, they should give good example and be to all a good odor of virtue"* (Fifth Counsel, 13-14).

Educating in renewal – ours too: *[Those belonging to the Company] "relish everything reasonable and despise everything dishonest; and they do not hesitate to dedicate their lives to the common good. They do not intend to renew any things; they only intend to renew themselves and others by their example, by their urgings about values and morality. The Holy Spirit works in their hearts. They desire every good and are strong, happy, and blazing with divine love"* (Cozzano).

5. TRANSFIGURE

Enzo Bianchi interprets the verb "transfigure" in this way: *"During his daily interactions, looking at the world and at humanity, Jesus of Nazareth never left things or persons as he found them; rather he transfigured anything and anyone. He renewed all. It is the Lord transfiguring, not us!"*

“In summary, transfiguring means letting the existing beauty emerge, and it means that the Lord never tires of lifting up the people we meet and the circumstances we face and the situations we experience in the concreteness of every day.”

Transfiguring as a Merician experience... up and down the stairs: Transfiguring everyday life until it is possible to see, like Saint Angela during her work-break, those stairs (of the vision) joining heaven and earth, and to discover the call, the vocation.

Transfiguring as both active and contemplative persons:
“Being in the world and in the active life, they enjoy the contemplative life. And in a wonderful way they live out the one together with the other. The height of contemplation does not take away from their action, and their activities do not impede their taste for heavenly things” (Cozzano).

We are called to transfigure, consecrate, and transform the world – the times, everyday life, cities, villages, neighborhoods, families, and all people – into an offering pleasing to God.

Saint Angela, in her prayer, teaches us how to transfigure all: Creation, relatives, friends, the world, ourselves. Let’s repeat some of her words, let’s make them our own... and we and the world will be transfigured in love:

- **“Your holy name: be it blessed above the sands of the seas, above the drops of the waters, above the multitudes of the stars.**
- **Deign to forgive my sins, also the sins of my father and mother, and of my relatives and friends, and of the whole world.**
- **I pray that you receive my free will, every act of my own will... Receive my every thought, word and deed; everything that is mine finally, both interior and exterior.**
- **All this I lay down as an offering at the feet of your divine Majesty**
- **And I pray that you deign to receive it even though I am unworthy of this. Amen”** (cf Rule, Ch. 5).

Transfiguring because we belong to our Lover: *“My lover, or rather ours, the Lover of us all”* (Fifth Counsel, 38).

Cozzano depicted Saint Angela: *“God was her only love and wealth.”* Saint Angela expressed this in her prayer: *“My Lord, my only life and hope.”*

Transfiguring by doing what we have to do: *“Persevere faithfully and joyfully... And take care not to lose your fervor, for every promise that I make to you will be fulfilled for you beyond measure. Now I am going and you, in the meantime, do what has to be done”* (cf Last Legacy, 22-26).

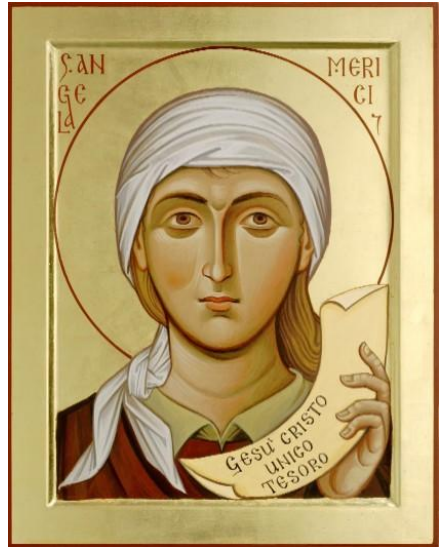
I'd like to close with another summary of the figure of Saint Angela, as presented to us by her loyal secretary Gabriele Cozzano:

S AINT ANGELA The fire and the sparks...

*There were many virgins,
first fruits of the Holy Spirit,
in this sisterhood,
like so many sparks
among the shadows of the world.
Mother Angela was among them
like a sun
that gave light to all the others.
She was like a fire, a conflagration
of love, that set them alight.
She was like a throne for God,*

*which instructed them;
actually, the Son of God, present in her, did everything with her.
Divinely inspired, she was the foundress of this great work.
She was the true and living Mother who,
in the Word of truth and in the blood of Jesus Christ,
gave them life and rebirth.*

Gabriele Cozzano, Declaration on the Bull of Paul III,
Regimini Universalis Ecclesiae (1544-1546)



WITNESSING WOMAN IN TODAY'S WORLD

GO OUT: THE CONTINUAL RHYTHM OF LIFE

Marie-Bernadette MBUY BEYA, Company of Congo



INTRODUCTION

The theme proposed to me was *Going Out*, and what immediately came to mind was the Exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt as a paradigm for a journey of faith. We know the history of this people that God loved, who were languishing in slavery. God hears the cry of

his people, and he himself is first to decide on the *Going Out* that will save the people. As always, the decision passes through a human mediation. Thus will he call upon Moses to make the people *Go Out* from this land of suffering and to lead them to the Promised Land, to freedom. From all this, it should be noted that *Going Out* is a gift from God, a move from a state of insufficiency to an experience of accomplishment.

GOING OUT IS A GIFT FROM GOD

God takes the initiative, and he calls Moses, who is far from thinking of such a mission. While grazing his father-in-law's flock, he sees a burning bush that is not consumed; he wants to see the phenomenon close-up. This is the moment when God calls Moses, who answers without hesitation. Moses begins by saying *Yes* without knowing the mission that he must accomplish. This fugitive had to undertake his own *Going Out* from fear, and God now calls him to free his people,

calls him to a **Going Out** from misery. At the risk of his own life, he agrees to **Going Out** of hiding to fulfill the mission that God has entrusted to him. It was the same for Abraham. God said, “Go from your country and your family and your father's house to the land that I will show you ...” (Gn 12:1).

For this Congress, I was asked to give my own testimony. It is simple because my story is not that of an exceptional person, but rather that of an ordinary African woman called by the Lord to leave her family, her clan, her traditional culture, and the personal ambitions that any girl of my age might have had. I come from a family of ten children with an unusual story. My mother, the grand-daughter of the great chief Fwamba of Western Kasai, left her native village to go and marry a man she did not know, who had left the village a few years before her and was living abroad, in the neighboring country of Zambia. For her, leaving village life was more important than any social status considerations. As the fruit of my mother's **Going Out**, I was born abroad, in a country where I learned a language and customs altogether different from my mother's. When I was six, my father, who was a merchant, decided to **Go Out** of Zambia, to take us back to Congo, our country, where my early childhood would be turned upside-down. We had to learn to live in another culture and learn the local language, taking into account the customs associated with my mother's position in her clan. This was my first experience of **Going Out** from one place to another.

During a three-day retreat organized by my boarding school, I heard for the first time the song “Leave, leave, don't look back, go where you're going, I'll be there ...,” and I knew that, like Abraham, I would leave some day without knowing where I would be going for the Lord. From then on, my interior life was a situation of Exodus. In other words, I received my vocation to consecrated life and have continued to live it as a perpetual **Going Out**.

When I was 14, a painful event struck Congo, the war following the Independence of 1960. The war escalated and affected the Church, with twenty missionaries brutally killed in front of the people, at Kongolo, in the short-lived ex-Katanga. Seminarians were forced to

throw the mutilated bodies of the Spiritan Fathers into the river. An eyewitness was invited to our school to tell us about the events. After hearing this story, I could not sleep, and I was convinced that I had to go and replace at least one of the victims so that the work of evangelization could continue. Another **Going Out** was on the horizon for me. My parents and teachers tried to make me listen to reason: I first had to grow up and finish my studies, if that was truly what was to be. They all thought that I was merely infatuated, and nothing more.

GOING OUT TO EXPERIENCE ACCOMPLISHMENT

The only feasible way to achieve this apostolic mission was religious life. Despite the difficulties of a student, I was a happy woman. I tried to do anything I was asked. After teaching for several years, I began to feel that this did not correspond to my true vocation. I had to **Go Out** from this situation, to leave to be a missionary among the people. My superiors were understanding and gave me the chance to **Go Out** for training in Religious Sciences in Belgium, to be able to realize this missionary vocation.

DOUBT

While everyone around me had supported my vocation to serve in evangelization, a deep doubt began to settle in my heart. I fell in love and I realized that I was important to someone. A promising future of happiness was offered to me. It was a period of great uncertainty, of big questions, and of tears. So as not to disappoint my family and my religious and priest friends, I locked myself into a long silence, and I was shrouded in a dark night. I was expecting an answer from somewhere until, during a retreat on discernment, a priest friend reassured me and helped me make my choice again with serenity. Once again, I had to **Go Out** of my human feelings to break through the doubt, in order to open myself to the great love that the Lord was offering me.

MY MISSIONARY VOCATION

When I returned to Congo after a stay in Belgium, I was appointed Director of the Interdiocesan Institute of Religious Sciences of Lubumbashi, which gave training in mission to lay leaders responsible for parishes. I was very happy to work with a team of teachers to bring the light of the Gospel to all life situations, especially regarding all the rites and traditions that mark the life of an individual. This mission would open the door for me to meet various groups of women who were victims of violence in the name of religion and culture. Thus, little by little, I found myself engaged with women around the world, and I was continually forced to **Go Out** of the convent. I was more outside than inside.

THE COMPANY OF SAINT URSULA

My meeting with the Company of St. Ursula in Brescia and with Elisa Tarolli in 1981 was not just by chance. There I discovered all the richness of secular life, and I met Angela Merici in a personal way. I kept in close touch with Elisa, who would eventually give me the address of the French Company.

My mission with women would lead me to support religious women who were victims of turbulence at a time of political unrest in Katanga. These sisters were forced to **Go Out**. They found themselves in Kasai, still willing to continue to serve the Lord as consecrated persons. Again, it seemed obvious that I had to **Go Out** of my daily environment to support them in their fidelity to the Lord. More than ten years after my meeting with the Company in Brescia, we appealed to Jeanne Lagrave, of the French Company, to come to DRC. Jeanne Lagrave had to **Go Out** of her native Brittany for a beautiful mission in the DRC. The French Company agreed to set everything up, with the support of our assistant, the late Father Victor Jouneau, to give birth to the new Congolese Company. And so we started the Company in several dioceses of the DRC. We are physically distant from each other,

over a distance of 1,000 to 2,000 km. Today we number 19 professed sisters.

ILLNESS

My life is an act of thanksgiving. I thank the Lord for all the people he has put in my path to help me to live with illness. After identifying five others living with this rare disease, I was called to **Go Out** of my own shock and go to them, because for us this cancer is not a disaster or a fatality. We have started a small mutual support team to encourage each other to continue to keep going and to appreciate life.

CONCLUSION

Every man, every woman, every believer, every Christian, every community is in a situation of Exodus, of **Going Out**; this situation should be assessed to identify the different places of the **Going Out**. What are the situations that we must leave to be faithful to the Lord's call? It should be noted that the **Going Out** is not a willful act. It is a response to a call. It is always the Lord who initiates our **Going Out**. I have seen the affliction of my people. *Go. I will send you...* For every **Going Out**, the Lord sets us free and asks us to be truthful with ourselves, with others, and with history, so that a true **Going Out** may come about. The freedom given by the **Going Out** is a freedom in peace and serenity. We don't just decide to **Going Out** when we want; it's not wanderlust. It is an interior process that requires careful listening to the Holy Spirit and careful attention to the signs of the time, so as not to succumb to the temptation to settle down once and for all. Our Mother St. Angela puts it so well: *"If according to times and circumstances the need arises to make new rules or do something differently, do it prudently and with good advice."*

Our **Goings Out** are still vitally connected with the **Goings Out** of others. The **Going Out** of Katangan sisters to Kasai was, for me too, a call to **Go Out** and to go to them. Similarly, this situation later caused

Jeanne Lagrave, Germaine Denis, and Father Victor Jouneau to *Go Out* to Congo.

Finally, it should be noted that any authentic existence entails a situation of Exodus. Jesus himself did not jealously cling to the rank that equaled him to God. He *Goes Out* of his Father's house to become one of us, to save us, and to make us sons and daughters of God, in God's image and likeness.



PROCLAIM

Rosa Cristofori, Company of Trent



The way of proclaiming today is certainly very different from the way of yesterday, because the sociological situations have changed.

Today's culture, in fact, transmits not the faith but religious liberty. The profound changes can arouse in us moments of nostalgia for the past, but they could also be a stimulus for a different, more interesting and more incisive

proclamation, because it is respectful of the person.

My journey of proclamation has taken very diverse paths, in very different situations.

- I have taught in a small middle school of a village, where I have had the opportunity to take care of children with the most disparate personalities: from the arrogant to the shy, from those with relational difficulties to those with psychological difficulties, etc.

My principal concern was to have a maternal attitude toward them, to reassure them, and to make them feel at ease. This approach was also helpful for parents who felt as though they were replaced in their motherly and fatherly role during the scholastic session.

At that time, someone asked me about my motivation for this attitude, which was normal for me.

Being available to replace absent colleagues at the headmaster's request became an opportunity for proclamation and witness, even if this was interpreted by some colleagues as calculated opportunism.

For some people, the serenity, the smile that they see in us, proclaim something that they can't explain; someone asked me about this after having proposed marriage to me.

- I have had the opportunity to be with suffering people when I belonged to a first aid association.

Because of the distance from the villages to hospitals, we volunteers were the first to arrive at the sites and maintained contact with emergency dispatchers, describing the situation.

In some cases it was more necessary to take care of the minds of the healthy than the bodies of the sick.

How many unpleasant situations wound us inside! How many questions arise about the reasons for suffering! How many doubts about the existence of a loving God!

- My style of proclamation was different in my role on our town council. Attention, conversation, mutual respect, and a quest for society's well-being in various decisions have taught me a great deal.

- Maintaining church furnishings, handling the choir (if it can be called that), and attention to liturgical celebrations still provide occasions for interpersonal relationships where presence, even if it is silent, offers me the opportunity for discreet but perceptive proclamations.

- I have had the opportunity to proclaim that God doesn't have favorites, even in providing my modest sewing skills to whoever asks.

- Sometimes life surprises us in ways that limit our activities, but they don't limit our possibilities for proclamation. Even illness can become proclamation. Suffering generates questions. Knowing how to retire from some activities in the face of slow but inexorable physical decline can become a source of grace, a blessing, one more opportunity and not a sign of punishment, as many think.

Unfortunately but necessarily in a small village, the people who do the work are always the same; searching out and promoting collaboration also becomes a form of proclamation.

My final consideration is this: it is not how much we do, but how we do it that gives meaning and form to our proclamation; this thought has been the central thread of the formation that has been given to me.

- In the Company I have a way to share my choice with wise and enlightened sisters and leaders who, by their example, show me the true

spirit of sisterhood. Therefore, proclamation as I have described it has been easy for me.

Our daily-renewed commitment to hone our proclamation under the Holy Spirit's guidance makes it contemporary and suitable to the different situations before us.



+



DWELL
Mary-Cabrini Durkin
Company of Canada, Group of the USA



Abitare was a key word at the national Italian ecclesial meeting in Florence last year. In English we say we *inhabit* a particular territory. However, the dynamic quality evoked in Florence is better expressed as *dwell in*. *Dwell in* suggests deep presence. Also, to *dwell among* others suggests relationships.

A territory is not only geographic or civic, but a texture of relationships. Through this lens I will share something of my own experience.

Our way of dwelling in the world flows from our secular consecration. Belonging to Christ, we share his mission: to incarnate the Kingdom of God in the particular part of the world where we dwell. Precisely as women, we bring certain gifts to this mission: we recognize the realities of oppression and, as women, we are called to foster relationships of mutuality, not of control.

Light and Shadow

To dwell in the United States of America is to enjoy a legacy of human and civil rights and unparalleled economic prosperity. America blends many ethnicities and cultures into peaceful communities. But each good also has a shadow side. Our emphasis on rights breeds individualism. Our economic model requires consumerism. Instead of building inclusive community, we continue our original sin of slavery

in the form of racial injustice and economic inequality. Our prosperity has funded our military power, for human rights but also for domination of other nations and of their natural resources. This is my territory, with its graces and its sins, with its challenges and its need for redemption.

The Florence meeting stressed listening, making room, welcoming, accompanying and creating bonds as Christian ways of dwelling in a territory.

Christians are called to create space for mutual dialogue in our loud, competitive, and self-referential American culture. I struggle constantly with the need to listen. My country's self-referential culture finds an echo in my personality. Also, as a former teacher, I am tempted to think I have all the answers. My personal challenge is to silence the noise of my own thoughts and words. The reward is to receive the gift of another person in a true dialogue.

Self-referential attitudes encourage polarization; we live within bubbles, listening only to those who think as we do. By instinct and family formation, I am very involved in civic activism, seeing public policy as an instrument for justice in our world. Therefore, I'm sure that I'm always right! It seems that every American is equally convinced of being absolutely right. We all think we must pass judgment on everyone else in the style of reality television shows.

These attitudes extend to international relationships. Some chant, "Make America great again," meaning military domination motivated by profit. They rush into conflict, scorning the mutual listening, compromise, and collaboration required for negotiation.

Donald Trump is stoking a fire already present in the hyper-masculinized American psyche. We must acknowledge these proclivities existing under the surface of our national identity and occasionally rising to the light. But do not blame all Americans for his political rise. He has gained a plurality, not a majority, of votes within the Republican Party. The Democratic Party is much larger and more broadly representative of our nation and of women, who tend to vote more on issues of human well-being and less on illusions of power.

Despite the fact that immigration built the United States, hyper-nationalism is closing many minds – not to mention our borders. In my

parish, fortunately, we try to be welcoming to new Hispanic parishioners, a fresh source of vitality for us. The fact that they do not have legal documentation is opening our native-born eyes to their plight as brothers and sisters.

Listening

However, the Church too is often polarized and quick to embrace conflict rather than listening. We may describe fellow-Catholics by stereotypes: un-orthodox, reactionary, etc. We may even demonize others. Surely Jesus' deep dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well demonstrates what Pope Francis describes as building bridges rather than walls. The person who expresses views so different from mine is a brother or sister with whom I share the table of the Lord's Supper. In situations of conflict I try to look at him or her with the eyes of God, who has loved this person into being. This is someone from whom I may be able to learn, or at least understand better. We may find common ground and even learn to collaborate. But first I must relinquish my desire to control the conversation or the situation.

In a very simple example, my fellow-parishioner Loretta complained that I had spoken of God without using the word "Father." My first impulse was to criticize patriarchal language. Thank God, the Holy Spirit whispered a millisecond before the criticism left my lips. Instead I asked her why "Father" was such an important word for her. She shared some of her personal history. I was enriched and Loretta and I became friends at a new depth.

This doesn't always happen, but often we can reach deeper mutual respect. With her customary practical feminine wisdom, St. Angela addressed the problem of conflicting ideas in the Seventh Counsel, saying, "Consider each one as good but be prudent for your own good." Striving to live this way, we can foster a disposition to resolve differences through relationship rather than through conflict.

Welcoming and Being Welcomed

Social and economic walls separate Americans of different races. Even without much money, as a white person I have opportunities that are closed to my fellow-citizens of color, not to mention my expectation of justice before the law. Separation impoverishes us all, including privileged whites like myself. One of my greatest blessings is to dwell in a neighborhood with a good mixture of Euro-Americans and African Americans. In the apartment next to mine lives Sarah, an African-American woman of my own age who appears older. Years of hard physical work and minimal health care have taken their toll on her. As women of the same age, though, we enjoy sharing our views on life. Our womanhood is common ground. My friends Geraldine and Frank telephone if they haven't seen me for a while, concerned about my well-being. Geraldine feels comfortable to discuss aspects of female healthcare with me, and we work together on political action. Frank and I pray together.

I do not wish to speak of "welcoming" my African-American neighbors or of making space for them. I receive the grace of *being welcomed* by people who have reason *not* to welcome me. Their welcome is humbling. It is I who learn from my African-American friends. I am the "other" to whom their hearts are open. It is I who am inspired by their four centuries and more of perseverance rooted in deep faith in God, by their courage, and by their generosity amid their poverty.

When I allow the Holy Spirit to remove me from the pedestal of my white privilege, I am evangelized by someone who may seem different.

Making Room

Consumer culture has little room for persons who are poor or who create wealth and comfort for others to enjoy. It has no room for those who struggle with mental illness, addiction, disability or imprisonment. They are usually invisible to the majority, marginalized. St. Angela exhorted the Company's leaders to respect and esteem those

who seem least and lowest. Often women – who feel less need to control – can more readily respect and esteem the vulnerable.

Accompanying

At times we are asked to minister. Most often, however, the ministry or service emerges within the ordinary texture of shared daily life. Among our family, co-workers, and fellow parishioners, we share the joy of a marriage. When a marriage ruptures, we are there to accompany them. We assist parents by encouragement and presence – and perhaps cooking or baby-sitting – and are blessed by their affection. When they confront illness or death, we are there to accompany them. At parties we find God's presence in conviviality with our friends. When they become depressed or break a bone, we are there to accompany them. Although I have experienced all these situations myself, I say "we" because I know that you too dwell in these circles of life. Here we respond to our secular vocation. Saint Angela showed us that our secular consecration means encountering God and serving God in this very ordinary world.

Most of what I have said is about dwelling in the territory of Cincinnati, Ohio, in the United States of America, with its particular features and relationships. I also dwell on earth, an earth that is too small for any part of it to be dismissed from my relationships. Being a member of the global Company is one reminder that I have sisters on every continent. Textile workers in Asia may be invisible to me, but they are not outside my circle of relationship. St. Angela rejected the wearing of embroidery, well aware of the conditions of the women who labored over that handiwork, for others to wear. I try to purchase and use goods with this consciousness, avoiding as far as possible what seems to be the result of exploitation.

Relationship with Mother Earth

Earth itself is not simply territory. We dwell in relationship with our sister Mother Earth, as Pope Francis reminds us. St. Angela's words from the end of her chapter on obedience are a resounding challenge to me: "Obey God and each creature for love of God." What would earth,

our common home, be like if we all dwelt in this spirit? If we all listened for God's presence and guidance in the very nature of our world?

Christ has called me to this life of secular consecration, that is, to serve God, together with all of you. How? By dwelling in my parish and neighborhood, in my family and civic community, in my nation and on Mother Earth. To dwell – deeply present and engaged in my territory – in authentic and mutual relationships.



EDUCATE

Maria Pia Zappalà, Directress, Company of Catania



Before starting my speech, I would like to thank our President and the Council of the Federation for trusting me to speak in this round table with the hope of properly contributing, as a daughter of St. Angela, about the daily experiences and the educational challenges of today's world, with care and dedication. The topic that was assigned to me

and on which I will focus is the verb **educate**. All people have always given high value to this word, because it is on education that you bet the future of society and the good performance of a civil society that is culturally advanced.

I have worked in the state school for many years. I'm an English teacher in the "Scuola Media" of my region. I like my work, I'm really happy about it, and since the beginning I have thanked God for the beautiful opportunity he gave me to carry out this type of service for the sake of his vineyard. Such a long period spent in an educational institution has allowed me to be a witness and to live fully the changes that slowly but surely have occurred in the various levels involved with all matters relating to education: social, cultural, legislative and human levels.

I don't hide the fact that with the advance of time the difficulties have increased, the negative aspects sometimes seem to take over and discouragement sets in easily. **Educating** has become a real challenge; overcoming this challenge requires great enthusiasm and determination, goodwill, patience and above all joy... the joy of self-giving, the joy of interacting with positivity and correctness, the joy of commitment to

build together, the joy of the Kingdom of God. So much joy must shine through the educator's eyes, her attitudes, her words, her smile!

Educating is a challenge because today we must operate at 360 degrees: the educator no longer has the task of solely helping the child, the boy or the youth to grow up well. The educator often has to take up the burden of the family, turning her attention to parents who need to be assisted because they hardly know how to do their job or, better, they have lost their ability to establish effective relationships with their children. Furthermore, the educator isn't a loner who goes on her way without meeting anyone; there are others, colleagues, headmasters, the staff of the various school districts, who sometimes need a word of conviction and planning.

At this moment, somebody is certainly thinking that what I say isn't new and that the times have always been difficult for educators, but I will answer that we have just to consider some practical data to realize that the situation is quite different. In the past, family existed and could be collaborative; today it often doesn't exist or it functions poorly, with endless internal problems. In the past you could rely on values that somehow helped society; today a worrisome culture of aggression and violence is spreading. In the past the outlook on life was realistic; today virtual activities are followed, things that slowly move one away from the authentic flavors of everyday life... and the list could go on.

At this point I would like to insert a brief parenthesis to point out that when you discuss the verb **educate**, you cannot and, maybe you should not confine its meaning only to schools. It's true that educational activity usually involves young learners, but the educational field is very large, and we rightly have to consider it in its totality.

Let me talk about an experience which is teaching me a lot and that in a certain sense affects all of us, everyone who is participating in this International Conference in Verona. I'm referring to my current Company experience... I'm carrying out a service within my Company of Catania that makes me aware of an important truth: lifelong formation is fundamental for our Companies and no alternative can replace it. I have realized that, despite their long years of consecrated

life, some of St. Angela's daughters lack adequate "education" or, as we call it, "formation." After all, what is "formation" if not a specific aspect of education, pursuing appropriate goals corresponding to certain criteria and objectives? Youth or maturity doesn't matter; more or less culture doesn't matter; social status doesn't matter. We daughters of St. Angela need to educate ourselves, or more properly to be educated in facing a quickly changing reality. The world goes forward and we risk staying enclosed in our small opinions, perhaps lamenting and expressing an inappropriate amazement at happenings in the society around us. Maybe linking the two concepts "education" and "formation" may seem forced or exaggerated here, but I assure you that our Companies (at least some of them) also need an educational plan to help each member to really and responsibly open up to the life of secular consecration she has chosen.

Let's go back to the verb **educate** as it was handled by the Ecclesial Conference held in Florence last November 2015. The text from the conference says, *"The coming of God and His being among us... asks to conjugate the verb **educate**, placing before young people the model of the Teacher from Nazareth who had nowhere to lay his head, so as to be the witness to the truth of God-Father of all, rich in mercy."* What does that mean? I'd like to discuss what interests us in the first person... what do I mean? I ask myself and you a question that seems all the more relevant in this context: today how can one of St. Angela's daughters conjugate the verb **educate** in her experience? How is it suitable to act? What steps should the Ursuline of our time do, in the twenty-first century, to carry out this project contained in the verb **educate**? Let's not ignore the fact that this involves an action sought urgently and decisively by the Church. All Christians must feel called, but I believe that an institute of secular consecrated life is another thing, it's in the front row. It must be strenuously involved in this summons. I think that we have to get involved in the conversation and we must engage ourselves as we can.

"Educating is an art" someone has said. It's a very lovely definition... in which the educator becomes an artist who uses her hands to model the clay she is holding... and with her brush she paints

the outlines of a clear and harmonious personality. “Educating is an art,” and I add: educating is an art that is learned, loved and perfected to be transformed into a passion... your own passion! The preparatory document of the Ecclesial Conference in Florence contains this definition: “Educating is an art” and it continues: *“It’s necessary that each of us, immersed in this changing context, learn it again, seeking the wisdom which allows us to live in peace among ourselves and with creation. It isn’t just the absence of conflicts, but the weaving of deep and free relationships.”*

The literature professor and successful writer Alessandro D’Avenia, speaking at the Conference, emphasized that *“The art of educating is the art of living,”* and then he expressed a thought that amazed me... putting together two very challenging verbs: *educating* and *praying*. He said, *“The way of educating depends on how much we pray, on the time we spend in front of the Lord: it is God that converts me and, through me, the other will perceive a transforming gaze, through which things appear good and beautiful.”* I’ll tell you an episode in the life of a great woman of our time, Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, an episode that appears to have little to do with the educational issue, but we will soon realize that the message closely relates to the topic we are discussing.

One day Mother Teresa spoke with a seminarian. Looking at him with her clear and insightful eyes, she asked, “How many hours do you pray every day?” The young man was surprised by such a question and tried to defend himself by saying, “Mother, I expected an appeal to charity from you, an invitation to love the poor. Why do you ask me how many hours I pray?” Mother Teresa took his hands and folded them between hers, as if to convey what she had in her heart. Then she confided, “My dear son, without God we are too poor to be able to help our children! Remember: I am only a poor woman who prays; praying, God puts his love in my heart and so I can love the poor. Praying!”

We are discussing here the verb **“educate.”** Today I seem to hear Mother Teresa directing this message to us modern teachers, modern educators and – why not – to the mothers of our children and the fathers of our young people: “My children, without God we are too

poor to help our kids. God and God alone puts his love in our heart and so we can love the young. Praying!”

I think it's time to consult the woman who interlaced her life with the verb educate... a great educator ... energetic and at the same time sensitive, refined and resolute, capable ... an educator who knew the human heart and how to transform it, to educate it. I am referring to our dear St. Angela Merici: educating was certainly the engine that supported her in all her choices. I don't think I exaggerate if I say that every experience of Angela found its resolution in a very successful educational action. She counseled children and adults; she taught the love of God and developing a good conscience; she inculcated healthy principles for civil coexistence; she also transmitted the knowledge of practical, daily activities. Angela was a teacher who became a model and unsurpassed example for her daughters who are educators.

I will mention just a few of her Counsels: *“Be gentle and compassionate towards your dear daughters. And strive to act solely out of the sole love of God and out of the sole zeal for souls when you admonish and advise them... For you will achieve more with kindness and gentleness than with harshness and sharp rebukes”* (Second Counsel, 1-3). *“Tell them that, wherever they are, they should give good example... And seek to spread peace and concord where they are. And above all let them be humble and gentle”* (Fifth Counsel, 13-17). *“As for you, live and behave in such a way that your daughters may see in you a model. And what you want them to do, do it yourselves first”* (Sixth Counsel, 1-2). They are only a few examples, but they will undoubtedly reveal the educational method of Angela Merici.

Why educate? On May 20, 2014, in his speech to Italian school personnel, Pope Francis had this to say: *“One is educated to learn many things, that is, much important content, in order to behave in a certain way and also adopt values. And this is very important.”* Then, before closing his speech, he expressed a wish to all those who are involved in the educational process: *“I wish you all... a journey that enables you to learn three languages that a mature person should know how to “speak”: the language of the mind, the language of the heart and the language of the hands. [These are expressed] harmoniously: thinking*

*about what you **feel** and what you **do**; **feeling** deeply what you think and what you do; and **doing well** what you think and what you feel. Three languages, together in harmony!"*

I'm about to conclude. Pope Francis has pointed out the effort that we educators have to make today more than ever: helping the other to think well, to feel well, to do well. We will succeed in our enterprise through prayer. A daughter of St. Angela who is an educator should pray to be able to conjugate the verb **educate** in her life. By praying we will be able to establish human relationships that will surely transform the educational challenge of our century into an enriching experience for us and especially for those who interact with us. For me, so many years of work in the service of "education" have led me to develop this thought: **To educate is to live in love...**

Educating is nothing but experiencing love, it means putting love at the center of our lives. If we want our educational efforts to succeed, we must let the unstoppable force of love accompany us. Some might argue: "Of course I love those I want to educate!" And I say: "It's not always this case. This is only partially true. The situations are very different: sometimes the educator wants to convey only the notions and remains remote from those who should be educated. Sometimes, in the name of education, we try to suffocate others; maybe we wish them well, but we can't make them free and well balanced."

You see, education is something extremely delicate, and we must learn this art by involving ourselves in the question every day, maybe letting ourselves be led by the educational method of the One who alone is the true Teacher ... our Lover Jesus.



The Prayer of an Educator, Daughter of Saint Angela Merici

Lord Jesus, the one and only Love of my life,
You call me to be a witness of your Word,
to help others by good example,
to educate those close to me for liberty.
Grant me a docile heart able to safeguard
your teachings with diligence;
let my thoughts always be centered on You,
source of eternal wisdom;
make my words true and convincing in proclaiming
the beauty of your Kingdom.

Lord Jesus, grant that I may love as You love,
think as You think, speak as You speak,
so that my every deed as an educator
may have its source and its fulfillment
in You, great Teacher from Nazareth.
Make me silence to listen to the voices
of those you entrust to me to educate;
make me shade in the heat of their days;
make me smile to welcome their plans,
make me joy to share their desires and their hopes,
make me light to shine on their actions and their choices.

Saint Angela, extraordinary educator of youth and adults,
teach me to be kindly and gentle,
to have good sense and respect for all, to work with justice and truth;
help me act only out of love of God
and only for the good of those entrusted to my care. **Amen.**

(MARIA PIA Zappalà)

TRANSFIGURE

Directress, Company of Piacenza



The verb “transfigure” takes us back to Jesus’ life, to that Gospel episode on Mount Tabor, where Jesus was transfigured and his appearance was changed before Peter, James and John. At the very moment you met Jesus and decided to put your feet in his footprints to follow

him, you realized that, despite the disproportion between you and him, transfiguration became the sense and the meaning of your life too. This flows from your understanding that Jesus’ thoughts, wishes and actions must take shape in you, as we have been created in God’s own image and likeness.

Thus in all of us there is a desire for transfiguration hidden in our heart, even if we do not recall it daily and maybe are not fully aware of it. Our desire to be transfigured is intense. Our anxiety to reach a model of success that we consider extremely attractive, or any type of human achievement, is not in itself a bad desire. It resembles the infinite, because each human being is in God’s own image, and God is infinite, almighty, omniscient. Even when we are upset because of our limits and failures and we cannot perform as we would like, this desire remains.

So often we reveal ourselves to be wretched and miserable, egoist instead of generous, mean instead of compassionate, and above all dissatisfied and discouraged. For many of us this is a daily experience.

We must contemplate Jesus' transfiguration. Looking at it we can glimpse our transfiguration, the one that God wants to work in our life.

We have a weak and fragile body but, in God's plan, our body, our weak and fragile humanity is called to transfiguration, to share in God's beauty, God's life, God's holiness.

God created the world not so that the world would sooner or later be destroyed, but rather for it to share in the fullness of God's life and for humanity to walk the path of the Lord's glorification. Clearly our body's path of transfiguration is the same as the one of Jesus' transfiguration. The transfiguration of Jesus happened with the Passion, Death and Resurrection; ours takes place in the same way. Jesus was transfigured because the fullness of God's love is in him.

Our transfiguration does not happen externally as something awesome and extraordinary, leaving people astounded. The transfiguration happens when our body contains the love that comes from God, produces the love that comes from God, when our words become the words of God's love, and when our actions and relationships become animated by the love of God.

Transfiguration is faith's gaze, a different way of looking at human reality, at the world and at history. Transfiguration represents the synthesis of the first four stages that come before it (going out, proclaiming, dwelling, educating), which in turn are the fruit of a transfigured reality.

Transfiguration lies in an attitude of humanizing as much as possible people and all that exists, the whole creation, on the basis of the person of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Transfiguration is transformation in order to discern God's will, that is, what pleases him and tends toward the perfect.

Transfiguration is transformation in order to discern; it is the will not to conform to worldliness. Transfiguration is the ability to discern within the world where we live without belonging to it; being in the world without becoming worldly. Transfiguration gives shape and essence to the Christian's lifestyle, forges her thoughts and actions, molds the conscience.

Transfiguration is viewing the person, recognizing in the face of our neighbor the face of a person hidden behind so many countenances: Christ's face. It means knowing how to welcome, love, accept and embrace him.

What does transfiguration mean to me? It is abandoning myself and putting myself in Somebody's hands and giving him *carte blanche*, so that my entire life, my very being, may become that transfiguring reality, which can, in turn, transfigure those close to me.

It is a continuing journey and a moment-by-moment conversion, to remain in constant communion with him.

One day I entered the church and I almost shouted, "I can't take any more." In that silence, alone, in a close intimacy, the unexpected, inner answer came to me: "I can't take any more, without loving you more."

In Saint Angela we can see an articulation of the Word: her life was a pilgrimage, not only from an historical point of view, but in her travels among the people of her world, to be an instrument of peace and to be able to transfigure her surroundings. This is possible only through the experience of love.

Whoever meets me has the right to be loved, recognized, and welcomed: only like this it is possible to walk the path of transfiguration, as Pope Francis tells us in the letter "Contemplate." Only love is able to perceive hidden things: we are invited to that wisdom of the heart which never separates God's love from love for others, especially for the poor, the least ones, Christ's flesh, the face of the crucified Lord. The consistent Christian experiences that encounter with heart-felt attention. This is why, in conjunction with professional competencies and plans, one needs a well-formed heart, for faith goes into action through love.

The Gospel always exhorts us to take the risk of looking our neighbor in the face, with his demanding physical presence, with his pain, his requests, with a joy that is contagious when we remain in close contact. Let's open our eyes to look the world's miseries, the wounds of so many brothers and sisters deprived of their dignity. Let's allow ourselves to feel stirred by listening to their cries for help. May our

hands clasp their hands and bring them close to us to feel the warmth of our presence, friendship, sisterhood.

In my job, I'm always in touch with the reality of pain, both physical and psychological. I work as medical doctor in a rehabilitation clinic for long hospitalizations. The majority of the patients are aged, presenting Alzheimer pathologies or suffering broken bones or the consequences of accidents. There are some young persons too, and recently many patients "without fixed abode," as they get called nowadays. Approaching them is not always easy, sometimes because of language differences, more often because of negative behavior towards the personnel. Often my colleagues adopt attitudes of refusal and criticism towards them.

I remember a patient without clothes or slippers, a real vagabond. I approached him and we started talking. I got involved in procuring him undergarments, pajamas and the essentials to wash himself, while my colleagues almost made fun of me. The next day he looked like a different person, or better, he was another person: I saw him smiling, and even the assistants noticed the day-by-day changes in him. One morning he was looking for a pen to fill in his crossword puzzle. People passing by pretended not to see him. I had only one, but it didn't take much to go looking for another and take it to him, which I did. I caught his gaze; maybe for the first time someone took an interest in him. Of course, being available and welcoming is not always taken for granted. Sometimes I notice that, in order to preserve an appearance of professionalism and authority, I impose on others and give the impression that I have no time to waste. Acting like this, I miss the opportunity to let the reality of the transfigured One (in my heart) show through. In such cases I entrust myself to the infinite mercy of the Lord and come back to this reality.

A lady was once hospitalized for a serious form of Alzheimer's: she did not let herself be touched and refused to eat. One morning I entered the room to visit the patient in the next bed. The lady's relative was exhausted after an hour of trying to feed her some yogurt, mixed with her ground-up medications. The lady kept spitting it out. I got close to her, looked at her kindly, and started to feed her; soon she had

eaten the whole yogurt. Joking, the relative offered me a care-giver job. I did hope that my Head Physician would not get to know what had happened, but shortly after he telephoned me asking how I could manage that. As it is not always possible to explain the power of love, I simply answered that perhaps the lady found me pleasant.

We started a rehabilitation plan with a young woman with motor problems due to a serious disability; one morning she unexpectedly died. I had no words for her mother and sister, who had been so attentive and caring to her, and were so extremely exhausted. I hugged them close while telling that I would pray for them (since they were believers). Eight years later they came to visit me, and the mother said, “Doctor, I will never forget that hug.” It is really true that loves endures forever.

A colleague harshly attacked me with statements about things I had done wrong. I was convinced that I had acted correctly, and our relationship was not calm. I checked my actions with some co-workers, who also thought I was right. However the relationship had deteriorated and it was hard for me to take the first step to repair it. What counts for eternity? My rightness or reconciliation? So I decided to talk to him: we came to an understanding and got together again in a new way.

One day a young lady came for a check-up. She looked particularly nervous, strained, and I could feel a special tension while examining her. I looked at the files she had brought and discussed with her only her spinal column, nothing else. Approaching the end of our appointment, she told me, “Doctor, meeting with you was what I needed. I recently became a widow and gave up on everything. Now I want to restart.” Love can truly read what is in the heart and give the right answers to people in need. We



are its instruments only if we are connected to the Source, to him. “I am all things to all people, so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). I wish my life could be like this.

To our mother Angela, the weakest being was the most beloved. Quoting Cozzano: “With maternal love she embraced each creature. Even the most sinful received the greatest kindness from her; if she could not succeed in converting such a person, at least she tried by her gentle love to persuade him to do a little good, or a little less evil.”



I found a reflection expressing transfiguration very well: “Fall into the deepest contemplation and remain among people, close to your fellow human beings. Get lost in the crowd to speak about God. Be part of God’s plans for humanity, to embroider the crowd with threads of light. At the same time,

share with neighbors their hunger, their bruises, and their brief joys. The appeal of this modern time is most human and most divine if one can think about Jesus and Mary, who are the Word of God, son of a carpenter, and the Seat of Wisdom, mother of a family.”

This braiding of the divine and the human (human in divine and divine in human) is transfiguration. In Saint Angela there was no distinction of persons or realities that could not be transfigured. Her presence itself was already a transfiguration and fascinated all the people she met.



ECHOES OF THE 2016 MEETING



Consoled and gladdened ... together

I took part in the International Meeting of the Federation held in Verona on the theme “Consecrated secularity – inhabit the world.”

Upon Kate’s invitation I willingly share with you the echoes of this new experience of Company.

With gratitude and commitment I experienced moments of listening, reflection, mutual discussion and prayer.

The unhurried lunches and dinners proved to be precious occasions to get to know one another in an enjoyable way, in the dailyness of our life both past and present, with our joys, toils and difficulties.

The round table where some sisters talked about themselves along the lines of the Florence meeting with the five verbs, dwell – go out – proclaim – educate – transfigure, inspired me with praise and thanksgiving to him who works “marvels of grace” within us, albeit amidst the “weeds” of our frailty, slowness and infidelity.

While listening to words of one speaker addressing the greatness and responsibility of our being women created in order to be “space open to life”, I couldn’t help but recall that excerpt from Psalm 139: “*It was you who created my inmost self...for all these mysteries I thank you: for the wonder of myself; for the wonder of your works*” (vv. 13-14).

Last, but far from least, we were given the opportunity for a contemplative foretaste of the mystery of God and man through the works of art in St. Mark’s in Venice and the tiny island of Torcello. Marvelous indeed!

Heartfelt thanks to those who made the various moments of this Meeting possible, and a sisterly embrace to one and all.

Letizia, Company of Trent



Encounter and Spiritual Growth

The Federation of Companies experienced the gathering of many Sisters from Companies around the world from July 19 to 23, 2016, in Villafranca (Verona); in addition to European members, it was a joy for us to share important moments



with the African and American daughters of Saint Angela, as well as two sisters from Indonesia. For everyone present it proved to be a stupendous occasion of encounter and an opportunity for spiritual growth, following the footsteps of our holy Mother Angela, who guides and sustains us in the choices we make in life.

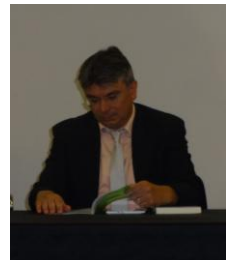
Moving indeed were the embraces when we met and gathered together the first evening, the day of arrivals and ‘newness’!

Our hearts beat faster each time we were able to see each other and get to know one another all the better, or exchange embraces again with the desire to express newness of intentions and thoughts. Each day was woven with prayer, with the recital of Lauds and Vespers and the Eucharistic Celebration, the wellspring of joy and communion for each Sister.

Beautiful and profound were the presentations and the testimonials (included in this document).

With sincere emotion each one of us was able to express the joy of belonging to the Company of Saint Ursula, feeling ourselves united in the world and for the world with all the Sisters in the various countries, forming unity wherever we are called to bear witness with prayer and charity. This is a Charism, our Charism, which becomes richer and richer, year after year, because it is ever alive and incisive. Thank you, dear Sisters!

One evening after dinner we were joined by **Prof. Paolo Gheda**, who had come to Villafranca to present his new book published by the Libreria Editrice Vaticana and entitled *The History of the Federation Company of Saint Ursula*. Most pleased



with this excellent and new source of information at our disposal, we thanked him wholeheartedly and are grateful to him for the enormous and demanding work he has done, which saw the light of day in a volume welcomed with wide acclaim!

Awaiting us on the last day of the Meeting was an extraordinary and well-deserved **excursion to Venice and its environs!**

Each instant of this meeting was fully experienced among the sisters, who gathered closely together around Saint Angela to savor her charisma, not only through the reading of important and useful texts, and reflection upon them, but also in getting together for joint ‘re-creation,’ keeping ever “present” and well impressed in mind and soul the values that have been handed down to us as the wondrous heritage of our holy Mother Angela.

Saturday, July 23, was the day of farewells; yes, with a touch of regret, but with so much spiritual richness and desires that were new, fresh, and enriched with hope, the hope of getting together and embracing one another again as soon as possible, each one committed to the journey of following our Lover. Heartfelt thanks to one and all for the example I received!

Vera Agostina Bonaita



Gratitude to God and to the Federation

My gratitude to God and the Federation for having enabled Meity and me to take part in the international meeting held in July 2016.

We felt very much at home in Company with so many sisters. . .we are very grateful to you. We were also pleased that we were able to visit Venice and make a pilgrimage to other churches. Thank you for our being together in the “sisterhood” among us.

*Sincerely yours,
Ona Cresensia, Indonesia*





Birthday of the Company

Brescia November 25-26, 2016
Living contemporary life

Friday, November 25

- **5 p.m. Sanctuary of Saint Angela Merici:** Hour of Merician prayer with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
- **6:15 p.m. Solemn Vespers of Saint Angela;** Presider Most Rev. Luciano Monari, Bishop of Brescia
- **7:30 p.m. Dinner** at the Casa Sant'Angela
- **9 p.m. Surprise!**

Saturday, November 26

- **8:30 a.m. Mass, Sanctuary of Saint Angela Merici;** Presider Most Rev. Olmi, Superior of the Company of Brescia
- **10 a.m. Casa Sant'Angela:** Greetings from Superior of the Company of Brescia
President of the Federation
- Presentation by Carmela Tascone: *Living contemporary life*
- Break
- **11:30 a.m.** Presentation by Maria Teresa Fenaroli:
Living in one's territory as a daughter of Saint Angela
- **1 p.m.** Lunch
- **2:30 p.m.** Sharing based on the presentations and on our Merician life
- **3:30 p.m.** Closing assembly and celebration of Vespers

FOR INFORMATION AND RESERVATIONS:

Secretary of the Company of St. Angela:

Via F. Crispi, 23 - 25121 Brescia

tel. 030.295675 - fax 030.2937092; info@angelamerici.it

Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 12 and 3 to 5 p.m.

COMPANY OF MODENA-BOLOGNA

The Company of Modena-Bologna is pleased to announce a happy event: the celebration of the 400th anniversary of its foundation.

The closing of the Holy Door will be the beginning of the Modena-Bologna Company's jubilee year, which will culminate on November 19, 2017, with a solemn Eucharistic Celebration.

A year of prayer and reflection, but above all a year of thanksgiving for the wonders that *the Lover of us all* has brought about, brings about, and will continue to bring about in the life of each sister and of the Company.

May Our Mother Angela intercede so that this year may be an occasion to evoke memories of the past with gratitude, live the present with passion, and embrace the future with hope.