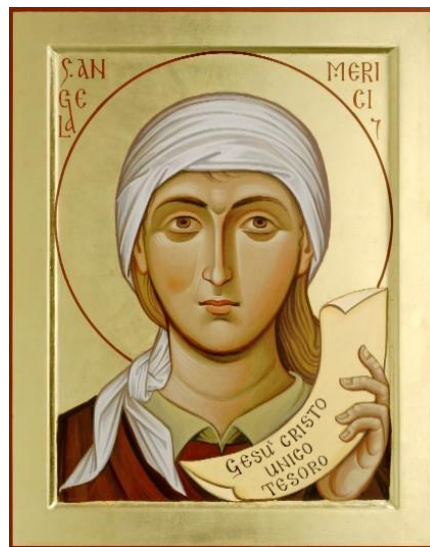




A path of holiness



Spiritual reading of the Constitutions of the Company

Caterina Dalmaso

A path of holiness...
Spiritual reading of the Constitutions of the Company
Foreword

The Constitutions now in force were approved on August 8, 1994, an historic date since the Company had been approved by the diocesan Ordinary on August 8, 1536.

The new President (Kate succeeding Elisa Tarolli) and the new Council of the Federation were elected that same year and began their term of service with the new Constitutions in hand after a journey that was by no means entirely foreseeable.

During the first international conference organized by the new Council in Mendola (August 18-25, 1995) we drew close to the new Constitutions with this spirit in mind: ***The Constitutions, a gift to be lived in fidelity.***

With the passing of years we have focused our attention on the Constitutions many times and already made them an object of study for directresses and moderators, because they are the rule of life which we must constantly call to mind, refer to and live in obedience and with love.

We also decided to collate all these notes and offer them to one and all in a red colored booklet ('red – love') entitled: ***The Constitutions, food for thought.***

Several directresses took turns engaging in in-depth study, and provided a study of the text of the Constitutions in order to ensure suitable and timely formation in the Groups and in the Companies.

It would seem, however, that this approach, this study and this going deeper do not suffice. In the grace and the responsibility of having close contacts with individual sisters and Companies, I often realize the degree to which we often fall short in faithful observance of the Constitutions. Absorbed by our projects and our all-too-material problems. . .at times we have drifted away from the true spirit of the Constitutions without even realizing it, and we find it difficult to draw pure water from the well of our own house: the writings of St. Angela and the Constitutions of the Company. All of this, however, had to be clear, as we read in the Constitutions:

1.5. In the life of the Foundress, in the Rule, the Counsels and the Testament, inserted into the current historical context by the present Constitutions, we find the fundamental guide of our life and the way for carrying out the purpose of the Institute: striving for the perfection of charity; honoring Jesus Christ; serving God and His Reign; and collaborating in the salvation of the world.

Why should we open the pages of the Constitutions? To repeat the same things? Maybe yes, because there is nothing new under the sun. . .Then again, it is not a bad idea to go back to them.

Be that as it may, I see the true motivation for this rereading of mine in the years spent preparing and drafting the text of the present Constitutions. As I remember so well, we wanted a text that would link due juridical clarity with the spiritual inspiration of Angela Merici. Yes, because what we have in hand are the writings of our Foundress and the text of the Constitutions: *we find the fundamental rule of our life and the way to achieve the purpose of the institute* precisely in the unison of these texts (published together in a single volume).

I have always appreciated these Constitutions as able to harmonize the rule of our life so very well and have always asserted that these Constitutions are truly ours alone, unable to be mistaken for those of any other institute of consecrated life, even those that are secular in nature.

Moreover, we must be so grateful to all those who did so much work drafting them, so many persons still with us, and others already in the garland of the saints.

Hence, stirring within me was the desire to take a more spiritual approach, without overlooking the juridical factor that prevails as far as observance of the Constitutions is concerned, and must always be recalled.

With the Constitutions open before us, in these encounters we want to do what Saint Angela says in the Eighth Legacy: *"..., together like this, they might also meet each other as loving sisters and thus, talking over spiritual matters, rejoice together and together encourage one another, which will be no small help to them.."*

I believe it will certainly be to our benefit to make this new spiritual effort to live the Constitutions in fidelity today.

The Constitutions are intended to deepen for today a longstanding charism, the charism of the Company founded by Saint Angela Merici in 1535.

At the conference in 1995, Rev. Adriano Tessarollo had said: *“Now it is a matter of inspiring and comparing the life of the Companies with the provisions of the Constitutions, welcomed as the fruit of the light of the Holy Spirit which always inspires what is most fitting to whoever has a docile. listening heart.”*

By way of method, I will not comment on all the articles of the Constitutions, nor will I deal with the texts from a juridical viewpoint. Instead, I will dwell on the articles that may help us in a spiritual reading, that is to say much akin to meditation on our part.

Thereby, it is our intention with this endeavor of spiritual closeness to inspire and monitor our personal life and the life of our Companies according to the *provisions*, the “spirit” of our Constitutions.

We thereby wish to open our heart to listening, to renewal, to living in this way the Merician spirituality which is so essential to our Constitutions and with which they are so imbued.

Prayer for living the Constitutions

*Holy Spirit, true creator of fruitfulness
in the Church’s life,
you who raised up in it
the charism of secular consecration
and who inspired Saint Angela Merici
to found the Company of Saint Ursula,
continue to renew in us this marvelous form of life,
in fidelity to its origins and to the Church’s expectations today.*

*Saint Angela, Mother and Foundress,
help us seek and find in your life, in your writings,
and in the Constitutions approved by the Church
the fundamental norm of our life
and the way to bring about the purpose of the institute.*

*This is how we want to honor Jesus Christ,
to serve his Kingdom, and to collaborate for the salvation of the world.
In the obedience that is a great light, we want to receive
what the Constitutions offer us as a path of holiness
in the common and ordinary conditions of human existence,
united in a spousal relationship to the Son of God,
the Lover of us all.
Amen.*

DECREE
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE
AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE APPROVING THE
CONSTITUTIONS

8 August 1994

(458th anniversary of the approbation of the Company
by the diocesan Ordinary)

Spiritual life = life according to the Spirit

The Holy Spirit, true author of the fruitfulness of the life of the Church, has raised up in her the charism of secular consecration, which, in the course of centuries, has gathered persons desirous of consecrating themselves totally to God with the profession of the Evangelical Councils lived in the world, without any exterior sign of their vocation, in order to be yeast and ferment of holiness from within.

I would like to approach the Constitutions of the Company with a spiritual frame of mind; spirituality, as we know, is life according to the Spirit. We find the clear profile of secular spirituality in the Decree of Approbation:

- ❖ **The Holy Spirit** at the very wellspring of the charism of secular consecration; Saint Angela, *obedient to the counsels and inspirations the Holy Spirit never ceases to arouse in hearts*, proved able to welcome this marvelous charism and hand it down to us. Our docility, our collaboration and our welcoming must be our response to the action of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ **Total consecration to God and the profession of the evangelical counsels lived in the world.** *“Life consecrated through profession of the evangelical counsels is a stable form of living, in which the faithful follow Christ more closely under the action of the holy Spirit, and are totally dedicated to God, who is supremely loved” (Code of Canon Law canon. 573,§1).*
- ❖ **In the world without any exterior sign**, except for that of belonging to Christ. . . .without concern for exterior signs, because the sign could overshadow the mission.
- ❖ **In the world as yeast and ferment of holiness:** *“The Kingdom of heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through” (Mt13:33).* I believe we must be the pinch of yeast hidden in the dough of the world, and, with faith in the Lord, wait for all the dough to be leavened in his love. Nonetheless, we can also be the woman (yes, woman it is) who knows where to get the leaven, where to put it, how to wait, and give thanks for its disproportionate effect.

The Company of Saint Ursula, forerunner of secular consecration

Forerunner of this vocation, officially recognized by the Church in 1947, is the "Company of Saint Ursula" founded by Saint Angela Merici at Brescia on November 25, 1535.

The Church, recognizing the Company of St. Ursula as the precursor of this secular vocation, stimulates our gratefulness to the Lord, the giver of all gifts, and to Saint Angela, our Mother and Founder.

Now to the task, with courage! Therefore let us all embrace this holy Rule that God through his grace has offered to us (R pr,29).

Now to the task, with courage, she would say to us yet again today: *“Let us all embrace these Holy Constitutions that God by his grace has offered to us through His Church.”*

This is an exhortation with the sense of both counsel and mild command at one and the same time, and which above all calls for the strength and force of will and desire: let us resolve to want to travel this road, and let's get down to the work at hand: *“Now to the task!”* This is our moment.

Saint Angela, however, is with us. . . she had not written a rule to have it observed by others, but had prepared it so it could lead to good, so it would help us to live as true spouses of the Savior. Likewise the Constitutions: a code of holiness.

And if the Rule, and the Constitutions today, lead us to the Spouse, Saint Angela is with us in embracing and observing them.

The Constitution, past, present and future. . .

After the publication of the new Code of Canon Law, the Secular Institute "Company of Saint Ursula" undertook specific studies, consulted experts, solicited Federated Companies and their members to deepen their own charism and their own traditions and especially begged the Lord's favor, certain of the words of Saint Angela: "Jesus Christ will never abandon this Company as long as the world lasts," for the purpose of arriving at a new constitutional text which, attentive to the present historical context and always open to the future, would reflect its beginnings and traditions."

The 1994 Constitutions. . . in order to live our today and venture into the future, solidly rooted in our origins and traditions, and ever faithful to the exhortation of Saint Angela: "*Finally, take the greatest care that the good directives given, especially those in the Rule, be most diligently observed. And if, according to times and circumstances, the need arises to make new rules or do something differently, do it prudently and with good advice*" (T 11,1-2).

And again: "*Keep to the ancient road and live a new life.*"

The Constitutions, a path of holiness...

... These [the Constitutions] will offer to all the consecrated members of the Institute a path of holiness for a more effective witness in the Church and in the world.

This phrase inspired me for the title I've given to these thoughts of mine for a spiritual reading of our Constitutions.

Spirituality certainly leads to holiness, and it is beautiful to know that the path of holiness is mapped out in the Constitutions for each sister, for each Company. . . for all consecrated laywomen. . . until the very end of the world.

This path of holiness is not self-enclosure in a disincarnated spirituality, but rather pursues a commitment of witness in the Church and the world.

Ours must be positive witness, not counter-witness; we are called to *educate to the good life of the Gospel*.

The Congregation said 'yes,' gave us the approved text of the Constitutions, and now it is up to us. . .

The Constitutions must be the reference point for each one of us and all of us together; we must study them, make use of them in initial and ongoing formation, pray them and live them. Only in this way will they be what they must be: a guide for *a path of holiness and for more incisive witness in the Church and the world*.

Observance of the Constitutions will be peace and joy for us, as we read in Psalm 119: "*great peace for those who love your precepts. . . I observe your teachings and love them with all my might. . . your law is my delight. . .*"

Observing the Constitutions leads us, in commitment and fidelity, to peace and joy in doing God's will, with a sure confirmation of truth in the constituent text the Church assures us to be an authentic path to holiness.

CONSTITUTIONS CHAPTER ONE

CALLED BY GRACE TO SERVE THE LORD TOGETHER

Let us dwell on the title of this chapter, a title which is an entire spiritual program all on its own.

- **Called**

Someone calls. . . someone hears the call: it is a vocation.

Saint Angela uses the word "*chosen*," which means elected, preferred, uplifted to a dignity, to a task. God chooses: "*having been thus chosen to be true and virginal spouses of the Son of God*" (R pr,7).

A vocation immediately indicated as one of . . . Company. . . *called* (in the plural). . . we. . . *together*. . .

Called each by name. . . all equally by Him Who is Unique. . . *the Lover of us all*.

- **By grace**

Grace is gratuitous by definition. St. Augustine put it like this: "*a free gift, something donated to you, not something owed to you. If it had been owed to you, giving it to you would have meant settling a debt with you, not bestowing a grace upon you.*"

We have been called only by *grace*. . . a gift to be acknowledged, and for which to be grateful always and at all times. . . "*you must give him infinite thanks for having granted such a singular gift especially to you*" (R pr, 5).

- **To serve together**

How will it be possible *to serve together* if not by virtue of the unity established in the Company?

United together to serve his Divine Majesty. serve the Lord together. . . The Lord is *the Spouse, the Lover of us all, the sole Treasure, the sole life and hope*. The bride serves in this life while living spousal communion.

How are we to approach this first chapter of the Constitutions in a spiritual way?

As if it were a good of utmost value, a great treasure to be invested in the best way possible. This is the chapter dealing with the patrimony of the Institute we have received as a gift today: an historical and spiritual patrimony, a great good.

"The patrimony of the Company thus comes to light as the most precious good it may have and administer in the evangelical and ecclesial sense" (Sarzi Sartori). ". . . *He summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them. . .*" (Mt 25); ". . . *he summoned ten of his servants and gave them ten pounds, saying 'do business with these until I return' . . .*" (Lk 19).

"Now I am going, and you, in the meantime, do what has to be done" Saint Angela tells us in her Last Legacy.

We can approach this first chapter with the attitude of Saint Angela: *a most inadequate and useless servant, great grace and your gift (cf T pr)*.

We can approach it with the feelings of Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother: *"he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. . . the Almighty has done great things for me."*

OUR INSTITUTE

A Company of virgins consecrated in the world

1.1. *Saint Angela Merici gave the name "Company of Saint Ursula to the institution of consecrated virgins in the world, which she founded at Brescia on November 25, 1535.*

This is a Company the Lord willed and Angela Merici founded: *"God willing in his eternal wisdom to call forth from the vanity of the world many women, especially virgins, that is, this our Company, and being pleased in his infinite goodness to use me as his instrument for this great work of his . . ."* (T pr).

Company "In our case, the word 'Company' is to be understood in neither a military nor a political sense, but in terms of relationship. Angela was to use ordinary family vocabulary: *brides, mothers, daughters, sisters*. A family whose members feel at home in company. A Company in which the members who want to live *united together to serve its Divine Majesty*, even though remaining in *diaspora*, has a common goal, a common path, and common means to be shared.

The companions in this company must choose not isolation, but relatedness; they must be capable of companionship, instill companionship, accompany one another. . .they have one and the same plan.

The word 'Company' comes from "*cum panis*," and we are told there are at least 100 citations of this in the Bible.

It is a matter of sharing, of sharing bread, sharing what is essential in order to live (bread is shared first, then all the rest), and for us this means: the vocation, salvation, holiness, spirituality, obedience, unity, communion, friendship. . .

We can take as food for thought the fact that Saint Angela gave her foundation the name Company, almost thereby revealing a method in the structure of her foundation. A little Company, groups with the leaders - in Brescia and in the vicinity for her. . .diocesan and interdiocesan for us. . .all together forming the world Company.

The Company is much like a gym for globalization!

Company of Saint Ursula: *"...the newly begun life of virgins who are called by the name Company of Saint Ursula. To the beloved daughters and sisters of the Company of Saint Ursula. . ."* (R pr, 2-3).

This Saint protector also modeled the features of Merician spirituality for us:

- ❖ The sense of Company: Saint Ursula was not on her own, she had her companions, and this is how it is in the Company.
- ❖ The crown of virginity, just as for the virgins of Saint Ursula, *"a new crown of glory and joy is prepared"* (Counsels, V, 25) for us.
- ❖ Perseverance unto the end, just like that rank of women who, with Saint Ursula, struggled unto death to defend their virginity and bear witness to their faith: *"seek out, and desire all those means and ways that are necessary to persevere and prosper till the end"* (R pr,10).
- ❖ Readiness to accept martyrdom, just like Saint Ursula and her companions: *"Furthermore, let each one be willing to be ready to die sooner than ever consent to stain and profane such a sacred jewel. [virginity]"* (R. IX,23).

Institution of consecrated virgins in the world

Institution. . .Our consecration is not private. It is total consecration to God in an institute of consecrated life recognized by the Church and of pontifical right.

A secular institute: alive in the world and of God in the world.

There have always been consecrated virgins in the world. This was also Jesus Christ's form of life. . . but the institution is new.

"These are the ones who have kept their virginity and follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (Rev 14:4).

"The Church began with virginity and in virginity will have to end. A virginity lived externally according to just and common mores. . ." says Cozzano.

Consecrated in the world: *"This indicates that the members of Secular Institutes dwell in the world among the men and women of their time, with whom they share conditions, supplications, professions.. . aware of having to change the world from within"* (John Paul II).

Perhaps we could reread John 17; 15.17: *"I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the evil one. . .Consecrate them in the truth."*

The Federation. . .the Institute

1.3 *On May 25, 1958, recognizing the needs for communion and collaboration of the Companies, the Holy See constituted and approved their Federation as a feminine secular institute of pontifical right with diocesan and interdiocesan organization.*

The unity of the one charism so resolutely recommended by Saint Angela becomes characteristic and powerful in the Federation: *"Consider therefore how important this union and concord is. Hence, desire it, seek it, embrace it, conserve it with all your energy"*(Counsels 9, 10-14).

Working small scale, and opening ourselves to the big picture! My local Company and "my" world Company. . .it is one and the same belonging.

In spiritual terms this entails: simplicity, humility, sisterliness and community, openness (overcoming territorial and cultural closure. . .) hope, active and participatory collaboration, fidelity and trustfulness: *"...and he will never abandon this Company as long as the world lasts"* (T 11,7).

The fundamental guide

1.5 *In the life of the Foundress, in the Rule, the Counsels and the Testament, inserted into the current historical context by the present Constitutions, we find the fundamental guide of our life.*

If one of us, or all together we were to ask ourselves where to find the fundamental norm/guide of our life and that of the Company, we know where to look for it: in the life and the writings of Saint Angela, which remain not stories of yesteryear, a sort of dead letter. . .but are inserted into the today of history by the Constitutions.

The life of the Foundress, her writings and the Constitutions become norm and path. . .law and road. . .commandment and itinerary.

"The writings of Saint Angela evoke the origins as the wellspring of the spiritual energies to tap for self-renewal, and the Constitutions seek to guide the journey in the today of the Church and the world". (Adriano Tessarollo).

It is good to recall these things along our spiritual itinerary with the Constitutions on hand, coupled with the writings of St. Angela. The writings of St. Angela are the ***wellspring of spiritual energies, and the Constitutions seek to guide the journey in our today.*** Return to the wellspring to renew ourselves, and renew ourselves in order also to find our way today in the Church and in the world.

Rev. Giacomo Sarzi Sartori recalled all this at a Conference in Brescia (January 19-21, 1996):

"For the Federation of the Companies, the 'Rule' at the basis of any other normative-disciplinary text is the Rule of Saint Angela Merici. And not only this, but everything she left as memory of herself: her spiritual experience and her plan of spiritual life; her life of consecration, holiness, and mission; her works: the Counsels and the Testament in addition to the Rule. . .These writings remain the charismatic foundation, and their substance is to be found and set forth anew in any disciplinary text."

Perhaps because of this fidelity, this profound bond with Saint Angela. . . our Constitutions are so beautiful. . . they seek to incarnate the charism of Saint Angela today for the good of the Company and the Church. Observance and diligence are required of us: *“take the greatest care that the good directives given, be most diligently observed”* (T.11).

The way to reach the goal

1.5 [the fundamental guide of our life] and the way for carrying out the purpose of the Institute: striving for the perfection of charity; honoring Jesus Christ; serving God and His Reign; and collaborating in the salvation of the world.

Let us take a close look at the characteristics of this path that leads to carrying out the purpose of the Company, a theological-spiritual purpose, not a devotional one.

Striving for the perfection of charity. . .

“To tend towards holiness: this is in summary the program of every consecrated life, particularly in the perspective of its renewal. . .” (V C 93).

Tending for, striving towards. . . because we’ve never arrived. . . let’s think about how many times Saint Angela speaks about effort in her writings: *“Then strive with all your might to keep yourselves as you have been called by God”* (R pr,9).

It is a matter of tending not towards an apathetic stance but towards the perfection of charity. . . . *“Be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect”* (Mt 5:48).

This perfection of charity induces us to do some serious thinking, because no one can say she is perfect, and no one can lose the hope of being able to become so in charity. We must get off our pedestals, because no one can say “I am perfect just as God is.”

The way of perfection is charity: *“Charity is the badge of Christians. It is the synthesis of their whole life: what they believe in and what they do. The way of Christian perfection is charity, because the essence of God Himself is love”* (Benedict XVI).

As the saints teach us, perfection consists essentially in love of God and neighbor. Whoever possesses charity also possesses the other virtues (let’s think about all the Merician virtues. . . enough material for an entire course of secular spirituality).

The call to perfection and holiness is for everyone, and is for us, who have responded to a call to consecration in the practice of the evangelical counsels. We know very well that we do not possess perfection, because we too are sinners saved.

And yet we are called explicitly to strive towards the perfection of charity. Perfection consists in the most complete possible gift of ourselves to God. We will find this in article 18.1 of the Constitutions: *“With our response, through taking up the evangelical counsels, we express the firm and absolute will to give ourselves unconditionally to God and to our sisters and brothers, and to be faithful for all of our life.”*

Honor Jesus Christ . . . chosen as Spouse. . . “They are to honor Jesus Christ, to whom they have promised their virginity and themselves” (Counsels 5).

I’ve found two Italian proverbs that have to do with honor, a word striking us as somewhat out of date:

A tal signore, tale onore (literal translation: *To such a Lordship, befitting honor*). *L'onore del figlio è onore del padre* (literal translation: *A son’s honor reflects on his father*).

Let’s think about which *Lordship* we must honor. . . honoring the Son of God is to honor the Father...

I also found a selection of synonyms of honor: dignity, glory, innocence, praise, merit, morality, chastity, purity, consideration, credibility, reputation, esteem, veneration, virtue, homage, privilege, decorum, virginity, worship.

It is a matter of living in complete and exclusive self-donation for Jesus Christ, the Spouse, from whom we receive each and every good: *“And in God, he has all his wealth and outside of God he sees himself impoverished of everything, being a total nothing, and with God possessing everything”* (R X,6).

Let us repeat with St. Peter: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Mt 16:16). And let us add: *“I have been chosen to be a true and virginal spouse of the Son of God”* (R pr,7).

Serving God and his Reign . . . almost like saying “serving God and God as Lord”. . .because his Reign is God himself. Serving is the true way of governing. In fact, service is the attitude St. Angela requests the most of the bride queen.

“The Kingdom of God . . . is justice, peace and glory in the Holy Spirit. . .” (Rm 14:17).

It is certainly evident that we are called to **serve** the Reign of God just as Christ served. Let us ponder a few excerpts from the New Testament: *“Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant”* (Mk 10:43). *“Yet here I am among you as one who serves”* (Lk 22:27). *“So with you: when you have done all you have been told to do, say, “we are merely servants; we have done no more than our duty”* (Lk 17:10) . *“He emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave”* (Ph 2:7).

We will serve the Reign of God and possess him if we live the Beatitudes: if we are poor in spirit, if we mourn, if we are meek, if we hunger and thirst for what is right, if we are merciful, if we are pure of heart, peacemakers, persecuted in the cause of right. . . *because theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. . .This is the vocation of laypersons: *“The vocation proper to the lay faithful is to seek the Kingdom of God, shedding light upon and ordering temporal realities according to God”* (CCC comp. 188). This is our vocation.

Collaborate in the salvation of the world . . . *“directing everything to the praise and glory of his Majesty and the good of souls”* (Counsels pr).

“The entire life of Christ is free offering to the Father in order to carry out his plan of salvation (CCC comp. 119). Thus must our life be.

The history of salvation becomes our personal history; we must be docile and collaborate; we and the world are awaiting definitive redemption.

Whoever expected to define the purpose of our Institute in a different and perhaps more grandiose manner will be disappointed. . . nothing new under the sun.

Whoever expected instead a definition neither cold nor hot. . . neither this nor that. . .will be bewildered in the face of a request so essential, so salvific. . .

In line with these indications regarding the perfection of charity, Jesus Christ and his Reign, and the salvation of the world, it is clear that the purpose of the Company will not be things to be accomplished . . . houses, works, or organization. . .even if all these things are to be done. It is necessary to live in love for the Spouse, for his Reign, collaborating with Him as consecrated laywomen for the salvation of the world. No one can say, *“I’m not going to get my hands dirty. . .”*; no one is to settle for “doing.”

OUR FOUNDRESS

*The first fruits of the Holy Spirit in this sisterhood
were the many virgins,
like so many sparks among the world's shadows.
The reverend Mother Angela was among them all
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, instructing them;
Or rather, abiding in her, the Son of God was doing everything.
Divinely inspired,
she was the foundress of such a great work.
She was the true and living Mother who gave life
and gave life again in the Word of truth and in the blood of Jesus Christ.*

(Gabriele Cozzano)

We have a duty towards our Foundress, and it is a most affectionate one. . .we must study our Foundress, reflect and meditate on her teachings, and pray her writings.

The Foundress herself tells us what her role is: *“Jesus Christ, Who, in his immense goodness, has chosen me to be mother, both alive and dead, of such a noble Company, even though, for my part, I am most unworthy of it; and having chosen me, he has also given me the grace to be able to govern it according to his will”* (Counsels 3).

A saint Foundress. . . what fortune, what grace, what a blessing is this Foundress acknowledged by the Church! Mother for a path of holiness. . .a Foundress among the holy founders in St. Peter.

The Trinitarian life

2.1 *The Foundress, Saint Angela Merici, docile to the Spirit, welcomed the mystery of Christ, sent by the Father into the world to share the history and life of humanity, in order to reveal in the Paschal Mystery his total dedication to the Father for humanity and in order to bring to fulfillment the design of salvation.*

Here we find how Saint Angela summarized her life, her writings, her foundation. . .the Most Holy Trinity.

“The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life. God alone can make it known to us by revealing himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (CCC 261).

We know very well how deeply Saint Angela lived the Trinitarian mystery by the opening words of the Rule: *“in the name of the blessed and undivided Trinity”* and in concluding the Counsels and the Testament, imploring the blessing of God: *“In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.”*

Let us highlight for ourselves her *docility to the Spirit*, the centrality of *the mystery of Christ* in her life. . .and Christ, who, obedient to the *Father, shared the history and the life of humanity*, and in the Paschal Mystery revealed obedience unto death for the salvation of humanity.

We also find a prayer to the Trinity as the conclusion of the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* of John Paul II, a prayer evoking Saint Angela's same beatitude: *“Most Holy Trinity, blessed and the source of all blessedness, bless your sons and daughters whom you have called to praise the greatness of your love, your merciful goodness and your beauty”* (V. C. 111).

The common and ordinary conditions

2.1 *... She lived this mystery in the common and ordinary conditions of human existence, united in a spousal stance to the Son of God, her "Lover."*

A foundress who lived the mystery of Christ in daily life, in ordinariness: *in the common and ordinary conditions of human existence. . .*

In the Letter to Diognetus we read that *“Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign. And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives.”*

We, however, can take the 5th Counsel of Saint Angela as the ‘manifesto’ of secularity and daily conduct: *“Remind them to behave well in homes [they go to], with good judgment, with prudence and modesty, and to be reserved and moderate in all things. . . .in eating and drinking, in sleeping, in laughing, in listening. . . .in speaking, that their words be wise and reserved. . . .Wherever they are they should give good example. . . .and be to all a good odor of virtue. . . .seeking to spread peace and concord where they are. . . .”*

John Henry Newman asserted that Christ himself could live side by side with us without our knowing it. In fact, he spent thirty years in a hidden life, *“without doing anything great, just like that, just to live; he did not call disciples, did not do anything with respect to the mission for which he had come into the world.”*

For us as well, it is a matter of living, as Paola Bignardi reminded us (at the conference in 2010) *“a spirituality that foresees nothing extraordinary, but rather seriousness in living a Christian life with deep roots and a great heart.”*

Live “joyfully day by day” (Cozzano).

The proving ground of the Christian life, and of life itself even before that, is the everyday unfolding of each day...

Each day in our life is made up of little ordinary things: work, home, family, the many things we repeatedly do; many relationships, at times serene and peaceful, and at other times confrontational and tense; minor setbacks and major concerns; persons, problems, situations. . . .The life of each one of us consists of the happening of all these events. . . .”

A Foundress with a spousal stance...

2.1 ... united in a spousal stance to the Son of God, her "Lover."

This is a love of communion and reciprocity. . . *“My Beloved is mine and I am his” (Sg 2:16). . . “I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine. . .” (Sg 6:3).*

Saint Angela suggests that we, virgins of the Company, *“live as indeed is required of true spouses of the Most High”* (R pr,23) for *“my Lover, rather ours and the Lover of us all”* (Counsels 5). It is a question of being, not of doing; it is a question of heart, not of reasoning.

Love is grand, love is unique, love is strong. . . *“I am sick with love”* (Sg 5: 8) repeats the bride in the Song of Songs. *“Love no flood can quench, no torrents can drown”* (Sg 8: 7).

Nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. . . says the Word of God. Angela Merici, *sick with love for her sole treasure. . .* gave life to the Company of Jesus Christ, and the *great floods, the many torrents* of history have not been able to overwhelm this awesome charism that lasts, and *will last as long as the world lasts.*

The canticle of Saint Angela seems to whisper: *the Lord is my Beloved, he is the everything of your life, place your trust in him because he is yours. . .* We can pray with the Song of Songs: *“Set me like a seal*

on your heart, like a seal on your arm, for love is strong as death” (Sg 8:6), and with our own words, let us repeat:

*Set me like a seal on your heart, Lord,
and since strong as death is your love for me,
strong unto death may be my love for you. . . . Amen!*

The flowering of a new institution

2.2 In obedience to the Spirit, she brought about, for God's glory, the flowering, in an entirely new institution, of 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.

An innovative Foundress. . . Saint Angela's foundation is an *entirely new institution*, born *in obedience to the Holy Spirit*. For her, as it is for us, *obedience is great light*. The Mother will recommend obedience to her daughters. . . . *especially* obedience to the Holy Spirit.

She brought about flowering for God's glory. . . Ever beautiful is the image of the flowering path: *we will find the roads, thorny and rocky in themselves, flower-strewn and paved with finest gold.*

A flower is always new, fresh, beautiful, and fragrant, the bearer of joy, consolation, affection, love. Moreover, when this flowering is for God's glory. . . .we are truly delighted.

The institution is new, the Company; better yet, it is *entirely new*. In actual fact, however, it was a re-flowering, a new springtime, because it is an *admirable form of life* already experienced, already lived *by the Savior, our Lady, the Apostles, the Virgins and many Christians of the early Church.*

The charism renewed

2.3 With joy and gratitude, we, her daughters, welcome the charism which the Holy Spirit continually renews in fidelity to its origins and the expectations of the Church.

With joy and gratitude, we, the daughters of Saint Angela, welcome the gift offered by our Mother. We know it is a gift, not a static charism, but a charism continually renewed by the Holy Spirit; renewed in dual fidelity to *its origins and the expectations of the Church today.*

With regard to faithful and renewed charism, Msgr. Cataldo Naro said:

"The charism of founders reveals itself to be like an experience of the Spirit handed down to the respective followers in order to be lived, conserved, deepened and continually developed by them in harmony with the body of Christ in perennial growth.

"Fidelity to the vocation in the institute is a commitment of fidelity to God. There is no other way to be faithful to God than to follow one's vocation.

"It is necessary to cultivate remembrance of the initial idea, memory of the original intuition.

"And then understand what the Lord asks in order to remain faithful to the original intuition, and to keep it open, also for others, for those who may approach us. . . ."

Verification and

Our Institute and our Foundress art. 1.1-2.3

- *How did I feel called to the Company?*
- *To whom do I respond?*
- *Serve the Lord together... how is that possible for me in the Company?*
- *Among the characteristics of my Institute (the Federation, the name, the history, the autonomy of the Company and the Federation), which one engages me more, and why?*
- *What is the fundamental guide of my life and where do I find it?*
- *How does the purpose of the Institute link with the purpose of my life?*
- *What impresses me the most in the life and the foundation of Saint Angela Merici?*

OUR CHARISM

Charism is . . .

A free gift of the Spirit in view of a specific service to be rendered to the community for its edification: *"The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose"* (1 Cor 12, 7).

True and unsullied spouses

3.1. *Participants through faith and baptism in the paschal mystery of Christ within the new people of God which is the Church, we are called to be "true and unsullied spouses" of the Son of God, to be separated from the "shadows" of the world and to be joined together to "serve" the Reign of God as seculars.*

A charism in which we partake through faith and baptism. A charism that is part of the Paschal Mystery; a charism which makes us new people, the people of God which is the Church.

What is our **faith**? *"We must believe in no one but God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Faith is a supernatural gift from God. In order to believe, man needs the interior help of the Holy Spirit (CCC 178-179).*

Baptism *"...by baptism men are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ: they die with Him, are buried with Him, and rise with Him; they receive the spirit of adoption as sons "in which we cry: Abba, Father" (Rom. 8 :15) (Sacrosanctum Concilium 6).*

*"One enters into the People of God **through faith and Baptism**" (CCC 804).*

This is the frame of reference, the root, the life-giving sap of each other gift: faith, baptism, the Paschal Mystery, the Church.

In this mystery, a particular calling, our calling, asks for a response of **being. . .true and unsullied spouses. . .** this is our charism:

- espousal *"having been thus chosen to be true and virginal spouses of the Son of God"* (R pr);
- separation... *from the shadows of the world;*
- union... *united together;*
- service... *serve the Reign of God: "Learn from our Lord, who while he was in this world, was there as a servant, obedient to the eternal Father unto death"* (Counsels 1,6);
- all this with a root and particular nuance, that of secularity.

Free and docile

3.2 *In the Company we will respond freely and with a joyful spirit to the call; and with docility we will let ourselves be led by the Spirit in the following of Christ, obedient, chaste and poor, so that our being may assume the form of faith, hope and charity.*

The call echoes in the Company.

In the Company, our response to that particular call is characterized by:

- liberty... *we will respond freely. . . "she should enter it of her own will"* (R 1);
- joy... *with a joyful spirit... "she should enter it happily"* (R 1);
- docility to the guidance of the Spirit ... *"And above all, to obey the counsels and inspirations which the Holy Spirit continually sends into the heart"* (R 8);
- *the following of Christ. . . . "Let them have Jesus Christ for their only treasure, for there also will be love"* (Counsels 5);
- the style and the commitment of the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity, and poverty . . . *"with the firm intention of serving God in this sort of life"* (R 1);
- letting ourselves be molded in our being... *so it may assume the form of faith, hope and charity.*

We could ask ourselves if our vocational response is like this in the Company and as Company.

Our life has a center of unity

3.3 *Our life as consecrated seculars will have its center of unity in Christ Jesus, who restored the covenant with the Father, and revealed his unreserved love for every human being.*

Regarding the center of unity, I came across these beautiful words of G. Ravasi: "Think about a circle drawn on the ground. The circle is the world and the center is God. The rays are the paths of men. The closer they move ahead, all the closer do they approach God, and approach one another as well. And vice versa. Certainly, there is also the risk of going along the rays in the opposite direction, that is to say towards the outside. That is when the encounter with God and the encounter of persons with one another are interrupted. Authentic faith is the principle of unity, not division, and, in the words of St. John, he who loves his neighbor loves God, and vice versa. True mystical experience projects you, yes, towards the infinity of God, but does not leave you hanging in the light. It sends you back to your brothers and sisters, to history, to earth. Having become fire, you can heat; having been transformed into a spark, you can shed light; having been transfigured in God, you become a seed of light that spreads out to reach the ice and the shadows of so many men and women."

A life of consecrated seculars, our life, which rotates, moves, departs and returns, hides and expands. . .because it has a center of unity that . . .balances, unites and surpasses. . .this is a *center of unity which is Jesus Christ*.

He restored the covenant with the Father: The new covenant came to life on Calvary with the sacrifice of Christ and his resurrection.

In n°73 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church we read: "God has revealed himself fully by sending his own Son, in whom he has established his covenant forever. The Son is his Father's definitive Word. . ."

He revealed his unreserved love for every human being; "God is love and anyone who lives in love lives in God and God lives in him (1 Jn 4: 16).

- It is necessary to return to this center of unity.
- It is necessary to start anew from this center of unity.
- It is for this center of unity that we commit ourselves, pray, live. . . .contemplate and do. . .

Our contribution for the coming of the Reign

3.4 *Walking faithfully in this form of life, we will participate actively in the coming of the Reign, giving our contribution by: carrying the renewing strength of the Gospel into the environments where God has called us; discerning the plan of God for history; orienting daily events in the light of things above; being workers for peace and harmony everywhere.*

In order to respond to this call in this particular form of life, it is necessary to journey. . . .to travel the path in fidelity so as to *take part actively in the Reign of God and give our contribution in order to:*

- evangelize the environments where God has called us;
- know how to read God's plan in history;
- *orient daily events in the light of faith;*
- bring *peace and concord* everywhere.

By living in this way, we too will realize what the first sisters lived:

"They are not concerned about dowries or other details, do not construct monasteries, districts or consulates; the city is ennobled. . . They desire everything reasonable, abhor everything dishonest, and for the true common good do not refrain from offering their own life.

They do not intend to renew anything; they only strive to renew themselves and others with their own example. . . . Strong and joyful, they yearn for all good, and shine out of love for divine things" (Ded. Al Lettore).

OUR STYLE OF LIFE

Continuous stretching towards Christ

4.1 Our spiritual journey is expressed in a continuous stretching toward Christ

Our spiritual journey has a goal. . .it is expressed in a continuous stretching toward Christ.

This is a goal never reached in full. . .it is a continuous stretching toward. . . Someone, as the Song of Songs describes, already possessed and always yet to be possessed.

We cannot isolate ourselves, bring ourselves to a halt. . .it is necessary to reach out to the fullness of the encounter with the Spouse: *"it is necessary that we be vigilant, and so much more so, as the undertaking is of such importance that there could be no greater . . . since we are called to a life of such glory that we are spouses of the Son of God, and will become queens in heaven"* (R pr).

Action and contemplation

4.1 United to Him, source of true wisdom, we try to bring about in our life that admirable integration of action and contemplation which was found in our Mother and in our early members: "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."

It is a journey of unity. . . united to Him, source of true wisdom. We can pray:

"Grant me wisdom. . . Dispatch her from the holy heavens, send her forth from your throne of glory to help me and toil with me and teach me what is pleasing to you, since she knows and understands everything. She will guide me prudently in my undertakings and protect me by her glory" (Ws 9).

It is possible to do and over-do, to be busy and also concerned, to journey without looking ahead to the goal. It is possible to pray, taking flight from everything and everyone, locked away in our interior world. What we have to ask for as a gift, what we have to live is this *admirable integration of action and contemplation*. . . in our houses, where we work and where we live our life, in commitment in the Company and for the Company.

Cozzano puts it like this: *"This sublime gift [of admirable integration of action and contemplation] was neither given nor promised in monasteries, because it wasn't even necessary insofar as God gives the grace of his Spirit according to the need of the endeavors. But this gift has been granted to this Company and promised to anyone who will consent to being in this fortunate number"*(Ep. Conf.).

Our fruits of the Spirit: *silence, wonder, wisdom, fortitude and ardor*

4.2 The Holy Spirit, who is always at work in us, will make us capable of silence, wonder and wisdom like Anna, daughter of Phanuel, and will give us the strength and zeal of Judith.

- **Silence.** . . a silence able to welcome the Holy Spirit's presence and his work; a silence able to live the Trinitarian dimension of love; a silence, gift and offering to the *Lover of us all*; a silence of industrious contemplation. . .
- **Wonder.** . . in each day of everyday life. . . able to astound us over our vocation, *because especially to us has the Lord granted such a unique gift, a new and wondrous dignity. Able to astound us over the marvels God performs in and around us....* in our life, in our families, in our environments, in our Companies.
- **Wisdom.** . . the wisdom of those who let themselves be loved by God, those who know that embodied in Him, the source of eternal love, is the response to every question, to all suffering, to each *afflicted heart*; the spiritual wisdom able to live each situation in the primacy of charity

Silence, wonder, wisdom. . . just like the woman in the Bible. . . Anna, daughter of Phanuel.

Luke says about this prophetess Anna that *"she never left the Temple, serving God night and day"* (Lk 2:37). An eighty-four-year-old woman, she had lived with her husband only seven years, and had then

become a widow. Having lost her husband at a young age, she had never remarried, dedicating herself full time to the service of God. Just like Simeon, Anna intuitively perceives the presence of God in an unrecognizable guise. . . a child like so many others. For her it was as if nothing more existed outside of God. She never left the Temple, serving God night and day. Anyone who dedicates both self and deeds to the service of God acquires a penetrating gaze able to see God's presence and His work in the world, above and beyond mere appearances.

Contrary to many others, Anna, with Simeon, understands that this child is the Messiah, because her eyes are pure, her faith is simple, and because, living in prayer and adherence to the Father's will, she has acquired the ability to recognize the richness of new times.

In this way the Holy Spirit will give us again *the fortitude and the ardor of Judith*.

Fortitude and ardor that correspond to faith and courage.

Let us listen once again to the words of Saint Angela: *"Now to the task, with courage! Therefore let us all embrace this holy Rule that God through his grace has offered to us. And, armed with his sacred precepts, let us conduct ourselves courageously, like holy Judith after she boldly lopped off the head of Holophernes, that is the devil, so that we may be able to return gloriously to our homeland. . ."* (R pr,29-).

But, whatever may be this strength and this ardor of Judith?

Judith, a widow, comes onto the scene in order to save her people with a surprising victory over Holophernes (cf Jdt).

Here is how the Catechism of the Catholic Church (n°1808) describes fortitude.

"Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures witness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. . . The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause. 'The Lord is my strength and my song' (Ps 118:14).

Judith prayed and fasted like Anna.

Listening to the words of Judith is like listening to the words of Mary in the Magnificat.

"Strike up the instruments, a song to my God with timbrels, chant to the Lord with cymbals; Sing to him a new song, exalt and acclaim his name.

For the Lord is God; he crushes warfare, and sets his encampment among his people; he snatched me from the hands of my persecutors.

.

A new hymn I will sing to my God. O Lord, great are you and glorious, wonderful in power and unsurpassable.

Let your every creature serve you; for you spoke, and they were made, You sent forth your spirit, and they were created; no one can resist your word.

The mountains to their bases, and the seas, are shaken; the rocks, like wax, melt before your glance.

But to those who fear you, you are very merciful" (Jdt 16:1-2, 13-15).

With meditation on the teaching of the two women in the Bible proposed by Saint Angela in her writings, we can now embrace the Foundress's wish: *"May the strength and true consolation of the Holy Spirit be in you all* (Counsels pr. 3).

The theological virtues lived in the world

4.2 *With the Spirit's help our life will be one of commitment to being witnesses of charity, faith and hope in the heart of the world.*

Saint Angela adds happiness to the theological virtues: *"but be happy, and always full of charity and faith and hope in God"* (R 9).

Happiness is the state of intense and serene interior joy, says the dictionary. Therefore, a stable joy not connected with anything in particular or a passing event, but, just like the theological virtues, to be sought and found in God, the Lover of us all, the only Treasure.

Thus will be faith as well. . . *in God alone, and in the kind and ineffable providence that is his . . .* (R X, 13).

Likewise hope, which makes us yearn for and await eternal life: *“provided they believe and do not lose heart and hope . . . how much they have to exult and rejoice, for in heaven a new crown of glory and joy is prepared for all of them, one by one. . . Let them set their hopes on high and not on earth* (Counsels 5).

Last but not least, charity, the queen of all the virtues, the bond of perfection. . . .which Saint Angela was to place together with patience: *“And let all their behavior, their actions and their words be with charity; and let them bear everything with patience, for with these two virtues especially, one crushes the head of the devil”* (Counsels 5,18).

Charity is Love! *“Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; it is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offence, and is not resentful; Love takes no pleasure in other people’s sins, but delights in truth It is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes”* (1 Cor 13:4-7).

Both personally and as Company, it would be important for us to dwell on this article in order to reflect upon and verify the commitment of faithful witness. Also because we run the risk of counter-witness, and this all the more so because the Constitutions call on us to bear witness in the heart of the world. Other people see, measure, and expect joyful and theological witness on our part.

Responsibility

4.2 *responsibility for a wise discernment of lights and shadows present in the human person and in history*

Saint Angela had already suggested ‘discernment,’ knowing so well that there are always lights and shadows in the human person and in history: *“Consider each one as good, but be prudent for your own good”* (Counsels 7); *“...God has granted you the grace of separating you from the darkness of this poor world ...”* (R pr,4).

The Constitutions ask of us not just any discernment, but *wise discernment*, and therefore it would be useful for us to pray: *“Dispatch your wisdom to help me and toil with me so I may know what is pleasing to you”* (Ws. 9:10).

Discernment is a great gift, but also a great responsibility, for grasping the good and defeating the evil first of all in ourselves, and then in others. In fact, Saint Angela first prays for herself: *“My Lord, light up the darkness of my heart”* (R 5, 16).

St. Paul teaches us how to live in the world: *“Do not model yourselves on the behavior of the world around you, but let your behavior change, modeled by your new mind, in order to discover the will of God and know what is good, what is pleasing to him and perfect”* (Rm 12:2).

Witness

4.2 *“instruction and edification” for all through our daily actions which rise from a heart molded by the Gospel*

“Let all our words, acts, and conduct always be to teach and edify those who deal with us” (R 9,21).

We are called not only to bear witness, but also to teach, to edify.

As witnesses, we have *seen and heard* something we must faithfully declare: *“Whoever declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven”* (Mt 10:32).

Citizens of the world

4.2 *sharing in order to create structures of fraternity and solidarity capable of helping others' freedom to be opened to the future of God.*

In Tresalti’s words: *“The member of a secular institute enjoys dual citizenship: he is fully a citizen of the Church, and likewise a full citizen of the world. He is so insofar as baptized and invested with a special consecration. Not only does he refrain from withdrawing from the world, but, in it and through it, realizes*

his vocation proper in seeking the Reign of God by dealing with temporal things and ordering them according to God.”

We will help *others' freedom to be opened to the future of God* in everything we are and do, also with technological means if so required: *“There exists a Christian way of being present in the digital world: this takes the form of communication which is honest and open, responsible and respectful of others.”* This is what Benedict XVI underscored in his message for the 45th World Communications Day in 2011.

Missionaries in the local Church

4.3 With a filial spirit we will share in the missionary dynamism of the Church, wholly bent on evangelization; we will commit ourselves to making our contribution as consecrated laywomen in the life of the diocese, and to praying intensely so that God “will not abandon His Church, but will want to reform Her” (Counsels 7, 24).

“Bloom where you are planted” ... this applies for the world as such, but also for participation in the local Church: the parish and the diocese are our ecclesial place. We are not “transferred” from one place to another. Our ecclesial involvement takes place under our own personal responsibility, not that of the Company, and our contribution is ever that of consecrated laywomen.

United together: in the Company

4.4 In the Company, we want to seek, build and safeguard the spirit of unity and communion, unmistakable signs of the authenticity of our communion with God.

A Company life under the hallmark of unity and communion. . . *“My last word to you, by which I implore you even with my blood, is that you live in harmony, united together, all of one heart and one will”* (Counsels 9).

“See then how important is this union and concord. So, long for it, pursue it, embrace it, hold on to it with all your strength” (Counsels 9,10-14).

Unity and communion will become unmistakable signs of the authenticity of our communion with God. . . . “And there will be no other sign that you are in the grace of the Lord than that you love one another and are united together” (T 10).

But how are unity and communion cultivated?

They are cultivated and grow through small, simple and humble gestures repeated with fidelity: let us try to list some of these gestures or acts:

- Personal contacts, encounters both sought and desired, informal or organized, mutual prayer. . .
- Encounters of communion, spirituality and prayer: days of spirituality, study endeavors, conferences, pilgrimages, retreats. . . .Collaboration among both nearby and distant Groups and Companies . . .
- Times of reflection and study on our charism, our spirituality, in order to share the patrimony inherited from Saint Angela, and, at the same time, together find the way to respond to the challenges posed to the world Company by the signs of the times. . .Let us write the history of our Groups and our Companies. . .
- Let us also share the work of communication in order to spread the originality of Saint Angela Merici’s charism in the world: help for the Federation’s website and the one planned for the International Center of Merician Studies, collaboration for our connection through IN THE SAME CHARISM *with responsibility.*

The good way pleasing to God

4.4 Thus we will have the certainty of being on the “way that is good and pleasing to God”¹ and we will manifest to the world that we are disciples of the Lord.

¹St. Angela Merici, *Testament* 10th Legacy

Unity is a Trinitarian experience. . . *the blessed and undivided Trinity*. . . and must be the style of our communion. Relationships are created in the spiritual family that will last for eternity..

Unity and communion in the Company will be good witness in the world, just as Jesus taught us: “*I give you a new commandment: love one another [...] by this love you have for one another, everyone will know you are my disciples*” (Jn 13:34-35).

Sharing among sisters

4.4 In sharing among our sisters in Christ, 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.

We must help one another to live *according to the Spirit*, this is spirituality: “*Those who live according to the Spirit are interested in spiritual things. . .*” (Rm 8:5).

We share the *counsels of love* contained in Saint Angela’s writings and in the Constitutions of the Company: “*May no one wish to think that anyone is obliged under the pain of sin by this Rule, because to be found in it are not laws and obligations, but counsels of love*” (Ded. al Lettore).

“*The earthly pilgrimage will also have its thorns and toils, but the suffering of this world is nothing in comparison with the blessings which are in Paradise*” (Counsels 5,30).

“*We will cross through this momentary life with consolation, and our every pain and sadness will turn into joy and gladness, and thorny and rocky roads we will find flower-strewn for us, paved with finest gold*” (R pr, 26-27).

With this chapter of the Constitutions in hand, offering us the most beautiful patrimony of our Company, let us finish with the words used by Saint Angela to conclude the Prologue to the Rule:

So now, all of you, kindly be attentive, with great and longing heart.

Verification and

Our charism and our form of life 3.1-4.4

- *Let me try to give my definition of the Merician charism. . .*
- *In the Company I am called to live the charism in liberty, happiness and docility. . .in faith, hope and charity. Which of these virtues is more congenial for me? Which requires greater commitment and more attention on my part?*
- *My center of unity is Jesus Christ! What does this mean, and what does it entail for me personally?*
- *How do I contribute to the coming of God's Reign in my surroundings, at this moment in history, in daily events?*
- *Be makers of peace and concord everywhere. . .what commitment is requested of me?*
- *Continual stretching toward Christ. . .in the admirable integration of action and contemplation. What predominates in my daily life? Which necessities, priorities, choices?*
- *Our gifts of the Spirit: silence, wonder, wisdom, fortitude and ardor. . .Which do I need the most? Do I ask for it in prayer?*

CONSTITUTIONS CHAPTER TWO *THOSE WHO ARE CALLED*

Having been thus chosen to be true and virginal spouses of the Son of God... (R pr,7)

This is a chapter that talks about us (and not only about those who enter the Company) . . . chosen *to be true and virginal spouses of the Son of God* . . . continually invited to re-check our formation and our adherence to God's plan in the Company.

This is the chapter dedicated to each and every one of the daughters of Saint Angela, so they may not forget *they have received such a singular gift*, so they may be ever *attentive, with a great and longing heart* (cr R pr).

Following the overall style of these reflections, let us draw the spiritual aspects for our path of holiness from this chapter.

The title of this second chapter of the Constitutions – *those who are called* – follows the title of the first chapter: *Called by grace to serve the Lord together*.

We have already seen that the call is a grace, that the purpose of the call is *to serve the Lord together*.

It is now our task to understand who are those persons called and what this path of following entails. We are the ones called! We are the ones who must feel called each day and during each season of our life.

The third chapter. . . will then tell us how *to respond to the grace of the vocation*. . . a complete program of spiritual life in its own right.

The call to follow...

5.1 ...the woman who feels called to follow Jesus Christ according to the charism of Saint Angela Merici

We follow Jesus Christ, and dedication to Him is complete, according to the Merician charism. It is therefore a matter of knowing Jesus Christ in order to be able to build a life on Him, to draw ever closer anew to the Gospel. Jesus is the Consecrated One, the Anointed One: *"The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me [...] This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen. . ."* (Lk 4:18,21).

During the conference of the Federation in 1995, Rev. Adriano Tessarollo referred to this chapter in these terms: *"The continual reference to Christ, sought and followed, and to whom a person wishes to give herself in the specific ways of the Merician charism, therefore entails a spiritual formation strongly centered on the knowledge and experience of the person of Jesus. . ."*

Someone calls

We all know who calls. . . *His Divine Majesty, the Son of God, the Lover of us all, the only Treasure*. . . He certainly has not stopped calling, because he has not stopped loving, falling in love. He has not stopped calling me again, each one of us again, whether in the Company for many years or a few years, because he continually calls, renews His choice, His election at each and every instant. He has not stopped calling for the Company as well, since . . . *He will never abandon this Company for as long as the world will last*.

Someone feels called ...

Called to follow Christ according to the charism of Saint Angela. . .

This is a particular call which presumes knowledge of the Master and knowledge of the charism of secular consecration in the spirituality of St. Angela Merici. When commenting on the first chapter we made an effort to penetrate into the Mercian charism. . . .we can return to it.

It pertains to us, the heirs of Saint Angela Merici, to deepen and propose this *gift so singular*. . . again and again, ever anew.

Someone accepts... *the Company accepts* . . .(5.1)

It is the Company which accepts, the whole Company. . . .even if the directresses have a special task in accepting and guiding.

The atmosphere breathed in the Company, the strength or the weakness of unity, giving and fidelity. . .warm up or cool down the sense of acceptance.

We all need to be accepted in the Company, and accepted anew. We need to warm up both heart and spirit, so that at every age and in every situation we may and must feel we are mothers, daughters and sisters.

Welcoming acceptance is made up of understanding, gazes, words, attitudes, charity, ideals of company. . . . *they are to see one another as dear sisters*.

It is always time to verify our vocation ...

5.1 ... verify the authenticity of the vocation, study in depth the identity of secular consecration, know the spirit of our Foundress, and experience the form of life she outlined.

This chapter addresses verification for a person embarking upon the path in order to understand if this is the right route. . . at times, however, our steps along the path of life have detoured *to the right or to the left*. . . and it is necessary to get back on the right road. Let us learn self-verification before the Lord, in dialogue with our directress, and in open discussion with our sisters.

- ***Verify the authenticity of the vocation***. It is a matter of asking the gift of the Spirit so there may be light within and around me regarding what the Lord wants right now, in this historical context, and verify the adequacy of my response. Certainly, the Lord is faithful; He never withdraws. Certainly, the vocation corresponding to the call was authentic, but how many passages, how much purification will still be needed before the definitive encounter with the Lord!
- ***Study in depth the identity of secular consecration***. In-depth study of this particular call. . *secular consecration*. . . is always needed. It is neither automatic nor taken for granted and depends on experience, culture, expectations, and clarity regarding identity. Both personally and as Companies, we must revisit this identity, update it, perfect it. . .Saint Angela had clear ideas about secularity, but the passing of time has often encrusted the original inspiration: let us return with trust and creativity to what consecration in the world demands.
- ***Know the spirit of our Foundress***. In order to know the spirit of our Foundressit is necessary to know the life, the history and the writings of Saint Angela; it is necessary to know the Constitutions. . . *the fundamental guide for our life and the way for carrying out the Institute's purpose*.
- ***Experience the form of life outlined by*** the foundress herself. It is not enough to know about this life; it is necessary to experience it, verify its modalities and purpose. Experience must bolster the unity between one's personal plan and the Company plan, between the ideal sought and proposed and life actually lived. All this is experienced through direct experience of Company in fidelity to what is small and in openness to what is grand.

The requirements of this vocation

5.3 ... joyously and freely

...and has the requirements for leading the life proper to the Company

If we return to Saint Angela and the first chapter of the Rule, we find: *she should enter it happily and of her own will* (R I, 3-4).

It is normal that Saint Angela, a happy and positive woman, calls for joy: “*she should enter happily*” ... it is our task to live accordingly.

Less typical, even new at her time, was the requirement of free and voluntary choice. For a woman, everything was decided by others, even the choice of life and, if necessary, the “right” person to marry.

For the Company, however, it was not and still is not like that: it is necessary to choose to belong to it by virtue of an act of one’s own free will, exercising personal responsibility and accordingly remaining faithful and persevering.

It was a free choice and it is necessary to assume the ensuing commitments. . .including the unforeseen ones, all in joy.

There are **general requirements** for being a member of a secular institute: human maturity as complete as possible, Christian maturity, basic general culture, the exercise of a profession or employment, emotional balance, the ability to assume the commitments of the Company and the time to carry them out, resolute and constant will.

“Hypothetically speaking, it may be supposed that a baptized person is called to secular consecration when he manifests the following signs (among others): optimism with respect to history and an evangelical reading of what happens in the world; resilience to the wear and tear of daily life; a readily evident ability to live solitude with peace of mind; autonomous identity and a spirit of initiative; active insertion in secular realities; ability to share acute situations linked to the frailness of life; an intense sense of the presence of God in his own life; proven ability to live a serious interior life without necessarily making changes to life style or habits” (O. Cantoni).

There are **particular requirements** we find in the **ceremonial manual dating far back in time** (1570): *“All those virgins who, moved by themselves and by heavenly Spirit, leaving behind the vanities of this world and carnal sensuality on one hand, and, on the other hand, donning **patience, obedience and humility, and falling ardently in love only with Jesus, Savior of the world, and accepting Him as her dearest Spouse, will yearn to enter into this Company of the spouses of Jesus. . . .**”*

We can all run a check on the general requirements and the particular ones, not really in order to ascertain their presence in other sisters, but to ask for the gift of continual conversion in order to *make progress* and purify styles of life and attitudes.

The Company and accompaniment

The formation guides ‘accompany’ up close ...

5.5 . . . the formation guide. . . will accompany her with witness, counsel, prayer, . . .

First and foremost, the formation guide is not called to do many things, but rather to be *close*; also physically close when possible, but above all close *with witness, counsel and prayer*.

This is a closeness that requires continual conversion, because, first of all, it entails a commitment of **witness** on our partAs formation guides, let us willingly leave aside the temptation of constant physical presence, command, control, curiosity. . .in order for us to continually return to the *Lover* and His presence in both our life and that of the sisters entrusted to us.

Let us then ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of **counsel**. Even though we will always be weak, less than consistent, and fragile in our witness,. . .in spiritual closeness as formation guides, it is also up to us to listen to the sister, understand her, and make space for her needs and demands, and we also have to counsel her.

In any case, true closeness is that of **prayer**. . . Witness may fail at times, counsel given may not turn out to be efficacious, but prayer is infallible. . .it always achieves its purpose. . .a lot of prayer, because a little does not suffice.

The formation guides follow ...

6.2 ... The formation guide . . . will continue to follow the consecrated member so that, in docility to the Spirit, she assumes and expresses ever more the lifestyle of a consecrated secular, typical of the Company, and grows in the desire and will to give herself to God in a total and definitive way.

Becoming close, the formation guides do not go ahead, do not mount on high, and do not keep their distance, but accompany, indeed **follow** . . . the sisters, because they must follow Christ. He is the Master, the guide, the Shepherd, the goal. . . The formation guides follow the sisters for an entirely spiritual purpose: so they may belong totally and definitively to the Lord. How many times we have to purify our intentions, our deeds and our words. . . because it is the Spouse who must 'grow' and the formation guide must 'diminish.'

In fact, the sisters are the ones who must be *docile to the Spirit* in order to incarnate this particular Merician secular consecration for a donation of self with no 'ifs' and no 'buts,' ever faithful and persevering.

These are the elements of the formation guide's spiritual service we find underscored in this chapter. It will suffice to return to the Counsels and the Testament of Saint Angela to find all the Merician teaching for the "colonelle" of the Company.

The entire Company

5.5 ... she will be supported by the members of the Company through prayer, friendship and dialogue, in mutual respect and with the necessary reserve.

We all bear responsibility for and mutually support one another; the entire Company is responsible. . . How?

- **With prayer.** . . pray for each sister, bring their names and situations before the Lord, and present them to Him, to the Spouse, so He may make them all worthy, so He may transform them as is pleasing to Him;
- **Friendship.** . . a free friendship that is not possessive, not intrusive, without claiming anything in return, the friend of the Spouse and the bride, who remains the *Lover's*;
- **Dialogue** . . . serene dialogue of someone who knows that the truth is sought together, that no one possesses all of it. Dialogue, where the first thing is to listen, understand, comprehend, and then invoke the Spirit, and, seeking the Lord, voice one's point of view with humility;
- **In mutual respect.** respect first for the person, then the sister, a sister in our family, and then respect for a bride of an incomparable Spouse;
- **With the necessary reserve.** . . reserve for secular consecration, reserve for what is communicated to me, confided to me, what I happened to know. . . just like Mary, each sister must be able to *keep everything in her heart.* . .

verification and

The call

- *Do I feel called? By whom and for whom?*
- *Do I feel called to the Company?*
- *Do I feel at home in the Company?*
- *What difficulties. . . how could they be overcome?*
- *How can I define the identity of secular consecration?*
- *How do I feel with the characteristics of belonging to the Company: happiness, liberty, patience, obedience, humility?*
- *Which requirements can I perfect in order to lead the life proper to the Company?*
- *Is it my firm intention to serve God forever. . . in the Company?*
- *Do I make the charism of Saint Angela known to others?*

THOSE WHO ARE CALLED

Those who are consecrated in the Company must have matured *the firm intention to follow Christ according to the charism of Saint Angela Merici. . . (6.1)*.

According to the early ritual, the request for incorporation could be made by her who had been found to be *devout (totally donated), humble, obedient, polite, giving good example, persevering in prayer, and observant of what is commanded by the Rule of the Company*.

According to the current Constitutions, the candidate must:

- **Have matured the firm intention to follow Christ. . .** “On Him I have pinned my entire life, the only life I have” (G. Biffi). It does not suffice to belong to the Company. . .it is necessary to mature in one’s choice. While requested above all of those at the beginning of the journey, this maturation must then last all life long.
- **Follow Christ according to the charism of Saint Angela Merici. . .** A superficial and fleeting intention does not suffice. . .here it is a matter of a lifelong following of Christ according to the charism of Saint Angela. A charism ever to be studied, deepened, understood, and lived.

Consecration for life. . .

7.1 *Consecration for life, the definitive seal of the spousal covenant, incorporates the person into the Company with all canonical effects.*

Definitive seal of the spousal covenant. . . “With our response, through taking up the evangelical counsels, we express the firm and absolute will to give ourselves unconditionally to God and to our sisters and brothers, and to be faithful for all of our life” (Const. 18,1).

Incorporates in the Company with all canonical effects. Incorporation also in juridical terms, but what we are mostly interested in here is the spiritual point of view.

For the early ritual, those virgins could be accepted into the final “order” who were recognized as *totally established in the most ardent love of the Lord, and who (in the preceding period), had been vigilant in prayer, diligent in fasting, humble in obedience, patient in adversities, and fervent in the life of the Lord Jesus*.

Spouses of Christ, in the Company, totally established in the love of the Lord, because this is the Spouse’s gift. Nonetheless, there is still something we have to do, and the ascetical life required of us includes prayer, fasting, obedience, patience, fervor. . .

FORMATION

The formation experiences

The formation experiences must be a point of reference for each Company, as well as for each sister. I’d say that the formation experiences are to be found above all in the Constitutions of the Company which, suitably presented and studied, are the best formation program. Therefore, I would say the program does not have to be invented, because it already exists. . . .nonetheless, it must be continually taken up again, revisited, adjusted, and interiorized.

The formation experiences are instruments useful for: (const. 5.6)

- o **An authentic knowledge of self. . .** Even if we are already of a certain age and believe we know ourselves well enough, how many hidden wrinkles there are in both our mind and our soul. If we update our formation, also from a psychological viewpoint, but especially in theological and spiritual

terms, we could know ourselves all the better, ask forgiveness for our errors, capitalize on our talents and place them at the service of all.

- o *Personal formation on the human, cultural, spiritual ecclesial and apostolic levels . . .* while other persons and suitable instruments can help us, formation is personal. By virtue of the Constitutions we commit ourselves to complete formation in order to be and bear witness to our belonging to the Lord, which gives both tone and hue to our existence.

Formation has objectives (const. 5.6)

- o *Assimilate evangelical values. . .* The values are the Christian ones, and we find them in the Word of God as well as in the writings of Saint Angela, a biblical woman, who - she first - had assimilated the evangelical values.
- o *Internalize and experience commitments that derive from consecration in the world. . .* The commitments of secular consecration constitute not just a duty to be performed; they are to be internalized in our heart, in our being, and are to be continually experienced in daily life.
- o *Know the history of the Company and love its life. . .* the history of the Company down through the centuries, of our Company, of the world Company. While it is already complicated to know the history of the Company, at times it is more difficult to love its life. . . that life made up of so many miseries, so many shortcomings. . . And yet the life of the Company is a marvelous life ever to discover, ever to renew, and much, but not everything, depends on us.

The responsibility of formation and the means

7.2 The consecrated member will continue all her life to care for her human, spiritual, intellectual, professional and apostolic formation, with a sense of responsibility making use of the means offered by:

- o *the Company,*
- o *the Church,*
- o *society,*
- o *in order to strive towards an ever-more-radical gift of herself to Christ in history.*

Let us begin from the aim of formation: *to strive towards an ever-more-radical gift of herself to Christ in history*, seeking and enhancing, with responsibility, all the means. The end purpose of the means is not to appear increasingly capable, but to live ever more completely for the Lover in the world and in history.

Be salt, light and leaven. . . The goal is never reached so that we might savor the enthusiasm of the past or just stop in the present: we are summoned each day to renew the commitment as if it were the first day, or as if it were the last day.

- **Formation continues throughout life . . .** and calls for continual care. . . it is always necessary to seek it and want it, necessary to be committed to it, and, even if it may be toilsome, it is worth the effort. Saint Angela had indicated the care of formation for perseverance in the vocation: *“Then strive with all your might to keep yourselves as you have been called by God and seek out, and desire all those means necessary to persevere and prosper until the end. Because merely beginning is not enough if not carried through”* (R pr,9-11).
In both material and spiritual endeavors, everybody knows how to begin, but few are those who persevere every day, for so many days, for so many years, throughout life.
- **It is total formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, professional, and apostolic . . .** At the aforementioned conference of the Federation in 1995, Rev. Adriano Tessarollo reminded us: *“This is far-reaching formation. It calls for a serious investment of energies and time in formation, which is not limited to taking note of and accepting what already exists, but which stimulates, attends to, guides and supports a serious and demanding formation commitment.”*
- **It is responsible formation** which enhances all the means . . . *offered by the Company, the Church, and society.* We must use the means offered by the Company, at times simple and poor means, but always

necessary for living this call. We must use the means proposed by the Church: the universal Church and the local Church. But we must also know how to use the good means offered by society, because we live in this world, and, in this world, are called to consecrate earthly realities, ordering them to God. *“Formation is a dynamic process by means of which individuals are converted to the Word of God in the depths of their being and, at the same time, learn how to discover the signs of God in earthly realities.[...] The formation commitment never comes to an end”* (Vita consecrata, 68).

CO-RESPONSIBILITY

7.3 *She will feel herself co-responsible for the life and growth of the Company; she will find in it the privileged place for evaluation, dialogue and support, and for a journey of renewed fidelity.*

- Each consecrated sister must *feel herself to be* responsible and co-responsible in the Company. . . responsible for her formation, her fidelity, her perseverance. . . *Co-responsible for the life and growth of the Company*, bringing into the Company her own witness and service, the richness each person receives from the encounter with the Lord along the roads of the world, and dedication to the growth of the Company and in the Company's mission.

“The Church is not the result of a sum of individuals, but a unity among all those who are nourished by the one Word of God and the one Bread of life.” Likewise, the Company and the Federation are not the total amount of the sisters in a given area or scattered in the world, but rather the unity and the communion that become pro-active co-responsibility for the very life of the Institute and for the growth of the Merician charism. It is true that each one of us has her own responsibility, but only together will we bring about what the Lord wants of the daughters of Saint Angela today. *“‘Collaboration’ on the part of laypersons is no longer sufficient, and instead ‘co-responsibility’ is needed, going to the anthropological status of each believer. Co-responsibility is inscribed in baptism: it is not a benign concession on the part of someone who wants collaborators in order not to be alone, but a right/duty, a vocation of each Christian”* (D. Sigalini).

- Each consecrated member *will find* in the Company *the privileged place for: evaluation, dialogue and support for a journey of renewed fidelity.*

In order for the Company to be a privileged place, I must be there, I must love it, I must feel myself responsible and co-responsible. I must choose this place, giving it priority over other places, no matter how useful, good and perhaps more interesting they may be.

In order to renew my fidelity to the Lord, I must be faithful to the Company's commitments and encounters. In the Company I must exercise myself to evaluate and verify with the directress, to dialogue with all the sisters; I must be spiritual support for each sister, and thus will I find personal support for my *journey of renewed fidelity.*

verification and

Consecration . . .

The conditions for consecration: totally giving oneself, humble, obedient, polite, giving good example, persevering in prayer, observant. . .in the firm intention to follow Christ . .

How can I improve in order to be ever more suitable? Do I check myself?

- Follow Christ according to the charism of Saint Angela Merici: how can I understand and live the Merician charism more and more?
- The Company's distinctive secularity. . .How could I define it?
- Gift of oneself to God. . .total and definitive. . .what does this entail? How does it commit me?
- Formation continues. . .How do I care for it? For what purpose? With what means?
- Responsibility and co-responsibility: what do one and the other entail for me in the Company?

We can pray in this way:

*“O Lord... You do not scorn,
but accept persons of all ages;
neither do You consider a person's condition
but accept her as she is...
Like a good shepherd, You shield with Your protection
Your servants whom
You have deemed worthy
to be chosen from Your flock
to preserve their virginity for life ...
Prepare them for their undertakings of virtue and glory...
until they prove themselves worthy
of being united forever
with Your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ...
May they be honored and wholly strengthened
in faith, hope and sincere love ...
Help them to joyfully lead their lives as virgins.
Amen.”*

(Old ritual of the final benediction)

CONSTITUTIONS CHAPTER THREE

RESPONDING TO THE GRACE OF THE VOCATION

The title of this chapter abounds with richness and is demanding for each sister and each directress.

This is a core chapter of the Constitutions, and whoever approaches it, together with the following chapter dedicated to *Consecration and Mission*, welcomes the gift of the vocation each day and forever, and wishes to respond freely and with joy. . . .

Responding. . . here is what you have to do. . . here is how you must commit yourself. . . here is what you have to verify. . . here are the forms of assistance you must seek. . . here are the gifts you receive. . .

This is the chapter to study, propose, program. . . it is the chapter to be lived personally and together, *giving infinite thanks for such a singular gift, for this new and wondrous dignity* (cf R pr).

For this chapter, entirely spiritual in its own right, I will use much of what I already had in mind for the directresses during the years when I was president of the Federation, and which can be found in the booklet: *The Constitutions, Food for thought* (2005).

OUR PRAYER

*“Being in the world, partakers of active life,
they savor contemplative life and unite action to contemplation in an admirable manner;
the heights of contemplation do not take them away from action,
nor does activity inhibit their taste for heavenly things.”*
(G. Cozzano)

The grace of the vocation. . .

11 *The grace of God our Father which has made us give ourselves totally to Him in Christ, through the Church, requires unceasing prayer and a keen desire for radical fidelity, in order to be brought to fulfillment.*

The vocation is a grace. . . . *“Since, most beloved daughters and sisters, God has granted you the grace of separating you from the darkness of this poor world and joining you together to serve his divine Majesty, you must give him infinite thanks for having granted such a singular gift especially to you”* (R pr,4-5).

It is a grace *God the Father has given to us to donate ourselves entirely to Him in Christ, the Lover of us all.*

This is a grace we have received *through the Church.* . . . in the Company, in the Rule and in the Constitutions recognized and offered by the Church so our *path of holiness and our witness may be more effective in the Church itself and in the world* (cf Cost. Decree).

The necessity and the condition for bringing it to fulfillment . . .

The grace of the vocation is not automatic. . . ***it requires . . .*** fidelity and perseverance each day, and every day until the end of life. *In order to be brought to fulfillment . . . it requires unceasing prayer.*

At times we believe we are responding to the grace of the vocation with our activism. . . and yet it does not seem to be like this at all . . . The response is with prayer.

“Pray all the time, asking for what you need, praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion. Never get tired of staying awake to pray with all the saints” (Ep 6,18).

“One needs to pray always with spirit and mind on account of the constant need for God's help . . .” (R 5,5).

But how is it possible to pray always? Where and how to pray?

The answer is in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: *“In naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times).*

According to Scripture, **it is the heart that prays**. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain. The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live. . .The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. It is the place of truth. . .the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation; it is the place of covenant” (CCC 2562-2563).

Praying always is possible: “It is possible to say a frequent and fervent prayer even at the market or during a solitary stroll. It is also possible in your store, while selling or buying, or also while cooking” (St. John Chrysostom).

And St. Teresa of Avila: “Prayer is none other, for me, than an intimate relationship of friendship, a frequent spending time by myself and alone with Him by whom we know we are loved.”

“The Lord will teach you to pray. He will especially say it is not difficult, and by no means impossible. Since He commands us to pray always without tiring, and God does not command impossible things. It is necessary to look in the Gospel for the figure of Christ praying in the desert, on the mountain, in the Cenacle, in the agony of the garden, on the cross. The prayer of Jesus was always united with an intense experience of the Father in solitude, with a very clear awareness that everyone was looking for Him, and with tireless missionary activity” (Pironio).

Together with *unceasing prayer*, the Constitutions propose *a keen desire for radical fidelity*. . . Radical fidelity is a need that never wanes, has to be continuously renewed, and is never fully realized. It is necessary to be faithful to the hilt, always, unto the end. It is necessary to want fidelity, to have a keen desire for it, to ask for it as a gift, to renew it without *losing fervor, for every promise will be fulfilled beyond measure*. . . (cf T 11).

Prayer in the Trinity...

11 *Persevering prayer will make us participants in the filial colloquy of Jesus with his Father and will dispose us to welcome the gifts of the Holy Spirit.*

In the name of the Blessed and undivided Trinity. . . must be our persevering prayer. . . and thus will it have its effects:

- * *It will make us participants in the filial colloquy of Jesus with his Father:* we will pray God the Father with Jesus; we will be siblings with the Son, and the Father will listen to us;
- * *And will dispose us to welcome the gifts of the Holy Spirit:* we too, like the apostles in the Cenacle with Mary, await in prayer the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

THE WORD OF GOD

The roots and the nourishment of prayer. . .

12 *Our prayer finds roots and nourishment in the Word of God.*

The Word of God must precede and accompany our prayer.

The plant of our life as baptized and consecrated persons must have well-grounded roots and must be continually nourished by the Word of God.

“The force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life” (Dei Verbum,21).

Prayerful listening. . .

12 *In the Church and with the Church we will open ourselves to the prayerful listening of the Word of the Lord.*

In the Church. . . and not outside the Church. . .this requires attention, participation, study, fidelity, adherence to the teaching and interpretation of the Magisterium.

With the Churchin unity with the entire pilgrim and heavenly Church . . .with all the means the Church itself proposes to us.

Our listening to the Word of God must be *prayerful*, it must turn into prayer in order to become incarnated in life. . .

“Silence prepares the ground upon which the seed of the Word falls [...] Let us read the readings of the day calmly and attentively, and ask ourselves: what good news is there here for my life [...] Let us pause every so often, and sense towards which forms of prayer we are being moved by the Spirit of the Lord within us” (Cardinal. C. M. Martini).

Welcoming in faith . . .

12 ...welcome it in docility of faith.

The Word of God is to be welcomed. . .just as a vital gift is to be welcomed, it must leave traces. . .It is to be welcomed *in docility of faith*. . .a faith ever to be asked for as a gift, a faith ever to be increased: Lord, increase our faith. . .

The Word of God is translated into life . . .

12 *With the help of the Spirit we will strive to translate it into concrete and consistent behavior, in order to witness in our lives the newness and hope of the Gospel.*

The Word of God must become life, Christian witness in the world; it must be translated into concrete and consistent behavior and choices. The Gospel is message of newness and hope..

“The proclamation of the Word creates communion and brings about joy. This is a profound joy that swells forth from the very heart of Trinitarian life [...] This is joy as an ineffable gift the world cannot give. Feasts can be organized, but not joy” (Benedict XVI).

The closing words of article 12 expand both heart and horizon: *Enlightened and transformed by the Word, we will be able to look at persons, at the world and at history through the eyes of God.*

In order to live as consecrated women in the world, we must let ourselves be enlightened and transformed by the Word of God, and thus will our gaze be God’s gaze. . .a gaze of love, compassion and salvation.

LITURGICAL AND SACRAMENTAL LIFE

“Our principal attention must be given to the liturgy, the summit towards which the Church's action tends and at the same time the source from which comes all her strength.”
(N.M.I. 35)

The Eucharist, source, climax, center, nourishment of the heart. . .

13.1 *The Eucharist, source and climax of the life of the Church, is the center of our life, the heart of our vocation, and the nourishment of our mission.*

The Eucharist is everything. . . everything that is most important for my life, my vocation, my witness.

Source and climax of the life of the Church. . .

If the Church has an ever-gushing source, a goal ever to be reached, the strength that gives ever-new life. . .it is because the Lord Jesus has left himself as gift with the institution of the Eucharist.

“At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and

resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us" (C.C.C. 1323).

The Eucharist, strength and joy. . .

13.1 *From the Eucharist we will draw strength to offer our lives, in fidelity and in thanksgiving, loving as Christ has loved us; from the Eucharist we will receive as gift the joy of opening ourselves to the hope of a renewed world.*

Those of us still fortunate enough to be able to receive the Eucharist each day know that we draw from it the strength to live the love of Christ in daily life; know we will receive a great gift, the gift of continuing to harbor hope for ourselves and the world at large.

Participation in the celebration of the Eucharist. . .

13.2 *For this reason, we will participate daily in the celebration of the Eucharist; in case of impossibility, we will unite ourselves to the celebration of the holy sacrifice being offered continually in the world and for the world.*

Daily. . . *"Again, let each one go to Mass every day, and see at least one entire [Mass] and attend it with modesty and devoutly, since in the sacred Mass are found all the merits of the passion of our Lord. And the more one attends with great attention, faith and contrition, the more one participates in those blessed merits and the greater consolation one receives" (R 6,1-4).*

*"The Eucharist must become the form, the source and the operational model that in itself shapes the believer's personal and community life. **Daily Mass** remains a duty, an important appointment for each person who wishes to live his belonging to Christ in full (Cardinal C. M. Martini).*

We trust and hope we will be able to participate in the Eucharistic Celebration each day, but were this to be impossible, we would be able to unite ourselves in time and space, every hour during both day and night, to the Eucharist being celebrated somewhere in the world. Now that we have sisters on all continents, we can feel we are in communion of faith and prayer with the Company out there in the world.

Every day. . .every week. . .every year. . .

13.3 *We will celebrate with the Church the mystery of Christ during the liturgical year; we will appreciate the Lord's day and will glorify God with Lauds and Vespers, normally every day.*

We will seek to render glory to God every day in the celebration of **the liturgical year**. This means living with God and with the Church every year, every season, every feast, every day, marking time with the rhythm of prayer.

We will appreciate the Lord's day. . .

"It is necessary to stress particularly the Sunday Eucharist and Sunday itself experienced as a special day of faith, the day of the Risen Lord and of the gift of the Spirit, the true weekly Easter. For two thousand years, Christian time has been measured by the memory of that "first day of the week" when the Risen Christ gave the Apostles the gift of peace and of the Spirit" (N.M.I. 35).

"Sunday, with its ordinary solemnity, will remain to measure the time of the Church's pilgrimage unto the Sunday with no dusk" (John Paul II).

We will glorify God with Lauds and Vespers, normally every day.

"Each one should want to say devoutly and attentively at least the Office of the Madonna and the seven penitential psalms every day" (R5,9).

"With the liturgy of the Hours, celebrated by longstanding custom during various parts of the day, the Church fulfills the Lord's command to pray ceaselessly, give praise to God, and intercede for the salvation of the world" (Decree, Congregation for Divine Worship, 1971).

The sacrament of reconciliation. . .

13.4 *Our awareness of the inadequacy of our response to the gift of God and our infidelity to his grace will urge us to ask of our "most kind Lord" his mercy and the time and way of repenting.*

We ask for mercy. . .

We have received the great gift of the call, and yet we are always inadequate in our response to so much love, to such predilection. God is always faithful. He never ceases to give us the gift of faith, but we fall short in fidelity.

"So am I forced, day and night, walking, standing, working, thinking, to cry out and shout to Heaven and to beg mercy and time for penitence. O most benign Lord, deign to pardon me so many offenses and each of my omissions that I have ever committed from the day of my holy baptism till now" (R5,22-23).

*"What I want is **mercy**, not sacrifice. And indeed I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners" (Mt 9:13).*

"I lament the fact that I have been so late to begin serving your divine Majesty" (R5,27).

Frequency and regularity...

13.4 *We will frequently and regularly, as far as possible, approach the sacrament of reconciliation.*

"Again you are called upon to make a practice of confession, a necessary medicine for the wounds of our souls" (R7,1).

"Each one may want to confess at least once a month" (R 7,12).

"How far away our life is from the evangelical perspective, attracted as it is to itself and petty egoistical interests that contradict the plan of life God proposes to us. The return to the evangelical idea cannot take place according to the ways we decide and the efforts we make, but will instead be a courageous and humble entrustment of self to an act of mercy Jesus performs through the community, and which is the sacrament of reconciliation" (Cardinal C.M. Martini).

Each sister will have to decide on the **frequency and regularity** of the sacrament of reconciliation.

Prepared with a daily examination of conscience, confession fosters the conversion of heart to loving the Father of mercy. Paul VI recalled that frequent confession is a privileged source of holiness, peace and joy. Periodically renewed confession has always accompanied the Church in the ascent to holiness.

Our faith teaches us that Jesus wanted the sacraments to be ordinary and incisive means through which His redemptive power passes and works.

verification and

Our prayer. . .

- How do I personally respond to the grace of the vocation?
- What does "unceasing prayer" mean for me?
- How do I succeed in reconciling the requirement for "unceasing prayer and a keen desire for radical fidelity"?

The Word of God

- Roots and nourishment, prayerful listening, docility of faith, illumination and transformation. . . . Which of these aspects do I find the most in my life? Which could I intensify?

The liturgical and sacramental life

- What place and what significance do I reserve for the Eucharist in my vocation and my mission? How do I participate in Mass?
- *Liturgical year, Sunday, Lauds and Vespers. . .how do I live these times, these spaces, these commitments?*
- *The sacrament of reconciliation. . . .frequency and regularity. . .How do I stand?*

PERSONAL PRAYER

In God in the world. . .

14.1 *Aware that it is necessary to recollect ourselves in God in order to be in the world in truth, we will daily find times of silent adoration and contemplation, also in our houses.*

We are consecrated seculars and want to give Christian witness in the world. . .all this will be possible on one indispensable condition: prayer. The following articles speak to us about the need for personal prayer, prayer of the heart, made up of silence, adoration and contemplation.

Also in our houses. . .

Personal prayer in our life surroundings. . .

"If they want to pray longer, let them go into their rooms, and enclosed there, pray in the way and as much as the Spirit and conscience will dictate" (R 6,7).

"When you want to pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you" (Mt. 6:6).

Silent adoration and contemplation

14.1 *in order: to voice our praise and thanksgiving together with all creatures; to ask pardon for sin in the world, for ourselves and for all our sisters and brothers; to be amazed by the marvels that God works in and around us.*

* Praise and thanksgiving together with all creatures. . .

"Through your holy name, may it be blessed beyond the ocean's grains of sand, beyond the drops of the waters, beyond the multitude of stars" (R 5,26).

* Asking pardon for the sins of the world. . .

"Deign to forgive my sins, alas, even those of my father and mother and of my relatives and friends, and those of the entire world ..." (R 5,24).

* Amazement over the marvels that God works in us and around us.

Do we still know how to be amazed by God's marvels? Wonder, silence, wisdom, strength and ardor are part of our style of life. In fact, we meditated on this in the first chapter, article 4.2: *"The Holy Spirit, who is always at work in us, will make us capable of silence, wonder and wisdom like Anna, daughter of Phanuel, and will give us the strength and zeal of Judith. . ."*

The means of conversion...

14.2 *We will learn to value all the means that can help us in our journey of continuous conversion: especially life review, evaluation with the Directress and spiritual direction.*

Having ascertained our inadequacy, our infidelity. . . our journey must be of one of *continuous conversion*. We must let ourselves be helped. . . use all means possible, and use them well. *"Seek out, and desire all those means and ways that are necessary to persevere and prosper till the end"* (R pr,10).

"This sort of person will undoubtedly be able to take care of herself: one who will want to embrace the means and ways necessary to such an end, since there is little or no difference between freely saying: 'I no longer want to serve God' and not wanting the ways and the rules necessary to be able to keep oneself in this.

"My very own sisters, it is necessary that we be vigilant, and so much more so, as the undertaking is of such importance that there could be no greater, in which lie our life and well-being" (R pr,13-16).

Each sister can and must let herself be assisted where and how she most needs. . . nonetheless, the Company suggests some particular means:

* **Life review.** . . this is a matter of revisiting and verifying our daily life, our choices, and our plans in the light of the Word of God and our Codes of holiness: the writings of Saint Angela and the Constitutions.

This may be personal – examination of conscience – or community-wide 'in company.' How much we

have to ask pardon for, how much we have to be thankful for . . .in resuming the journey of continuous conversion to the one Lover;

- * **Evaluation with the directress.** . . evaluation with the directress regarding observance of the Constitutions and the life of the Company is the verification to be preferred; it is a salvific duty in the light of obedience;
- * **And spiritual direction.** . . The task of spiritual direction is to support the believer in living everyday reality with a sense of faith. This entails a relationship of accompaniment between a person endowed with wisdom and spiritual discernment, and a person who wishes to travel a journey of faith and discovery regarding God's will in her life.

Fasting

14.3 *We will welcome the invitation of our Foundress to accompany our prayer with fasting.*

In dialogue with a spiritual guide and with the consent of the Directress, we will find personal times and forms of fasting, which dispose us to conversion, to moderation in our life-style and to solidarity with our poorer sisters and brothers.

"Yet again remember that each one should want to embrace bodily fasting too as something indeed necessary and as a means and way to the true spiritual fasting . . ." (R4,1-2).

Fasting is not the same for everyone. . .but chosen, willed, sought: *we will find personal times and forms of fasting. . .*

Obedient and not arbitrary fasting: *in dialogue with a spiritual guide and with the consent of the Directress. . .*

"However, because one does not want anything unreasonable, you are admonished that no one ought to fast without advice, especially that of her spiritual father and of the lady governors of this Company, who may have to relax and diminish these fasts as seems necessary, . . ." (R4,18-19).

Fasting, how and why. . .

- o For conversion: *"Since gluttony was indeed the origin of all our evils, so may fasting and abstinence appropriately be the beginning and the means of our spiritual goods and benefits" (R 4,6).*
- o For moderation in our life-style: *"Let them eat and drink, not for pleasure and to satisfy their appetite, but only out of the need to sustain nature in order to serve God better (Counsels 5,8).*
- o For *solidarity with our poorer sisters and brothers.*

Traditional devotions

14.4 *Our life of prayer will find a way of expressing itself also with forms of traditional devotion proper to the community and to the local Church.*

"It would be necessary, with proper discernment, to give popular piety its proper place, and for people to be educated especially in liturgical prayer. . ." (N.M.I. 34).

"The harmonious fusion of the Christian message with the culture of a people, often expressed in manifestations of popular piety, is a reason for the Magisterium's esteem for the latter" (Directory on Popular Piety and Liturgy, 2002).

In a Company present in places so different and all over the world, we have to respect each person and each culture and become integrated in the traditions proper to a place, as long as this does not betray our essence and fidelity to the Church.

The Magisterium and the local Church . . .

14.5 *We will enrich our spiritual life with the study of the teachings of the Magisterium and with participation in initiatives promoted by the local Church.*

Study and participation are necessary. . .The Company cannot offer everything regarding formation. It is called to offer specific formation, but each sister can and must attend to her own formation and updating.

The Constitutions call for an enrichment of our spiritual life:

- * *With the study of the teachings of the Magisterium. . .* for the enrichment of our spiritual life, for our ongoing formation, so our witness in the world may be timely and faithful, *in order to bring the renewing strength of the Gospel into the environments where God has called us* (Const. 3.4);
- * *And with participation in initiatives promoted by the local Church. . .* insofar as possible, it is necessary for us to participate in what the local Church proposes: *we will commit ourselves to making our contribution as consecrated lay women to the life of the Diocese* (Const. 4.3).

The Rule and the Foundress's writings

14.6 *We will meditate on the Rule and the other writings which our Foundress left us, a sure way for responding faithfully to the divine call.*

A sure way. . .

"If you strive with all your might for a future of living as indeed is required of true spouses of the Most High, and to observe this Rule which has been composed to be useful to you, indeed as the road for you to walk by, I have this undaunted and firm faith and hope in the infinite divine goodness, that not only will we easily overcome all dangers and adversities, but we will conquer them, and with great glory and jubilation. Actually, we will cross through this momentary life with consolation. . ." (R pr, 23-26).

"Every consecrated person will constantly refer to the Rule, the Counsels and the Testament of Saint Angela Merici, because referring to one's origins preserves and nourishes the spiritual energies capable of always paving the way for an authentic renewal" (Const. 37.1).

"Finally, take the greatest care that the good directives given, especially those in the Rule, be most diligently observed" (T 11,1).

"I ask you all, or rather I beg you for love of the Passion of Jesus Christ and of our Lady, that you strive to put into practice these few counsels which I am leaving you now to carry out after my death; they will be for you a reminder of at least a part of my will and desire" (Counsels pr, 20-21).

"The Rule and the Constitutions, which are the updating of the former, must become the constant object of meditation: therein will you discover a richness otherwise unknown" (M.Albertini).

The feasts of the Company

14.6 *We will celebrate her feast and that of Saint Ursula with fervor. On the day of Saint Catherine of Alexandria we will remember the birth of the Company.*

The Saints are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, who endlessly chant the glory and mercy of God; in them, in fact, the Paschal passage from this world to the Father has already taken place.

The Saints are intercessors and friends of the faithful still pilgrims on earth, because the Saints, even though immersed in the beatitude of God, know the worries of their brothers and sisters, and accompany their journey with prayer and patronage. . . (cf Directory on Popular Piety and Liturgy, 2002).

Particularly important for the Company are the feasts of the Foundress and Saint Ursula, our protector, and the date of the Company's birth, November 25, the day of St. Catherine of Alexandria. We will celebrate them joyfully, if possible in Company, but also in *diaspora, one heart and one spirit*.

The meetings of the Company

15 *For our interior life the annual retreat is of fundamental importance, as well as spirituality days and periodic meetings according to the traditions of each Company.*

Our meetings . . .

*"Let us be concerned for each other, to stir a response in love and good works. Do not stay away from the **meetings** of the community, as some do, but encourage each other to go. . ."* (Heb 10: 24-25)

"You must take care to have your daughters come together from time to time in the place you think best and most convenient. And then (according to whether you have at your disposal a suitable person) have them listen to a short sermon and exhortation, so that, together like this, they might also meet each other as loving sisters, and thus, talking over spiritual matters, rejoice together, and together encourage one another, which will be no small help to them" (T 8, 1-6).

Let us give Company meetings the importance they deserve. . . fervor is lost and vocational fidelity is jeopardized without them. Let us never neglect them. Let us honor anew the duty to participate, with the ensuing solicitude to let it be known beforehand if grave causes prove to be impediments, or at least do so immediately after the meeting. The directresses are to consider it their duty to prepare the meetings with special attention, and all the sisters to participate in a sisterly manner with affection, in the desire to grow in thanksgiving and in the commitment for a beautiful Company, in unity.

Always remember that these meetings have top priority in the list of our commitments compared with other apostolic activities; let us at least evaluate our choices. . .

As far as the annual retreat is concerned as well, it is good to do it with one's own Company, or with other sister Companies. . . this retreat is always a source of irreplaceable thrust and commitment.

Special times. . . to be welcomed with responsibility and gratitude. . .

15 These special times, which are for each of us an authentic gift of the Holy Spirit, will be welcomed with responsibility and gratitude.

Each sister is called to responsibility and gratitude in seeking, wishing, welcoming and participating . . . in Company meetings. . . as *an authentic gift of the Spirit*.

Company meetings are a duty. . . not an obligation. As a duty, they require responsibility in both participation and the style of participation. . . Since nothing is obtained by force. . . it is necessary to want, desire, seek and experience the meetings as a gift, and hence with gratitude. . .

Times of grace . . . for the Company

15 They also are a time of grace for the Company, during which we will be able: to share the same ideal; to communicate to each other the joy of being together; to experience more intensely among us the intercessory presence of our Foundress.

The 'celebration' of the encounters. . . is a gift and a grace for the Company at large. . . thus are they to be prepared. . . thus are they to be lived.

It is a grace to be able to be in Company, to be able to work for the Company, to share the same call, the same goal; in order to celebrate together. . . the celebration of sisters, daughters, spouses, mothers. . . in order to always feel Saint Angela in our midst.

"Also, now I am more alive than when they saw me in the flesh. . . now I see them and know them better. . . and can and want to help them more. . . and am continually among them with my Lover, or rather ours, the Lover of us all" (Counsels 5, 35-38).

"And I shall always be in your midst, helping your prayers" (Counsels 9,20).

Mary, Mother of Jesus. . .

16 Mary, Mother of Jesus, to whom we turn with filial affection, is the model of our life as consecrated women in the world and the support of our daily response to God. From her we will learn to progress in faith and to open ourselves to the love of God. Through her we will implore the light of the Spirit. We will turn to her in trials and difficulties, in order to be faithful always, like her.

The Constitutions tell us who Mary is for us and give us three verbs for establishing our relationship with her: turn, learn, and implore . . . and also single out the purpose of our affection for Our Lady.

Who Mary is. . .

- o *Mary, Mother of Jesus. . .* we immediately feel her close to us, the mother of an Infant who *will grow in age, wisdom and grace*. . . the Mother of Jesus is also our Mother. . . we will turn to her as affectionate daughters.
- o *The model of our life as consecrated women in the world . . .* the Mother of Jesus lived an ordinary life in the world. . . she contemplated the workings of the Son of God, the Savior.
- o *Support of our daily response to God. . .* She also supports our daily 'yes,' especially during our most difficult moments.

The verbs. . .

- o To the Mother of Jesus **we will turn with filial affection.** . . .recalling Jesus' words of entrustment as she stood at the foot of the cross: *Behold your son. . . behold your mother. . .*
- o **From Our Lady we will learn to progress in faith and to open ourselves to the love of God.** *Believing in the angel's message, she is the first to welcome the mystery of the Incarnation, doing so in a perfect way (cf. Redemptoris Mater, 13). Mary educates us to live the faith as a demanding and engaging journey which calls for audacity and constant perseverance at all ages and in all life situations.*
- o **Through her we will implore the light of the Spirit...** united with her in the cenacle of our houses . . .and our meetings.
- o **We will turn to her in trials and difficulties.** . . . We too can pray as Don Bosco did: "*O Mary, keep my trust in you ever alive so that in every difficulty I too may experience how you truly are the relief of the poor, the defense of those persecuted, the health of the sick, the consolation of those afflicted, the refuge of sinners and the perseverance of the just.*"

The purpose of our filial devotion to Mary is fidelity . . . in order to be faithful always, like her.

The rosary. . .

16 *We will consider the rosary a privileged form of Marian prayer.*

We can pray to Our Lady in many ways, but the rosary is suggested to us as *a privileged form of Marian prayer. . .*

It is contemplative prayer of the life of Jesus and Mary. It is not a prayer of pious ladies. . .but rather the prayer of contemplative women of faith. With the Gospel in hand, we can also be new and creative in our meditation on the mysteries of salvation.

"This is the prayer in which intimate communion with Christ and His Mother Mary is commemorated and celebrated in direct reference to the mysteries. It is a prayer in which the mystery of Mary is continuously evoked in the series of the 'Ave Maria,' and where everything is then brought together in the mystery of the Trinity. This prayer is an admirable construct which, in brief, makes us relive the stages of the faith, makes us reflect on the fact that we are journeying, and makes us think about eternal life.

"However, let's not be in a hurry when saying the rosary. . .Our entering into communion with the Blessed Virgin, and through her with Christ, and through Christ with God, is what is jeopardized by our haste as persons praying under tension. The contemplative pace of the rosary must be safeguarded, and, especially in a consecrated life, the rosary must especially be seen to and preserved in our journey of faith, hope and charity". . . (Ballestrero).

"The rosary is my favorite prayer. What a marvelous prayer! Marvelous in its simplicity and depth. . .The principal events in the life of Jesus pass before the eyes of faith against the background of the words 'Ave Maria'. . . At the same time, in these decades of the rosary our heart may encapsulate all the facts making up the life of each person, the family, the nation, the Church and humanity. Personal events and those of our neighbor, and in particular those who are closest to us, who are dearest to our heart. This is how the prayer of the rosary pulses with the pace of human life" (John Paul II).

Fidelity to personal and community prayer

17 *Aware that without spaces of time sought responsibly, it is not possible to live contemplation in action, we will strive to be faithful to our life of personal and community prayer and to whatever promotes our growth according to the plan of God.*

The dimension of contemplation demands a space of time duly chosen and sought. Haste is an illness driven by the anxious thrust of activism. It seems that time is given to us only to do things. . .giving space to contemplation entails making an arduous effort. And yet time is to be dedicated first of all to the Lord, and also has to be planned (daily, weekly and yearly plan).

"It will never be possible to insist enough on unconditional fidelity to the daily appointment of the encounter with God in prayer, an appointment that must have a well defined time and minimum duration. . .in absolutely no way whatsoever must commitments, work, fatigue, disappointments, or concerns impede the loving appointment of faith with Him who has loved us and called us to embark upon an equally difficult

and joyful path, along which the typical following in the world is lived only by those who each day give primacy to Him, the Lord of time and things, truly consecrating the spaces due to Him” (V. Macca).

How much time for prayer?

Regarding how, when, how long, where, and in what way. . is entrusted to each sister's initiative, rule of life, and personal commitment: all this must emanate from an interior need, from the commitment of love, and stems from the eagerness for prayer and union with Christ.

“There will perhaps be days when extraordinary commitments make it necessary to reduce the amount of time. These, however, will always be exceptions that love will be able to overcome. . . .if the exception becomes the rule, this would be tantamount to the death of prayer, the betrayal of consecrated secularity. Neither God nor the world would have what they have the right to expect of us” (V.Macca).

Dialogue with the Directress. . .

17 Should there be persistent difficulties, we will try, in dialogue with the Directress, to find the most suitable means to safeguard our spiritual life.

The Constitutions also foresee difficulties. . .and do not exempt us from finding *the most suitable means to safeguard our spiritual life. . .* for each particular situation. . .*dialogue with the Directress* is necessary in order to find these means.

From awareness that nothing is possible without prayer, we move on to the effort of fidelity, and, lastly, to dialogue with the Directress in order to ensure being safeguarded in each situation of the spiritual life.

Regarding *dangers and various traps and diabolic snares* . . .our own difficulties or those caused by others. . . .Saint Angela suggests: *“be quick to refer this to the lady governors of the Company so that they may take care of it* (R 3,10). This is the verification required of us, and what we must do.

verification and

Personal prayer

- *Do I find moments of silent adoration and contemplation each day? Where? Have I given myself time and space for my encounter with the Lord?*
- *Life review, evaluation with the directress, and spiritual direction: do I seek these means along my journey, which must be one of constant conversion? What are my difficulties?*
- *How do I feel about Saint Angela's invitation to accompany prayer with fasting? Have I found personal times and forms for fasting: little, possible and concrete things? Does fasting dispose me to conversion, moderation and solidarity? Personal review?*
- *How do I live my belonging to the universal and local Church. . .knowledge, study, participation?*
- *The writings of Saint Angela: what place do they occupy in my life as a consecrated secular in the Company? Are they a sure way for me to respond faithfully to the call? What 'use' do I make of them?*
- *The meetings of the Company and the Federation: retreat, days of spirituality, conferences. . .Are they a burden, an obligation, a duty, a gift? Do I know I have to give priority to active participation and responsible participation?*
- *What place does Our Lady have in my consecrated life?*
- *My spiritual life. . .personal and community prayer; do I verify my fidelity? Have I identified difficulties? Am I willing to revisit the necessary times and means?*

Lord, teach me to pray...

*"Lord, in this tormented period of history,
in this time that is so difficult for the Church,
I who live in the word,
consecrated radically to the Gospel,
for the transformation of your secular world,
Lord, I who suffer and hope with the sufferings
and the hopes of humanity today, how must I pray?*

*How must I pray so as not to lose
the deep contemplation,
nor the enduring ability to serve my brothers and sisters?*

*How must I pray without distancing myself from the problems of humanity,
nor abandoning the demands of my daily life,
but also without losing sight of the reality that **You alone are God**,
that only one thing is necessary,
and that it is urgent to seek first
the Reign of God and God's justice?
How can I find a time
of silence and a desert place
to listen exclusively to you
in the midst of a world deafened by human words
and full of activity and problems that pursue me?
Lord, teach us to pray!"*

(Pironio)

CONSTITUTIONS CHAPTER FOUR

CONSECRATION AND MISSION

The title

This chapter is entitled *consecration and mission*. Neither consecration without mission, nor mission without consecration. . . .not one or the other, but one as the foundation of the other. We belong totally to God, we live in God. . . .we work for God, with Him, and we give ourselves to our brothers and sisters.

Living for the Lord and having a mission in the world are two firmly linked aspects in what could be called a circular relationship. It is by being with Jesus that we understand the urgency and the nature of 'going forth'. . . .why go forth, where to go, to announce what. It is also by 'going forth' that we are truly in the company of Jesus: in fact, He was always on the move, a homeless itinerant: "*The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head*" (Mt 8: 20).

"Your fervor is born from having discovered the beauty of Christ and of his unique way of loving, healing and meeting the needs of life and of enlivening and comforting it. And your lives aim to sing the praise of this beauty so that your being in the world may be a sign of your being in Christ" (Benedict XVI to the participants in the International Symposium of Secular Institutes, 3 Feb. 2007).

"Your consecration will be not only a commitment, but an expression of support, a love, a beatitude to which you will always be able to turn; a fullness that will compensate for all sacrifices, and will qualify you for that marvelous paradox of charity: give, give to others, give to neighbor in order to have in Christ" (Paul VI).

CONSECRATION

"Consecration bespeaks the intimate and secret supporting structure of your being and your doing. Here lies your profound and hidden wealth, which those among whom you live are not able to explain, nor do they even suspect" (Paul VI).

The grace of consecration is a gift

1.1. In Christ, the Father offers each of us the special grace of consecration in the Company.

A gift offered . . . handed to us. . . .just reach out your hands. . . .just open your heart.

We, always so serious. . . .we would have been willing, and perhaps also disposedto embrace our vocational commitment by offering something ourselves. . . .bringing with us some fund of good works.

But the Father in Christ turns our perspective upside down. . . .He is waiting for us on the threshold and offers us a gift.

- **It is a personal and community gift**

Reserved *to each one of us*. There is a personal aspect. . . .to each one the grace of the vocation. There is an aspect of Company. . . .*to each one of us* . . . that 'us' which in the journey of the Company will become unity, togetherness: *united together to serve His divine Majesty*.

It is a personal and community consecration . . . *in the Company*.

- **It is a singular gift**

An incomparable gift impossible to photocopy. . . .hence, singular:: *"you must give him infinite thanks for having granted such a singular gift especially to you, [...] First, be willing to recognize what such a thing means and what a new and wondrous dignity this is"* (R. pr.5.8).

The response is ours and is made through taking up the evangelical counsels.

18.1 With our response, through taking up the evangelical counsels we express the firm and absolute will to give ourselves unconditionally to God and to our sisters and brothers, and to be faithful for all of our life.

It means taking on a commitment of life and for life. . . responding to the gift of the call with a firm and absolute will. . . self-donation and unconditional fidelity. . . as Saint Angela tells us: *“She should have the firm intention of serving God in this sort of life”* (R.1,2).

“...Let each one be willing to be ready to die sooner than ever consent to stain and profane such a sacred jewel” (R9,23).

Paul VI and Benedict XVI have offered us a beautiful description of the evangelical counsels to be lived as consecrated seculars: *“Your poverty tells the world that it is possible to live with this world’s good things and that we can make use of what makes for a more civilized life and progress without becoming slaves to any of it; your chastity tells the world of a selfless love, as fathomless as God’s own heart from which you draw it and dedicate yourselves to all without becoming bound to anyone, attending above all to those most abandoned; your obedience tells the world that a man can be happy without digging in his heels over the things that just suit him, and can be always completely open to God’s will as seen in the daily grind, in the signs of the times, and in the world’s need of salvation here and now”* (Paul VI).

“The evangelical counsels, accepted as the authentic rule of life, strengthen faith, hope and charity, which unite to God” (Benedict XVI).

18.2 *We will undertake the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty, in order to live them in the secular state, in the manner intended by the Foundress and presented in these Constitutions.*

The Constitutions must define the sacred bond:

For the Constitutions now in force, and therefore for the Church, it is now possible to undertake the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty *either with “a firm intention” or with a vow or with a promise.*

This is a legal bond insofar as it is a consecration recognized by the Church.

“When the evangelical counsels are undertaken, they are done so in concrete form. The substance does not change, and cannot change, even if one were to change the way of pronouncing the consecration or understanding the concrete form. It is always the same commitment, always the same substantially intense act, because it encompasses all the rest of the person’s life, which is rendered explicit in the formula of consecration” (Sarzi Sartori).

The evangelical counsels proper to each form of consecrated life are to be lived by us *in the secular state, in the manner understood by the Foundress and presented in the Constitutions.*

It therefore follows that it is necessary to live them and verify them in the light of secularity, the writings and spirituality of the Foundress, and the Constitutions now in force: *“Provided they stand firm and steady in their resolve, and strive to observe the Rule”* (Counsels 5,26-27).

verification and

Consecration ...

- Consecration and mission. Belonging to God and working for the Reign of God. . . How do I succeed in combining this twofold requirement of my vocation?
- How do I welcome and live the singular grace of consecration in the Company? How do I respond as person and as Company?
- The undertaking of the evangelical counsels. . . what does this say to me. . . what does it entail?
- What does the sacred bond mean in my consecration?
- How can I live the evangelical counsels in secularity and in the Merician spirituality?

FILIAL OBEDIENCE

19.1 With the gift of our will to God, we participate in the Church and with the Church in the mystery of the obedience of Christ, who came into the world not to do his own will, but the will of the One who sent him.

• Filial . . . obedience. . .

As defined in the title, this is the obedience of a child, and therefore the obedience of love, submission, trust and joy. . . It is the obedience of Jesus Himself, who came into the world in order to offer the sacrifice of Himself – as a human being – to do the Father’s will.

Filial obedience can also be crucifying: it led Jesus to be crucified. But this obedience redeemed us by virtue of the love with which Jesus said *Yes* to the Father for us. The mystery of Christ’s obedience also requires us to be and to do the Father’s will.

“Obedience to God is obedience we can always do. Only every so often is it a matter of obedience to direct orders or visible authorities. The more we are obedient, all the more are the orders of God multiplied, because He knows that this is the most beautiful gift we can give Him, the same gift His beloved Son Jesus gave Him. When God finds a soul resolved to obey, He then takes that person’s life in His hands, much like being at the helm of a boat or holding the reins of a wagon. Quite seriously, and not in theory, He becomes “Lord”, that is to say he who “reigns”, who “governs”, determining, we might say, moment by moment the deeds and words of that person, his or her way of using time, using everything” (Fr. Cantalamessa).

In this sense, the words of Saint Angela can be understood with a new meaning of belonging and obedience: *“My Lord, my only life and hope” . . .*” (R 5,35).

• The gift of our will . . .

The Constitutions here draw from the thinking of Saint Angela when speaking about will and obedience, and when summing us to look upon Jesus Christ as our constant reference: *“Again, we call upon each one to observe holy obedience, the only true self-denial of one’s own will, which is within us like murky hell. But Jesus Christ says: “Non veni facere voluntatem meam, sed eius qui misit me Pater”; that is, I have not come to do my will, but that of the Father who has sent me” (R.8,1-3).*

Obedience to Christ consists first and foremost in His fundamental choice to always do the will of God the Father. Just like for Jesus, our will must always correspond to the Father’s will; we hand our will over to Him. . . we give Him the gift of our will.

19.2 In union with Christ we will live obedience to the Word of God, to the Magisterium and the laws of the Church, to those who serve the Company with authority, "to father and mother," "to laws and statutes of the rulers, and to governors of States," provided they are not contrary to a conscience enlightened by faith, "and to every creature, for love of God" but especially we will be docile to the Holy Spirit who "continually," with counsel and inspiration, speaks to the reconciled and free heart.

Obedience to Christ. . . according to the ranking of Saint Angela. . .

There is a ranking in obedience. Nonetheless, it is total obedience ever in harmony with Saint Angela’s thinking: *“Obey God and each creature for love of God, as the Apostle says, as long as nothing is commanded against the honor of God and of one’s own integrity” (R.8,17-18).*

For as long as we are pilgrims on earth, we can only find God in the numerous mediations of human faces, the persons with whom we must relate. Therefore, we need the eyes of faith in order to make our obedience concrete in daily life, dialoging and evaluating ourselves with the persons God has chosen as sign of His will. This is duty-bound obedience, but our obedience goes beyond that, and is mutual submission in charity. We are in the great chapter of love. . . This total obedience to God and creatures proposed by Saint Angela is truly strong. . . it is a matter of obeying one and all. . . out of love. . . and obedience, like love, will have neither limits nor borders.

Obedience to the Holy Spirit

“And above all, obey the counsels and inspirations which the Holy Spirit continually sends into the heart, whose voice we will hear all the more clearly the more purified and clean our conscience” (R.8,14-15).

We become able to obey God continuously through His Spirit.

Placed at the end of a ranking of obedience, these words of Saint Angela bring this thought to mind.

That *above all* sounds like a priority, like something essential, even if it in no way eliminates the listing prior to it; in fact, that listing may be proposed together with a full exercise of concrete and meticulous obedience.

The Holy Spirit, the interior Master, will be He who will teach us everything, as we read in the Word of God: *“The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send you in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of what I have said to you”* (Jn 15:26).

Obedience to the Holy Spirit underpins the entire life of Saint Angela and the institution she founded, as we are reminded by the Constitutions: *“In obedience to the Spirit, she brought about, for God's glory, the flowering, in an entirely new institution, of 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”* (Const. 2.2).

A reconciled and free heart. . .

“We will hear all the more clearly the more purified and clean our conscience [will be]”. (cf R 8,15).

Sinfulness within us is the obstacle to listening to the voice of the Spirit.

In order to be enlightened by the Spirit, our conscience must be pure, honest, upright, free of compromises, able to seek the Truth, able to possess the *Wisdom that knows what is pleasing in His eyes and conforms to His precepts*. It is necessary to be humble and vigilant.

The inspirations coming from the Spirit bring:

- peace: accommodations, adjustments and compromises bring about no peace at all;
- concord: they help us to be in true communion with others and for others, ready and willing to seek solutions together, and, to the extent possible, find them;
- love: what truly counts is communion with Him, considered to be utmost Good;
- joy: denying one's own will may also cause suffering, but when we know how to make a holy and pleasing gift of it, we discover true joy.

Evaluation within the Company

19.3 *In evaluation within the Company each of us will learn to discern according to her own life situations, the demands of obedience, "great light"² and source of the freedom and joy born of the spiritual sacrifice of oneself."*

Regarding obedience as a “great light”, we could think back to some bible excerpts:

“Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light on your path. . .As your word unfolds, it gives light . . .” (Ps 119: 105, 130).

And regarding sacrifice: *“Is the pleasure of Yahweh in holocausts and sacrifices, or in obedience to the voice of Yahweh? Yes, obedience is better than sacrifice, submissiveness better than the fat of rams”* (1 S 15:22). *“You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices for sin. Then I said: ‘God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will’”* (Heb 10:6-7).

In the Company we find help for obedience in order to live in the light and offer a true spiritual sacrifice. To engage in discernment that is not theoretical, but regards *the demands of obedience in one's own conditions of life*. . .let us therefore learn how to engage in mutual and frank evaluation in the Company.

“Obedience, enlivened by charity, unites the members of an Institute in the same witness and the same mission, while respecting the diversity of gifts and individual personalities” (Vita Consecrata, 92).

What does the commitment of obedience entail:

19.4 *By the commitment assumed with consecration, each one, in active and responsible dialog according to means and times that are sought and agreed upon, will verify with the Directress, or her delegate, her own*

²St. Angela Merici, *Rule, Of Obedience*

commitment of fidelity to the demands of her vocation and to the charism, and her participation in the life of the Company, according to the Rule and the Constitutions; she will submit orientations and choices that might change her life in a significant way; as for example, a change of work or residence, the acceptance or refusal of public offices, of special family responsibilities and apostolic commitments, open to accept the directions that will be suggested to her.

Regarding obedience in the Company, the Constitutions make a clear distinction between evaluation with fellow sisters and verification with the directress.

Verification ensues from the commitment embraced in consecration, and takes place dialoging, submitting, and accepting. . . .in an active and responsible way, with forms, means and times *sought and agreed upon.*

This is a commitment of obedience. . .and therefore requires verification of that commitment. The areas for verification are:

- o ***Personal commitment of fidelity to the demands of her vocation and to the charism ...*** Am I faithful to what my vocation demands of me? Am I living the Merician charism, ever faithful to the requirements of secular consecration?
- o ***Participation in the life of the Company, according to the Rule and the Constitutions; ...*** My verification regards what the Merician spirituality proposes to me, with the Constitutions ever in hand.
- o ***Orientations and choices that might change her life in a significant way; as for example, a change of work or residence, the acceptance or refusal of public offices, of special family responsibilities and apostolic commitments. . .*** Indicative but very concrete choices that may jeopardize my vocation.

With verification, the directions of the directress are accepted with a sense of true willingness and responsibility.

The search for God's will lasts throughout life. . .

19.5 *Wisdom and upright judgment will guide us consecrated women and the Directress in our journey of seeking the will of God, a journey which will be lifelong; the seeking jointly, however, can never exonerate each of us from personally assuming our own responsibilities.*

It behooves us to ask for the gift of wisdom and rectitude in order to seek God's will **always**, and seek it lifelong. *"Because merely beginning is not enough if not carried through. "He who perseveres till the end will be saved" (R.pr,11).*

"Contrary to the spirit of discord and division, authority and obedience shine like a sign of that unique fatherhood which comes from God, of the brotherhood born of the Spirit, of the interior freedom of those who put their trust in God, despite the human limitations of those who represent him" (Vita Consacrata, 92). The directress's suggestions will have to become the way for me; it is a question of responsible obedience, not blind obedience. And responsibility is always personal. Is it a responsibility verified, or is it hardheadedness? Is it a search for God's will, or vested interests?

verification and

Filial obedience. . .

- What does filial obedience say to me?
- What is the dialogue between directress and sister like? Active and responsible?
- How do I seek and reach agreement on the time for this conversation?
- How do I verify fidelity to the requirements of the vocation and the charism?
- How does participation in the life of the Company, in fidelity to the Rule and the Constitutions, become concrete?
- When and how are orientations and choices of great importance submitted?
- Obedience and personal responsibility? How do I reconcile them? What do they require of me?
- What about commitments? Do I always ask? Do I accept indications and directions? Do I ask only after I've made my decision? Any grumbling about the indications received?

VIRGINAL CHASTITY

This is a voluntary choice

20.1 *Embracing chastity for the Kingdom of Heaven, we participate in the Church and with the Church in the mystery of the virginity of Christ, who loved men and women so much that he gave himself for their salvation.*

Like that of Christ, ours is a life which wishes to be pure gift. . . it is a choice. . . an embrace.

Chastity

“Chastity means the positive integration of sexuality within the person. [...] Chastity is a moral virtue, a gift of God, a grace, and a fruit of the Holy Spirit” (C.C.C. Compendium 488).

“As followers of Christ, the model of all chastity, all the baptized are called to live chastely in keeping with their particular states of life. Some profess virginity or consecrated celibacy which enables them to give themselves to God alone with an undivided heart in a remarkable manner. Others, if they are married live in conjugal chastity, or if unmarried practice chastity in continence” (C.C.C. Compendium 491).

Virginal chastity

“God calls some men and women to follow the Lord Jesus in a life of virginity or of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. These renounce the great good of Matrimony to concentrate on the things of the Lord and seek to please him. They become a sign of the absolute supremacy of Christ’s love and of the ardent expectation of his glorious return” (C.C.C. Compendium 342).

“The reply of the consecrated life is above all in the joyful living of perfect chastity, as a witness to the power of God’s love manifested in the weakness of the human condition. The consecrated person attests that what many have believed impossible becomes, with the Lord’s grace, possible and truly liberating” (Vita consacrata, 88).

We are called to virginity, and Saint Angela speaks of virginity:

“Again, let each one want to preserve sacred virginity not on account of making a vow through any human urging, but voluntarily making a sacrifice to God of her own heart.

Since virginity is the sister of all the angels, victory over the appetites, queen of the virtues, possessing all good things” (R IX, 1-5).

Being a relative of the angels is also recalled by the fathers of the Church: *“What we will be one day, you are already beginning to be. You, as of this century, savor the glory of the resurrection, pass through the world without being corrupted by it. As long as you remain chaste and virgin, you are equal to the angels of God”* (St. Cyprian).

Our response

20.2 *In union with Christ and in imitation of him, we will respond to the love of the Father with a continuous act of love, keeping alive in ourselves the expectation of the ultimate encounter with our "Lover."*

This is the chapter of love welcomed. . . lived. . . given. Love is not just a human prerogative. . . it comes from God; it is a reality that cannot be limited just to the experience of this planet earth. . . it bears the mark of eternity.

True love is what unites the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the *blessed and undivided Trinity*. True love is that which comes from the Father, the giver of each perfect gift. It comes from the Father through the Son: *in union with Christ, and imitating Him, we will respond to the love of the Father.*

But how will we respond to the love of the Father? *With a continuous act of love.*

This continuity is what makes us think. . . it is like hearing the echo of another important word. . . eternity. . . forever, all life long, and beyond this life. Everyone is able to love for a moment, for a period of time. . . everyone knows how to present and demonstrate a fleeting love. . . but continuity characterizes total and definitive love.

Precisely this *continuous act of love* will render a consecrated life possible in daily fidelity, forever. . . and will keep *the expectation of the definitive encounter with our Lover* ever alive within us.

We live each day knowing and realizing we are loved, and witness this joy for everyone and in all situations

21.2 In our daily life we will express to ourselves and to the world the happiness and gratitude of one who knows she is loved, and we will witness to the joy of the gift of ourselves to God

Here is what Saint Angela recommends to us: *"Be happy, and always full of charity and faith and hope in God" (R.9,11)... "In every situation each one ought to conduct herself in such a manner that she not commit either against herself or in the sight of others anything at all that may be unworthy of spouses of the Most High" (R.9,6).*

And again: *"How much they have to exult and rejoice, for in heaven a new crown of glory and joy is prepared for all of them, one by one" (Counsels.5,25).*

We will be open to the great values...

20.2 We will be open to the values of friendship, to collaboration, to sincere help toward all. We will know how to value our femininity which will make us happy and free women, full of charity, faith and hope, available to give ourselves to all without letting ourselves be possessed by anyone.

In chapter IX of the Rule, Saint Angela herself singles out virginity as openness to relationship with others.

Virginity helps to overcome negative attitudes: *"Above all let her keep her heart pure and her conscience clean of every evil thought, of every shadow of envy and ill will, of every discord and evil suspicion, and of every other bad appetite and wish. . . . Not answering arrogantly. Not doing things unwillingly. Not staying angry. Not grumbling. Not spreading gossip" (R IX, 7-10, 15-19).*

Saint Angela concludes what she says about virginity on a positive note: *"Let all our words, acts, and conduct always be to teach and edify those who deal with us, having charity always burning in our hearts" (R IX, 21-22).*

Charity and humility are necessary: *"No one preserves the good of virginity better than God, who granted it; and "God is love (1 Jn 4:8). Therefore, the custodian of virginity is charity, but humility is the abode of that custodian" (St. Augustine).*

"This life-style may be lived if the spiritual life and good friendships are cultivated, if charity is practiced, if people educate themselves to sacrifice and control of emotion, if, without self-presumption, the situations that expose us to the risk of infidelity are wisely assessed" (Rev. Adriano Tessarollo).

The family of the Company

20.3 In the family climate, which each consecrated person is committed to build and preserve in the Company, each of us will be able to find means and ways to proceed in moments of difficulty, and to live the loneliness and spiritual trials.

The Company is a family. . . .and the family is a great good to *build and preserve*. . .

The climate of the Company is the responsibility of one and all. . . .when a good climate prevails, it is a great gift, a form of support in daily life: *"Although at times they will have troubles or anxieties, nevertheless this will soon pass away and be turned into gladness and joy" (Counsels 5,29).*

I must seek in the Company *the means and the ways* in order to forge ahead faithfully along the path of virginity. . . .if I always go looking for them elsewhere, I'll never find them.

The commitment

20.4 By the commitment she assumed with consecration, each one, "voluntarily making a sacrifice to God of her own heart," will live virginal chastity faithfully in all its dimensions and demands of totality and renunciation.

This is a total and demanding commitment to be lived in fidelity. . . .Before being a sacrifice, it is fullness. . . .and, precisely because it is fullness, it is capable of sacrifice.

"Outside of these two dimensions (spousal relationship with the Lord and charity towards neighbor), virginity is mostly perceived as 'privation' and not opportunity, and often triggers 'compensatory' attitudes that jeopardize its value of witness: authoritarianism, egoism, materialism, hedonism, exaggerated

attachment to material goods of all kinds, a propensity to dominate rather than serve, constant dissatisfaction, solitude” (Rev. Adriano).

20.4 *She will behave in such a way as not to commit "anything that might be unworthy of spouses of the Most High."*

In her writings, Saint Angela recommends attitudes and forms of conduct having to do with both doing and not doing. . . .but which are primarily based on being. . . .being spouses of the Most High. . . .my Lover, indeed, our Lover. . . .It is necessary to live like that.

We do not deserve being worthy of such a choice. Being spouses of the Most High is in no way proportional to our goodness and holiness. . . .it is a free and completely gratuitous choice made by our Lover.

I must therefore choose to be pleasing to the Spouse, as St. Paul suggests: “An unmarried man can devote himself to the Lord’s affairs, all he need worry about is pleasing the Lord[. . .] In the same way an unmarried woman, like a young girl, can devote herself to the Lord’s affairs; all she need worry about is being holy in body and spirit.[. . .] I say this only to help you, not to put a halter around your necks, but simply to make sure that everything is as it should be, and that you give your undivided attention to the Lord” (1Co 7: 32-35).

It is so beautiful and sweet to love God. . . .a virgin must believe and show this with her eyes, words, and deeds. . . .His love is so beautiful that it fills a heart and a life.

Watchfulness and respect...

20.5 *Watchfulness and profound respect will direct those locally responsible in helping and accompanying the members on their journey of continuous gift to the Lord.*

“I beg you that you willingly hold in consideration and have engraved on your mind and heart all your dear daughters, one by one; not only their names, but also their condition, and character, and their every situation and state” (T.2,1-3).

The openness and trust of the sisters will facilitate the task of those locally responsible.

In order to assist and accompany, it is necessary to know - deeply and personally. *Watchfulness* is needed: keeping one’s eyes ever open for fidelity to the vocation. Together with this, however, is *profound respect*: as persons responsible and as sisters, we must help each another, support each another, and accompany each another *along the path of continuous gift to the Lord*, doing so with responsibility, without stepping on each other, and without being domineering, because we all belong to the *Lover of us all*.

verification and

Virginal chastity . . .

1. Embracing chastity for the Reign of God. . .
How do I embrace chastity? What does this embrace include? What does this entail for my life?
2. *A continuous act of love. . . .How do I respond to the Father’s love? How do I sustain and cultivate continuity in love received and given?*
3. *The values of chastity: friendship, collaboration, cordiality, happiness, charity, faith and hope. . . .How do I stand? How do I think I can perfect them? How can I give myself to all, without letting myself be possessed by anyone?*
4. *Solitude and the trials of life. . . .How do I live solitude and the trials of life? Where do I find the means and the ways to overcome them, keeping virginity ever alive?*
5. *The dimensions and the requirements of virginal chastity. . . .How do I live them in fullness and sacrifice? What difficulties do I encounter? Am I able to open myself in order to be ever more transparent and serene in love?*

EVANGELICAL POVERTY

Poverty. . .in the style of the Gospel

21.1 *In our following of Christ Jesus we participate in the Church and with the Church in the mystery of the poverty of the Savior, who received everything from the Father and returned everything as offering to Him, source of all good.*

In the following of Jesus Christ. . .true wealth. . .

“Remember how generous the Lord Jesus was: he was rich, but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty” (2Co 8:9).

“Store up treasures for yourself in heaven. . .for where your treasure is, there also will your heart be ...” (Mt 6:20-21).

“Evangelical poverty is a value in itself, since it recalls the first of the Beatitudes in the imitation of the poor Christ. Its primary meaning, in fact, is to attest that God is the true wealth of the human heart” (Vita Consacrata, 90).

In this chapter on truly evangelical poverty, the Constitutions underscore the liberty of the children of God and the concrete, secular reality of daily life.

Let's give some thought to that **“everything”**. . .Just like Jesus, we too have received everything from the Father and must offer everything. . .

Dependence and complete trust in God. . .

21.2 *In union with Christ and in imitation of Him we will practice gospel poverty in total dependence on God, who wants our good and our joy;*

- Living this way means being happy to depend upon and abandon ourselves to God, who is our Everything and our joy;
- It means liberty and peace of mind in our commitment and our daily work, remembering we are children, but useless servants;
- It means asking for the gift of truly participating in Christ's poverty, especially in the small and big difficulties of life, both for ourselves and for others, unto the poverty of death, knowing well that: *“our every pain and sadness will turn into joy and gladness in paradise” (Counsels 5,30).*
- *It means living as Saint Angela wished: “Let each one strive to be stripped of everything and to put all her wealth and love and delight not in material things, not in food and over-eating, not in relatives and friends, not in herself, nor in any of her own attributes and knowledge, but in God alone, and in the kind and ineffable providence that is his alone” (R.10,8-13).*

All this is certainly exacting, and yet we do know this is the evangelical radicality recommended by the Foundress herself: *“We call upon each one, finally, to embrace poverty, not only that of temporal things but above all true poverty of spirit through which man strips his heart of every affection and hope for created things, and of himself” (R.10,1-5).*

Poor without God. . . .rich in God. . .

“In God, he has all his wealth and outside of God he sees himself impoverished of everything, being a total nothing, and with God possessing everything” (R.10,6).

This phrase embodies the Foundress's lofty spirituality and is the expression of her being and her willing for herself and for the Company she founded.

- **In God. . .** If all other goods are good and pleasing things, they are to be sought and respected. . .only in God do we have every good, in Him do we find everything and each person, and discover everything and everyone in a new light. The destiny of our life is in God's hands.
- **Outside of God. . .** we neither have nor are. . .everything is there, and everything may not be there. . .we are truly poor. It is well worth the effort to divest ourselves of everything in order to possess everything which is in God.
- **With God. . .** we have Him, and all other things will be given to us in abundance.

This is the following of Christ; it is participation in the poverty of the Savior, who has received everything from the Father. Like Him and with Him, we turn to the Father and offer ourselves to Him, the source of all good: *I offer everything at the feet of Your divine Majesty. And I beseech You, deign to receive it, even though I am unworthy.*

We work and we place our trust in Providence. . .

21.2 *We will experience the freedom of children, living from our work, and using the things of the world with a serene abandonment to the Father and his "benevolent and indescribable Providence"³;*

As recommended by Saint Angela:

"Do not be anxious about any temporal need, since God—he alone—knows, can, and wants to provide them. He wants only what is for your good and joy" (R.10,16-18).

"Also, let them hold this as most certain: that they will never be abandoned in their needs. God will provide for them wonderfully" (Counsels 5,31).

Diligence, intelligence, responsibility and autonomy, also so as not to be a burden for others. . . yet these are not synonyms of absolute self-sufficiency. Always and for everything, our life is in the hands of God. . .and He wants to provide wonderfully.

"Even though they certainly are goods, work and wealth do not give sense to life. On the contrary, they receive sense from communion with God and with others. . .A Christian works in peace and lives with moderation" (Cat. Ad. 1121).

"I have learnt to manage on whatever I have, I know how to be poor and I know how to be rich too; I have been through my initiation, and am now ready for anything anywhere: full stomach or empty stomach, poverty or plenty. There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength" (Ph 4:11-13).

Benevolent and indescribable Providence. . .

A Providence which is *benevolent and indescribable*, not parsimonious. We could not expect so much, could not expect more. . .God always provides in abundance, in a wonderful way; the recompense far exceeds the sacrifice as well as the request.

He provides for the wild flowers and the birds in the skies. . . He will take care of us: "Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them! Are you not worth much more than they are? Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; and yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his regalia was robed like one of these! . . .! Now if that is how God clothes the grass in the field which is there today and tomorrow thrown into the furnace, will he not much more look after you?" (cf Mt. 6).

"So do not worry; do not say 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'How are we to be clothed?'; it is the pagans who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. . .So do not worry about tomorrow; Tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own" (cf. Mt. 6).

Let us not lose peace, and let us cultivate trust, doing what is our duty for ourselves, for others and for the Company in a serene and responsible manner.

Accepting ourselves. . .

21.2 *We will know how to accept our limitations, our problems and the sufferings of life serenely, as a sharing in the poverty of Christ, until the supreme poverty of death.*

We would like to be perfect, especially regarding how others judge us. . .but we are not perfect. We all have negative aspects with respect to our personality, our character. . .we have defects. . .which are like

³St. Angela Merici, *Rule, Of Poverty*

thorns in our side that hurt. These our negative aspects become more evident when we encounter other persons with their limits and their forms of personal poverty. The sense of malaise is in us, and we read it in others. At times we experience guilt feelings, and at other times act like victims and accuse both others and the world at large of not doing enough or not understanding us. . . Just think, instead, how clever we are in exaggerating whatever good thing we have done, and willingly highlight our personal merits!

This is why, in poverty, we have to reconcile ourselves with *our limitations, problems and the sufferings of life*. . . The Lord would repeat to us what He said to St. Paul: **“My grace is enough for you; my power is at its best in weakness”** (2Co 12:9).

Moreover, this was the experience of Christ Himself; He experienced temptations, solitude, abandonment, failure, and incomprehension unto death. This is why our Constitutions call on us to accept everything **as a sharing in the poverty of Christ, until the supreme poverty of death**.

Availability to others. . .

21.2 *We will always be ready to give our sisters and brothers time, advice, prayer, money and other goods, attentive to the emerging poverties, the demands of the Church and the needs of the Company.*

*“The Gospel commands us to distribute our goods and have them circulate. . . It condemns egoistic possession which does not take the needs of others into account. Nonetheless, it does not ask us to live in misery. **The absolute value is fraternity, not material poverty.** This is confirmed by the experience of the early Church in Jerusalem, where the believers were of one mind and one spirit, placing all they had in common so that no one was needy”* (Cat. Ad. 147).

Everyone can give something. . . ever attentive to requirements and needs. It is a matter of having gratuitousness and the style of gift prevail over the rationale of possession-driven isolation. Gift is the measure of love. Even if we were not able to practice charity, we could still “be” charity ourselves, offering what we are and what we have. Others could thereby reap the benefits of our espousal, sisterhood, maternity. . .

Giorgio Mazzola (S. I. Christ the King) says: *“Poverty creates a space so the existence of others and the world’s concerns may become a part of our life.”*

Needs may also include those of the Company: *“If by God’s will and provision it should happen that some money or other material things would be held in common, remember that good management is needed for them, and they should be dispensed prudently, especially to assist the sisters, and according to each need that arises. . . let her want to leave some little thing to the Company as a sign of love and charity. . . ”* (R XI, 22-24, 31).

Discernment is always necessary. . .

21.3 *In constant dialog we will seek within the Company the ways for a wise discernment of the realities in which we are inserted, and the ways for implementing our real commitment to poverty.*

Verification regarding the life of poverty has to do with concrete elements in order to seek the ways to live our commitment of poverty fully in our respective environments.

“Wealth is something good, the goods of this earth and money are not cursed. . .but there is one thing that is all the better: the richness of the Reign of God. . .the Lord is supreme richness” (Tonino Bello).

Limitation and dependence. . .

21.4 *By the commitment she assumed with consecration, each one will voluntarily seek limitation and dependence in using and disposing of her own goods.*

Each consecrated secular continues to have and possess, in limitation and dependence.

Let us recall the words of Paul VI: *“Your poverty tells the world that it is possible to live with the world’s good things and that we can make use of what makes for a more civilized life and progress without becoming slaves to any of it.”*

The Constitutions offer us *ways and means* for an effective commitment of poverty. . .because following Christ necessarily implies a poor life, self-constraint in the use of things, a moderate and simple life-style. It is a matter of living liberty, balance, and serenity, both in possessing and in privation.

Voluntarily. . . . an exquisitely Merician attitude because poverty itself is an act of love, and therefore, limitation and dependence have to be voluntary. . . .A verification of situations and criteria is required.

We have to embrace poverty in limitation and dependence. . . .not because someone asks us to. . . . this might never be asked of us directly, but we have to do it. It comes down to imposing a limitation upon ourselves voluntarily, and wanting to be dependent in both using and disposing. . . .in evaluation with our directress. Limitation, where and how? Dependence, how and when?

Verification. . .

21.4 For this reason she will evaluate with the Directress, or with a delegate, in ways and at times agreed upon, her own personal economic situation, and the criteria for the use of goods; she will ask permission to contract debts, make loans, guarantees, extraordinary expenses, donations of a certain amount in relationship to her own economic condition. In urgent cases she will act with prudence and, as soon as possible, will inform the Directress.

...There are also those who never 'inform' . . .How is prudence measured? How does a sister live her commitment of poverty? It is also necessary to plan ways and times, agree upon them together (once every so often? once a year? when needed?). Here we are not in the realm of formal permission. . . .but in the realm of love yet again. . . .it is necessary to set **criteria** so we may be able to orient ourselves each day and behave accordingly.

21.5 Christian charity and material solicitude will encourage the persons in charge to be near the members of the Company who might be in a needy situation.

*“Be prudent in this matter, and be good and true mothers, and such income as you have, **spend it** for the good and the development of the Company, according as discretion and motherly love will suggest to you” (T.9,2-4).*

Regarding goods, Saint Angela doesn't seem to be offering counsels on savings or capital gains, but rather on **spending for good**. It is a matter of living moderation and liberty in distribution.

The growth of the Company, accompaniment and formation, strength and persons is the aim anyone responsible for administration has to set and pursue. And all this is to be done not only in a technical sense, a managerial sense. . . .but with maternal love, with neither clamor nor frenzy, in all simplicity and discretion, living the echo of yet another evangelical lesson: “*Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.*”

Evangelical poverty. . .

- 1. Poverty of spirit. . .in my life. . .my identity. . .my wishes. . .my attitudes. . .*
- 2. I have received everything and offer everything. . .Reflect on this 'everything'. . .*
- 3. In God, all good. . .where is my heart, what is my treasure?*
- 4. Benevolent and indescribable Providence. . . what does abandonment to Providence mean today?*
- 5. My work, my commitments, my things, my limits, my life. . . .how do I experience liberty and abandonment?*
- 6. What do I give to others, and how? ... time, advice, prayer, money, other goods?*
- 7. Discernment, limitation, and dependence. . . .how do I set the criteria? When and with whom do I engage in verification?*

FAITHFUL WITNESS

In our Constitutions, witness underscores consecration itself, and constitutes its nature of mission. In fact, the articles on witness come after those on the evangelical counsels in the same chapter, *Consecration and mission*.

Faithful mission. . . brings to mind fidelity to the commitment of consecration, as well as a consequence of consecration: if we have *taken up the evangelical counsels we express the firm and absolute will to give ourselves unconditionally to God and to our sisters and brothers.* . . *faithful witness* is required of us all lifelong. *With our response, through taking up the evangelical counsels we express the firm and absolute will to give ourselves unconditionally to God and to our sisters and brothers, and to be faithful for all of our life.*

Faithful witness in secularity. . . discovering secularity ever anew. . . that secularity so ardently desired and at times so distant. . .

The indications regarding witness in these articles of the Constitutions also refer to *our charism and our style of life* (subtitle of chapter 1): *Called by grace to serve the Lord together*):

“Walking faithfully in this form of life, we will participate actively in the coming of the Reign, giving our contribution by: carrying the renewing strength of the Gospel into the environments where God has called us; discerning the plan of God for history; orienting daily events in the light of things above; being workers for peace and harmony everywhere” (Const. 3.4).

It is not meaningful to list goodness knows how many works of the apostolate: while it is true that laypersons can collaborate directly in specifically ecclesial roles in some cases, their engagement in the world and in history is their priority: this is the field of their mission. This is why the Constitutions stress our participation in the Coming of the Reign of God into our respective environments and daily life.

The mission is essential to the vocation, and not something added on, not something more or different, but rather life itself enlightened by the Holy Spirit:

“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.

“With the Spirit's help our 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 fraternity and solidarity capable of helping others' freedom to be opened to the future of God” (Const. 4.2).

This witness, in docility to the Spirit, will become a commitment of consistency, discernment, example, participation. We are the leaven in the dough, but we must be in the dough; we cannot play ‘hide-and-seek,’ remain in the closet, entrench ourselves in our forms of withdrawal and reticence.

*“The mission is not a crusade to be embarked upon, but a **life to live** in the Church and in the world with the witness of facts! Not flight from the world, but concrete commitment of competence, availability, generosity, sharing, solidarity, humble service, courageous defense of truth and justice, and effective engagement for peace” (A. Tessarollo).*

Our mission is that of Christ. . .

22.1 *Our consecration makes us sharers in the Church of the mission of Christ Jesus, priest, king and prophet.*

22.2 *In union with Christ and in communion with the Church, we will be inspired by our commitment to offer God our spiritual worship, and to serve the Kingdom and its growth in history.*

And yet how will we be priests, king, prophets? We find the response in *Christifideles laici*:

The lay faithful participate in the **priestly office** through which Jesus offered Himself on the cross, and continues to offer Himself in the Eucharistic celebration to the glory of the Father for the salvation of humanity. Incorporated to Christ, baptized persons are united to Him and His sacrifice in the offering of

themselves and all their activities (cf Rm 12: 1-2)...Laypersons as well, working devoutly as adorers, consecrate the world itself to God.

*“Through their participation in the **prophetic mission** of Christ, [...] United to Christ, the 'great prophet' (Lk 7:16), and in the Spirit made 'witnesses' of the Risen Christ, the lay faithful are [...]called to allow the newness and the power of the gospel to shine out every day in their family and social life, as well as to express patiently and courageously in the contradictions of the present age their hope of future glory even through the framework of their secular life.*

*“Because the lay faithful belong to Christ, Lord and King of the Universe, they share in his **kingly mission** and are called by him to spread that Kingdom in history” (Christifideles laici n. 14).*

Our commitment of witness. . .

22.3 *In our family and in our profession, in the civil and ecclesial communities, and in our every activity and endeavor, we will keep alive our hope for heaven, where Jesus lives at the right of the Father.*

Our work will be carried out with a great sense of responsibility, with competence, seriousness and honesty.

This chapter of the Constitutions proposes witness of life, relationships, commitment. . .a daily witness. . .because there could also be the risk of counter-witness. . .

We are not frequently called upon to be teachers in daily life. . .but much more often called to be witnesses. Paul VI expressed this in very clear terms: *“Each Christian layperson has a difficult yet magnificent role to fulfill. Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses rather than teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. It is an honor for you to be witnesses of Christ in the heart of secular activities.”*

It means to live *“happily taking life as it comes,”* as Cozzano made very clear, and Paola Bignardi expanded upon at our Conference in 2010:

“Even before life itself, the test bench of Christian life is the daily unfolding of each day as it comes.

“Each day in our life is made up of little and common things: work, family, house, the many simple acts repeated over and over; many relations, at times serene and conciliatory, at other times conflictual and tense; minor setbacks and major concerns; persons, problems, situations. . .The life of each of us is the mere happening of all these things. A life without sense or a life of great intensity: one situation or the other do not depend on what is external to us, but on the interior attitude with which we take on the concrete unfolding of existence. . .

“In the letter to Diognetus we read that Christians, ‘in the words of all, show the admirable and extraordinary character of their system of life.’ We can well imagine the wonder of those who see a Christian live, wonder coming from seeing that style of meekness, service, gift of self, passion for justice, and solidarity that projects the beatitudes into daily existence, making it clear that the sovereign of the homeland to which Christians belong is a Lord crucified and risen from the dead With concrete facts, this style of life makes it possible to say there is hope; that it is worth the effort to take things seriously, that it is possible to begin all over each day. Whoever sees us live understands that within us there is a secret that sheds light on us and supports us.”

The style of our witness

22.3 *Wherever we are, we will try to be builders of peace; we will be open to the needs of our sisters and brothers, and to our commitment to build the city of humanity in solidarity, and in the defense of truth and justice.*

We will joyously welcome Christ and will serve him lovingly and gently in each human being, beginning with the poorest. Our behavior will be judicious and meek, edifying and of good example for all whom we meet; our words will be "wise and measured, not sharp, not harsh, but human and conducive to harmony and charity.”

Our witness must be good for the Church and the world. . .because the more we live our spirit, our character of consecration, the more good and a benefit there will be for all.

Saint Angela is present with us, and is present in our way of living consecration is witness. . .let us listen to her voice: *“...In speaking, that their words be wise and reserved, not harsh, not rude, but*

*compassionate and leading to concord and charity. Tell them that, wherever they are, they should give good example. And be to all a good odor of virtue. . . And seek to **spread peace and concord** where they are” (Counsels 5°).*

“And let interaction with one’s neighbor be reasonable and modest as St. Paul says: that is, let your manners and prudence be evident to all, and let every action and speech be honest and polite. . . let all our words, acts, and conduct always be to teach and edify those who deal with us” (R 9°).

We have great opportunities for witness. . . witness ever to be verified: work, environments of life and relationships, conduct. . . kind, meek, example of edification with others, wise and reserved words.

How do we stand? How are we doing? What witness do the sisters of the Company give in the world?

Benedict XVI reminded us of the features of the secular mission: *“the witness of the human virtues, such as ‘justice, peace, joy’ (Rm 14: 17), the ‘behaving honorably’ St. Peter speaks of in his epistle (cf 1P 2:12), echoing the words of the Master: “In the same way your light must shine in sight of man, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven” (Mt 5: 16).*

“Therefore, feel called to become involved in any pain, any injustice, as well as in any search for truth, beauty and goodness, not because you have the solutions to all problems but because each situation in which man lives and dies constitutes an occasion for you to bear witness to the salvific work of God. This is your mission.

*“You are not asked to institute special forms of life, apostolic commitment or social works, if not those that may issue forth in personal relationships, sources of prophetic richness. Like leaven that ferments all the dough (cf. Mt 13:33), such is your life, at times silent and hidden, but always pro-active and encouraging, able to generate hope. **The place of your apostolate is therefore humanness at large.** . . both in the Christian community and in the civic community, where the relationship becomes concrete in the search for the common good, in dialogue with all, called as you are to bear witness to that Christian anthropology that is a proposal of sense in a society disoriented and confused by the multicultural and multi-religious climate characteristic of it.”*

Living part of the Church. . .

22.4 *Aware of being a living part of the local and universal Church, we will collaborate according to our life-style in the growth of the ecclesial community; we will be attentive to the directions of our pastors, especially those of the diocesan bishop, with regard to the needs of the Church for evangelization and the service of charity;*

We are Church, the Company is Church, and in the Church we must be *a living part, according to our life style.*

Benedict XVI singled out our way of being Church: *“Feel the commitment to work for the mission of the Church to be yours: with prayer, study, active participation in ecclesial life, an attentive and positive gaze towards the world, in the continuous search for the signs of the times” . . .*

Earlier sections of the Constitutions had already reminded us about our being Church: for example, in the Decree of approval, they were presented to us as *a path of holiness for a more effective witness in the Church and in the world.* And then in specific articles:

With a filial spirit we will share in the missionary dynamism of the Church. . . we will commit ourselves to making our contribution as consecrated lay women in the life of the diocese, and to praying intensely. . . (4.3)

We will enrich our spiritual life with the study of the teachings of the Magisterium and with participation in initiatives promoted by the local Church. (14.5)

The charism of Saint Angela Merici

22.4 *... We will be mindful to make the charism of St. Angela Merici known.*

Within the sense of witness and being a living part of the Church, the Constitutions call on us to be ever mindful of the charism of Saint Angela, who serenely promised: *“Hold this for certain: that this Rule has been planted directly by his holy hand, and he will never abandon this Company as long as the world lasts. Because, if he has planted it in the first place, who is there who can uproot it? Believe it, do not doubt, have firm faith that it will be so. I know what I am saying. Blessed are those who will take very good care of it” (T 11,6-13).*

It isn't always up to others, and we really can't complain beyond a certain point if other people do not know, do not understand, do not do. . . Being mindful to make the charism of Saint Angela Merici known is up to us. How? With trust, creativity, fidelity and newness.

It is the duty of prayer:

“Pray to the master of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest” (Mt 9:35-38).

“Vocations to the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life are primarily fruit of constant contact with the living God and insistent prayer raised to the ‘Master of the harvest’ in parish communities, Christian families, and vocation cenacles. . . [. . .] Every member of the Church, needs consciously to feel responsibility for promoting vocations (Benedict XVI: World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 2011).

Prayer of Paul VI

*We pray the Master to send workers into the harvest.
We pray the Master that no one may feel like an outsider,
but instead that each one may question himself
and consider his own responsibilities . . .
Extend, O Lord, your loving call
also to the souls of many generous women,
and pour into them the eagerness for evangelical perfection
and dedication to the service of the Church.*

It is a duty of witness:

“Witness Awakens Vocations. The fruitfulness of our efforts to promote vocations depends primarily on God’s free action, yet, as pastoral experience confirms, it is also helped by the quality and depth of the personal and communal witness of those who have already answered the Lord’s call to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated life, for their witness is then able to awaken in others a desire to respond generously to Christ’s call” (Benedict XVI World Day of Prayer for Vocations , 2010).

“By means of the witness of their faith and apostolic zeal, therefore, they can transmit, especially to the younger generations, a strong desire to respond generously and promptly to Christ who calls them to follow him more closely” (Benedict XVI: 50th World Day for Vocations, 2013).

It is a duty of proposal:

John the Baptist said to his disciples that Jesus is the *Lamb of God*. . . and they went with Him. Andrew (one of the two who had followed Jesus and remained with him, “*it was then about four o’clock in the afternoon*) met his brother Simon and said to him: ‘*We have found the Messiah*’. . . and took Simon to Jesus. . .

Jesus found Philip and said to him: ‘Come with me’. . . Philip found Nathanael and told him: ‘We have found the Messiah’. . . and said to him: ‘Come and see’ (cf. Jn 1:35 ff.).

In order to translate this in Mercian terms we could paraphrase it like this: someone made us know the *Lover*, we found Him, we encountered Him, we remained with Him, we have known *His Company*. . . Nonetheless, let us not forget that phrase describing the work of the disciples and repeated in the Gospel: ***and he took him to Jesus***. In communion with the *Lover*, it is up to us to take, lead, and accompany other sisters to Him, the Spouse, in the Company.

I’d like to recall here what Saint Angela proposes with respect to the vocational commitment regarding reception and resources:

“Remember, however, that those of a younger age [12 years old] can be received into the group so that they may be taught the truth of this unique way of life” (R 1,9).

“...and such income as you have, spend it for the good and the development of the Company, according as discretion and motherly love will suggest to you” (T 9,4).

Witness in the Company

22.5 *In the Company we will manifest concretely the charity that unites us, by helping our sisters in Christ, and by collaboration in the activities and initiatives suggested for the good of the Company.*

The life of the Company is not distinct from faithful witness. . .this was and is Saint Angela's urging: *"Be bound to one another by the bond of charity, esteeming each other, helping each other, bearing with each other in Jesus Christ".(Rc.9,2)*. If the leaders, with all the sisters of the Company, *love each other and live in harmony together, they are a sure sign that we are walking the path right and pleasing to God ... otherwise it would be a plague of bad example also for the city and even beyond. . .* it would be counter-witness (cf T 10).

Charity is love, unity, participation, co-responsibility. . .as the Constitutions remind us: *"In the Company, we want to seek, build and safeguard the spirit of unity and communion, unmistakable signs of the authenticity of our communion with God"* (Const. 4.4).

And also: *"Each of us will consider herself a participant and co-responsible for the life of the Company. She will commit herself to an active collaboration according to her own abilities and competence..."* (Const. 23.2).

The criterion of privacy

22.7 *The secular character of our consecration which places us in the world as leaven, suggests the criterion of privacy about our belonging to the Company.*

There has been considerable discussion in secular institutes about privacy in years past, and some institutes have also considered secrecy. Companies have often had houses and works, and the sisters were known as belonging to an Institute. For a certain amount of time they also wanted to be recognized as religious, and therefore confusion is understandable.

However, has this saying and public presence has not always benefitted secularity: how often, also more recently, have we heard people talk about sisters, lay sisters, sisters with no habit, or being "in between" lay and religious life. This has disrupted, and at times continues to disrupt our charism and our identity as consecrated seculars belonging to a secular institute.

I would like to underscore this reference in the Constitutions to privacy as an expression of our consecration and our witness. Each sister will freely do what she may wish, in consultation with her leaders, but always recalling that *the secular character of our consecration placing us as leaven in the world, suggests the criterion of privacy regarding our belonging to the Company*. What is important is the dough, not the leaven. . .

The vocation is not a degree or certificate to be waved in order to obtain a social, professional or religious position. . . Discretion and privacy are recommended first and foremost because witness to the vocation is to be witnessed with the choices and the consistency of one's own life.

It is nonetheless good to be prudent and responsible regarding ourselves, but above all the other members who share the same vocation, and this in order to ensure great liberty in what we do and how we act in all surroundings.

Were the thirty years Jesus spent in Nazareth useless because practically no one speaks about them? Are the normality and the humility of His family, beginning with His Mother, to be imitated or to be erased from history?

Certainly, ours is not a vocation to be shown off and boasted about in public, and this is part of the charism of secular institutes. Those who may have difficulties understanding this are to at least respect the privacy of the other sisters.

22.7 *When certain situations require that we render open testimony of our choice of life, we will maintain due respect for the choice of the other members of the Company.*

At times it happens, and at other times it may even be a duty to speak about our vocation, because the Institute as such does not have a privacy policy for itself. In fact, this charism is to be made known, proposed, and spread, but always with great respect for the persons who are members of it, never revealing the membership of other sisters.

Moreover, also when others know, or think they know, it ordinarily is not appropriate to say much at all about the programs, commitments, and roles within the Company.

I consider privacy to be a reflection of the great dignity that is ours, and also the true liberty of belonging totally and always to the Lord in the innermost depths of our heart.

verification and

Faithful witness. . .

1. *Serve the Reign of God and its growth in history. . .* how do I reconcile my witness between the requirements of the Reign of God and service in the world and history?
2. *Life and dailyness. . .* family, profession, civic and ecclesial communities. . . responsibilities, skill, competence, seriousness and honesty? How do I stand? How can we be educated in the Company?
3. *Good example and edification. . .* kindness, meekness, peace, concord and charity. What could others say about our witness of life or learn from it?
4. *Collaboration in ecclesial activities. . .* as a living part of the Church according to our life style, as attention to the directions of our Shepherds. . . Let's check!
5. *Make known the charism of Saint Angela Merici. . .* with prayer, witness, and invitation. Can we do more? Can we do better? How?
6. *The charity which unites us in the Company. . .* assistance to our sisters and active collaboration. How is it going? What can we suggest to ourselves?
7. *The criterion of privacy. . .* for ourselves and for the others. How to understand it? How to live it?

CONSTITUTIONS CHAPTER FIVE

UNITED TOGETHER: THE COMPANY

The title. . .United together. . .

The starting point is Saint Angela's desire: unity. This is why the chapter dealing with our life and structure places the words *united together* before the word *Company*. . .which nonetheless remains a Merician term. This title could also sound something like this: live *united together* and you will be Company.

Company is . . .being united together. . . it is a call and a purpose for one and all, sisters and leaders. The task of unity and communion is entrusted to each member in the Company, even if the specific task is entrusted to those called to the service of authority.

"Most beloved daughters and sisters, God has granted you the grace of separating you from the darkness of this poor world and joining you together to serve his divine Majesty" (R pr,4). "Your life in Christ makes you strong and his love comforts you, You have fellowship with the Spirit, and you have kindness and compassion for one another. I urge you, then, to make me completely happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind" (Ph 2:1-2).

Saint Angela's desire. . .

"My last word to you, by which I implore you even with my blood, is that you live in harmony, united together, all of one heart and one will" (Counsels 9,1).

This is the voice of the mother, the voice of blood. The mother wants unity among leaders, among sisters, among sisters and leaders.

This is the heartfelt recommendation to concord, to the unity of heart and will.

"Be bound to one another by the bond of charity, esteeming each other, helping each other, bearing with each other in Jesus Christ" (Counsels 9,2).

This is the bond of charity. . . . it's not just the bond of feelings. . .it is a matter of charity, *and love is patient and kind; it is never jealous; never boastful or conceited; never rude or selfish; it does not take offense, and it is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins but delights in the truth. Love is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and to endure everything" (1Cr.13: 4-7).*

Bound one to another with a commitment and a mutual force based not on merits or human skills, but on Jesus Christ. In order to express this commitment, Saint Angela uses three expressions complementary to one another:

- *Esteeming each other.* . . not destroying. . . .we are asked to be positive;
- *Helping each other,* not egoism;
- *Bearing with each other,* also with everything humanity entails, including limitations.

"For if you strive to be like this, without any doubt, the Lord God will be in your midst. You will have in your favour our Lady, the apostles, all the saints, the angels, and finally all heaven and all the universe. Because God has so ordained from all eternity, that those who for his honour are united in doing good enjoy every prosperity, and that what they do turns out well, because they have God himself and every one of his creatures in their favour. See then how important is this union and concord. So, long for it, pursue it, embrace it, hold on to it with all your strength" (Counsels 9, 3-14).

Let's assess the price of unity, and willingly pay it. . . it is worth the effort. Unity is so great that it can neither be taken for granted nor lost. . .reflection, desire, and searching are necessary. The willingness to embrace it and preserve it.

“For I tell you, living all together thus united in heart, you will be like a mighty fortress, or a tower impregnable against all adversities, and persecutions, and deceits of the devil. And moreover I assure you that every grace you ask from God will infallibly be granted to you” (Counsels 9,15-19).

The unity of the Company is a great strength for the Company itself and for any outside difficulty. It is the indispensable condition, the “authentic document” through which the prayer or request to God will be infallibly answered.

And I shall always be in your midst, helping your prayer (Counsels 9,20) ... with my Lover, indeed, our Lover, the Lover of all of us. . .

Unity is the condition for the Lord’s presence and that of Mother Angela when interceding for us with the Lord.

The Company. . .

Being in company is something more than not being alone. And the distinguishing feature of being in company is sharing, communion.

There is an old Persian proverb that goes something like this: “When you have two coins, use one to buy bread, and the other one to buy hyacinths for your soul.”

23.1 "United together" in the Company, we share the grace of the presence of the Lord among us; we experience communion and find support and assistance for living our vocation and mission.

Seek and share. . . it is not automatic, and not to be taken for granted. . .

- *seek, build and safeguard the spirit of unity and communion (Const. 4.4);*
- *share the grace of the presence of the Lord among us;*
- *the experience of communion;*
- *support and assistance for living our vocation and mission.*

Each sister in the Company must also be a participant and co-responsible. . .

23.2 Each of us will consider herself a participant and co-responsible for the life of the Company. She will commit herself to an active collaboration according to her own abilities and competence. She will be ready to assume those tasks that the good of the Company requires and she will fulfill them in respect of the norms established by the Church for secular institutes.

The opening words of this article, *each of us*, deserve emphasis. This participation, this co-responsibility, this commitment, this readiness on the part of *each of us* is indispensable *for the life of the Company*.

It is a matter of a participation and co-responsibility - to be exercised and always renewed in the life of the sisters and in the Company at large.

- **Collaboration:** must be *active*.
- **Ability and skills:** these can always be heightened and improved; it is necessary to make all gifts bear fruit at the service of all and for the glory of God.
- **Tasks and commitments. . . in the style of secularity:** We need true and ready willingness not to take on all tasks, but *those tasks that the good of the Company will require*; attention and discernment are needed. Fidelity is essential in carrying them out; never in pursuit of our own vested interests, but as the Church wishes for secular institutes.

COMPANY AND TEMPORAL GOODS. . .

26.1 Individual Companies [...]are able to buy, possess and administer temporal goods autonomously, commensurate to what is needed to secure their life and their apostolic mission; and they may also alienate them.

“Know that if it were not useful and suitable that this Company have some income, God would not have begun to provide it.” (T 9,1).

Temporal goods must serve the life of the Companies and their mission. Let’s ask ourselves this question and answer it: what is the mission of the Company?

*“If by God’s will and provision it should happen that some money or other material things would be held in common, remember that **good management is needed** for them, and they should be **dispensed prudently, especially to assist the sisters, and according to each need that arises** (R 11,22-24).*

In the chapter about Governance, Saint Angela acknowledges goods as a gift of the Lord’s goodness and generosity, and, as such, calls for good management and the virtue of *prudence* when dispensing them. . . and says they must be used for the sisters and according to each need that arises. . . this opens the road to sharing and charity, as well as to the growth of the individual Company and the world Company.

If goods are goods. . . seeking personal happiness and a sense of security in having material things is a sure way not to be happy. This also applies for the Company.

If material goods, houses and money become the center of life, they get a grip on us and turn us into their slaves.

In preparation for 2015, the year dedicated to the consecrated life, the Congregation of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life organized an international conference on “The management of ecclesiastical goods at the service of humanism and the mission of the Church,” held in Rome on March 8 and 9, 2014. Pope Francis also conveyed his thoughts to the conference: *“The Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life can and must be active protagonists in living and testifying that the **principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift** find their place in economic activity. The founding charism of each Institute is fully inscribed in this “logic” of being gift As consecrated people, you can make a true contribution to economic, social and political development. [...]Still, today may you be for the Church and for the world, the outposts of care for all of the poor and for all material, moral and spiritual poverty, and examples in overcoming every form of egoism through the logic of the Gospel which teaches us to trust in the Providence of God.”*

Attentive oversight is needed to make sure our goods are at the service of the mission; otherwise they have no meaning at all.

“Available resources are a form of providence to be welcomed and managed with wisdom,” affirmed the Secretary of State of the Holy See, Cardinal P. Parolin, in this regard.

There is a primacy and there are consequences. . .

The Reign of God is the primacy to be sought first. . . and then everything will be provided to you gratuitously: *“Seek first the Kingdom of God and do his will, and he will provide you with all other things”* (Mt.6:33).

Let us listen to what we are being taught by the new styles of life proposed for the good of civil society.

“It is time to act by removing rather than adding. We are so inebriated with a culture of adding that removing strikes us as a loss, a form of depression creating scarcity: but no one would say that about the work of a sculptor. Remove in order to seek the form, remove in order to leave beauty behind, remove in order to permit what is formless to speak out. Removing what is superfluous, smoothing, working. . . in brief, decreasing makes it possible to reach the feather-like beauty of essence, a more transparent form of presence, the disarming truth of identities” (Document: Down-growth for the future).

Let’s listen to what Cardinal Bergoglio thought. . . .

“There are congregations. . . small groups, very small ones, few members, mostly elderly. . . They have no vocations. . . But they resist, hanging on to their buildings, hanging on to their money. . . I don’t know why

this happens, nor do I know how to interpret it. . .it's something that deserves serious thought. . .” (Cardinal Bergoglio, Aparecida 2007, V General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate).

The management of goods is a duty to be fulfilled in liberty, joy and charity.

As Company, we do not wait for time to decide. . .

It isn't possible to wait for time to decide for us. . . . because others will decide, not those we thought, not as we wished . . . It isn't possible to stay focused only on our small and circumscribed reality, which, among other things, we no longer know how to manage.

Making decisions about goods will be an agonizing process, but we must also discover a moment of grace. It comes down to returning to our identity in a simpler, more essential, and more prophetic way.

The outlook is not just to alienate houses in order to accept death, but rather to open doors and windows to new needs, to the world Company, in order to take it upon ourselves with joy and in a responsible manner.

THE ASSOCIATED FAITHFUL. . .

27.1 Each Company, by decision of its own Assembly, can decide to institute a group of associated faithful, who will commit themselves in their own state of life, to live an evangelical life in the light of the spirituality of Saint Angela Merici.

This is a possibility for each Company: the decision, the ways of belonging and organization will be determined by virtue of a *decision of its own Assembly*. This will be a *group* of persons, men and women, who *will commit themselves in their own state of life, to live an evangelical life in the light of the spirituality of Saint Angela Merici*.

Sharing the common baptismal consecration. . .

There would be no sense speaking about spirituality and the Merician family if at the outset we had not acquired the fundamental prerequisites of ecclesial communion, these being the common baptismal vocation, the universal call to holiness, and the participation of all in the mission of Christ in the Church and the world. Beginning with these prerequisites, it will be possible to enhance the diversity and complementarity of vocations. All this involves acknowledging the identity of our vocation and any vocation, each one's mission, its natural environment of life, liberty and autonomy.

Sharing a common spirituality. . .

By sharing a spirituality, consecrated members and associated faithful project a plan in line with the Merician spirituality, its charism. . . It comes down to sharing a style of life, a certain vision of life . . .

Here are two different realities which, on the basis of a shared spirituality, recognize a bond of mutual belonging and commitment.

Each person involved grows through exchanging their gifts as laity and of consecration.

These are different vocations that encounter one another in normal, daily life. . .where we are already Church and act as Church

Participating in a common charism (that of the Foundress and not that of the Company) and sharing it in its completeness means living one or aspect or another as part of a whole, engaging and integrating, without becoming confused with each other.

The associated faithful are to be helped to be themselves in keeping with their own vocation, stemming from baptism. . .

Sharing the common Merician spirituality. . .

It will be necessary to share Saint Angela Merici's spiritual legacy. On the basis of this inspiring and common legacy we could speak in terms of the enlarged Merician family, the associated faithful. . . . in absolute respect for the specific vocation and particular mission of each person in the Church. These can be complementary. Never downplay one's own vocation, neither the consecrated sister in the Company, nor any of the associated faithful. Saint Angela's spirituality must help us to enhance our reality in depth, being

careful not to create forms of dependence or requirements that distract anyone from the vocation he or she is called to live as Company and as individual.

It will also be necessary to avoid confusing family relationships with possible collaboration in concrete activities and works. . .things like this may well occur, but they do not constitute the purpose of associating the faithful to the Company.

Associated faithful. . .not just any group. . .

This is not just a group of spirituality or the apostolate. . .nor is it just a group that holds festive encounters (prayer, meals together, exchange of views, or things to do together) that end up in a pleasant style of life. It is an encounter of diverse demands. . .able to create ways of living. It is a convergence of different vocations in the single Merician charism.

The charism inherited from Saint Angela Merici is a gift for the entire Church, and hence can and must be shared with others. The Merician charism can become a plan for generating authentic Christian identities, consecrated or otherwise. *May it be pleasing to God that the whole world may come under the umbrella of this Rule* (Cozzano, Epistola Confortatoria 963).

THE BISHOP AND THE COMPANY. . .

28 *The bishop of the diocese in which the Company has its headquarters [...] is father and shepherd of the Company as well as the competent ecclesiastical authority with regard to the Company itself and to its members [...]The Company, by tradition, lives a special relationship with the bishop and participates actively, as far as possible, in the life and mission of the local Church.*

"The bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ" (C.C.C. 862).

For the interdiocesan Companies as well, this is the bishop *of the diocese in which the Company has its headquarters [...] who is father and shepherd of the Company as well as the competent ecclesiastical authority.*

The Company participates actively in the life and mission of the local Church, and lives, *by tradition, a special relationship with the bishop.*

THE ECCLESIASTICAL ASSISTANT OF THE COMPANY. . .

29.1 *The Company's spirit of participation in the life of the diocese and its special relationship with its own bishop find an important expression in the assignment of the Ecclesiastical Assistant.*

29.2 *... the Ecclesiastical Assistant: will nourish the sense of Church in the Company; will be a faithful interpreter of the voice of the local and universal Church; will bring his specific competence in the spiritual field; will gather members and leaders around the Eucharist and the Word of God.*

29.3 *Respecting each others' competencies, he will collaborate with the Directress and her Council to spread the knowledge and esteem of secular consecration and to promote feelings of communion in the Company.*

It is clear that the Assistant has no role to play in governance, but he does have a role in terms of meaningful spiritual assistance. Therefore, we do not ask the Assistant to do things not pertaining to him, and, instead, are grateful for what he can offer us. The Company lives in a geographical place, participates in the local Church, recognizes the Bishop as *father and shepherd*, and, the Bishop appoints an ecclesiastical assistant to represent him in this portion of the Church which is the Company. The Assistant will nourish the sense of the local and universal Church in the Company. His task is that of unity in the Company: *he will promote feelings of communion . . .around the Eucharist and the Word of God.* He will also have a vocational task in order *to spread the knowledge and esteem of secular consecration.*

verification and

The Company...

...of yesteryear. . .now in heavenly glory together with the other virgins, crowned with the golden and lustrous crown of virginity.

... of today. . . with the sisters in their respective families, in their surroundings, at work, with the lonely, with youth, with elders, with the sick. . .

The leaders...

... Teachers and guides in the spiritual life. . .mothers through attention to the well-being and the needs of the sisters and spiritual daughters

... Guardians and mothers of the spouses of the Most High

The life of communion

Go visit the other sisters. . .to comfort and assist them. . .in both material and spiritual difficulties. . .

"When you have two coins, use one to buy bread, and the other one to buy hyacinths for your soul."

The Company is a sharing of both: bread and hyacinths. . .

THE TASK OF LEADERS. . .

Guidance and service

23.3 *The Church and the Company will entrust some of us with the task of leadership and service. In imitation of our Lord Jesus, who came into this world not to be served, but to serve, authority in the Company will be lived by those in charge, according to the style outlined for them by Saint Angela Merici, who placed them in charge to be guardians and mothers of the "spouses of the Most High". . .*

Task. . . were we to want to define 'task,' we should say it is a commitment, a job, a pre-established exercise assigned, a charge, a duty, a mission. A task is to be carried out, accomplished, finished, completed. The task is given to us by someone, and we don't ordinarily take it on our own; in our case, it is entrusted to us by the Church and the Company. Tasks are to be carried out in the best possible ways and with the greatest degree of commitment possible.

Task of guiding

Guiding means directing, having a direction to follow, keeping on the path. . . In guiding other persons it is necessary to be a point of reference or teach them the way. In the spiritual life, just like Alpine guides, it is necessary to be experts who accompany *"like Alpinists of the spirit."* Saint Angela herself reminds us of our task as guides: *"Each one for her part, to be faithful and full of concern for his spouses who have been entrusted to you, to guard them and watch over them as most vigilant shepherds and good servants"* (Counsels pr,3-4).

Task of service

Placing oneself at the service of someone, or something. . . means offering total dedication, unreserved commitment, ensuring ever-ready availability, being at the service of others and not of ourselves. In our case it means placing our entire life at the service of a grand ideal, at the service of the Lord and His spouses.

As Pope Francis says: *"True power is service. The Pope must serve one and all, especially the poorest, the weakest, and the littlest of all."*

In the Company, we must serve all the sisters, but in particular those in greater difficulty. . .

We could say there is authority in the Company. . . but it is an authority of service. . . *in imitation of Jesus, who came into this world not to be served, but to serve. . .*

"Anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave" (Mt 20:27).

By way of commentary on this chapter, I reread a document of the Sacred Congregation dating back to 2008: *The service of authority and obedience*. I will offer a few excerpts that strike me as very appropriate:

"Today, if assuming the responsibilities proper to authority can also seem a particularly heavy burden and demand the humility of being the servant of others, it is, however, always good to recall the severe words the Lord Jesus turns on those who are tempted to clothe their authority in worldly prestige: 'Whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mt 20: 27-28).

"Those who seek in their own office a means of becoming greater or affirming themselves, having themselves be served or making others serve them, place themselves clearly outside the evangelical model of authority" (Congregation for Consecrated Life: *The service of authority and obedience* – 2008).

Service in a maternal spirit: This is the style of authority to be lived by leaders in the Company. . . a style depicted for them by Saint Angela Merici, who designated them *to be guardians and mothers of the spouses of the Most High*.

"Open the eye of your mind to consider your great grace and good fortune, that God has deigned to make you mothers of so many virgins, and confided his own spouses to your hands, and entrusted them to your government" (T pr, 14-16). *"Be true and loving mothers of so noble a family"* (T pr,11).

THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTRESS. . .

23.3 *The Directress, especially, will take care to be an instrument of unity and communion, of dialog, animation and guidance; she will promote active participation of all the members in the life of the Company; she will do all she can to lead according to the directions of the Church, so that the Company will live its own charism in dynamic fidelity. She will be solicitous and watchful toward the members, and will make every effort to be affable and human, exemplary and sincere.*

The directress has the strongest and most delicate role in the Company. . .she is a valuable instrument in the Lord's hands.

The directress. . .will take care to be an instrument. . . not a goal, not 'Your Ladyship,' but a useful, necessary, practical and functional instrument. . .for members to avail themselves of, to benefit from, and to use. Instrument. . .goes hand in hand with service, humility, abandonment, simplicity. . .

An instrument may be of service today, may serve for a certain period of time, but can be changed tomorrow (for a better instrument, or perhaps a worse one) . . .Only God is unchangeable and forever.

Instrument of unity and communion

25.2 *It is the task of the Directress, with the aid of her Council: to keep alive and foster the spirit of the Company; to promote communion within the Company; to watch over the observance of the Rule and the Constitutions; to promote initiatives and support the efforts of the members' journey toward holiness; to be attentive and close to the individual consecrated members; to provide for the needs of the Company. . .*

In our Companies (some reduced in numbers) it is not possible to proceed with a sense of resignation, exhaustion and discouragement. . .we must remain ever alive and faithful; *do not lose fervor. . .keep alive and increase the spirit of the Company, and promote communion in it.*

How is this done? By keeping a close and vigilant eye on our own fidelity to the codes of holiness, as well as on observance by our sisters.

"Finally, take the greatest care that the good directives given, especially those in the Rule, be most diligently observed" (T 11,1).

Let us seek God's will together!

"In consecrated life everyone must sincerely seek the will of the Father, because otherwise the reason itself for this choice of life would disappear; but it is equally important to carry out such a search together with the brothers or the sisters because it is properly that which unites them, 'making them a family united to Christ.'

"Persons in authority are at the service of this search to ensure that it occurs in sincerity and truth" (Congregation for Consecrated Life, *The service of authority and obedience* – 2008).

"My true program of governance is not do my will or pursue my own ideas, but, together with the Church at large, to listen to the Lord's word and will, and let myself be guided by Him such that He Himself may guide the Church at this hour of our history" (Benedict XVI).

While all members of the Company are called to seek *to be as pleasing as possible to Jesus our Spouse*, some of us are called – ordinarily on a temporary basis – to exercise the special task of being a sign of unity and a guide in the shared quest for God will, and in the personal and communal fulfillment of it. This is the service of authority.

How? Never tiring of fostering, sustaining and encouraging the sanctification of our sisters, ever attentive and close to each one of them *with a great heart and full of desire.*

Instrument of dialogue and animation. . . .

Dialogue . . . not imposition, not authoritarianism, not imposing one's own thoughts or ideas, but listening, understanding, understanding each other. . .

“Within this picture, persons in authority promote the growth of fraternal life through the service of listening and dialogue, the creation of a favorable atmosphere for sharing and co-responsibility, the participation of everyone in the concerns of each one, service balanced between the individual and the community, discernment and the promotion of fraternal obedience.

“Whoever presides must remember that the one who does not listen to his brother or sister does not know how to listen to God either, that an attentive listening allows one to better coordinate the energy and gifts that the Spirit gives to the community and also, when making decisions, to keep in mind the limits and the difficulties of some members.

“Time spent in listening is never time wasted, and listening can often prevent crises and difficult times both on the individual and community levels.

“... Persons in authority will have to be concerned with creating an environment of trust, promoting the recognition of the abilities and the sensitivities of individuals.

“... In addition to listening, persons in authority will value sincere and free dialogue — sharing feelings, perspectives and plans. . .

*“Persons in authority will not be afraid to recognize and accept those problems that can easily arise from searching, deciding, working and together undertaking the best ways of realizing a fruitful collaboration. [...] Moreover, they will commit themselves to finding ways of overcoming any form of childishness, and discourage whatever attempts are made to avoid responsibility or to evade major commitments, to close oneself in one's own world and in one's own interests or to work in an isolated manner” (Congregation for Consecrated Life: *The service of authority and obedience* -2008).*

Instrument of animation

An animator is a person who deploys her imagination, creativity, seriousness and serenity in striving to get the persons in her charge to act and express themselves as best they can. The animator organizes, presents, coordinates, supports, incites, motivates, stimulates and instills vivacity.

The animator is the servant and not the master of these efforts. She is an instrument. This means she does not play a leading role, is not ‘the star’ of the moment. Instead, she draws forth life around her, calling into play all the resources at her disposal.

Therefore, the directress, who is an instrument of animation, cannot seek her self-fulfillment alone, or pursue the search for her own well-being. She has to foster participation and collaboration.

Instrument of guidance

An authoritative guide. . . and authority stems from moral and intellectual superiority, competence, ascendancy, reputation. . . and, for us. . . from true spirituality.

Our guidance must be inspired by the attitude of Jesus the servant, who washed the feet of His disciples so they could partake of His life and His love (cf *Jn* 13:1-17).

Great consistency is necessary for a person who guides a community. . . and, in our case, for her who guides the Company. The person called to exercise authority must realize that she will only be able to do so if she is the first to embark on that pilgrimage that leads to seeking God's will with intensity and integrity.

Authority and obedience. . .

Mediation. . . *“In effect, the history of salvation is a story of mediation, which makes the mystery of grace which God completes in the intimacy of the heart visible in some way. Even in Jesus' life, it is possible to recognize not a few human means through which He became aware of, interpreted, and accepted the will of the Father, as the *raison d'Être* and as the constant food for his life and his mission” (Congregation for Consecrated Life: *The service of authority and obedience* – 2008).*

Mediation in the Institute. . .

“Consecrated persons, moreover, are called to the following of the obedient Christ within an ‘evangelical project’ or a charismatic one, inspired by the Spirit and authenticated by the Church. Approving a charismatic program, the Church guarantees that the inspiration that animates it and the

norms that regulate it can provide a path for seeking God and holiness. Therefore, the Rule and the other indications concerning the way of life also become means of mediating the will of the Lord: human mediation but still authoritative, imperfect but at the same time binding, the starting point from which each day begins, and also for moving forward in a generous and creative impulse towards that sanctity which pastoral task of leading and deciding” (Congregation for Consecrated Life: *The service of authority and obedience* – 2008).

Let us return to that phrase in the Decree approving our Constitutions: *these* [the Constitutions] *will offer to all the consecrated members of the Institute a path of holiness for a more effective witness in the Church and in the world.* Therefore, our codes of holiness are a guide for us: the writings of Saint Angela and the Constitutions: observance and verification; the service of authority and the great light of obedience. . .refer to these codes of holiness. . .the *fundamental rule* of our life.

Some priorities in the service of authority

“In consecrated life authority is first of all a spiritual authority. Persons in authority recognize that they are called to serve an ideal that is much greater than themselves, an ideal which can be approached only in an atmosphere of prayer and humble seeking, which allows them to grasp the action of the same Spirit in the heart of every brother or sister. . .

“To be in the position of promoting the spiritual life, persons in authority will have to cultivate first in themselves an openness to listening to others and to the signs of the times through a daily familiarity in prayer with the Word of God, with the Rule and the other norms of the life” (Congregation for Consecrated Life: *The service of authority and obedience* – 2008).

Attention to promoting the participation of all the members: This is one of the tasks of animation. . . participation in the life of the Company is not to be taken for granted and has to be stimulated; then, as the Constitutions state, it is a matter of *active participation.* . . it is necessary to see to it that each member (young and old) feels at home in the Company, and that each sister participates not because she is obliged to, but with commitment and responsibility. *“You must take care to have your daughters come together from time to time . . . so that, together like this, they might also meet each other as loving sisters, and thus, talking over spiritual matters, rejoice together and together encourage one another, which will be no small help to them”* (T 8).

Attention to the directions of the Church: The Company’s *path* cannot just veer off on its own way, but must follow *the directions* of an itinerary proposed by the Church. This is a condition *so the Company may live in dynamic fidelity to its charism.*

“It must also be remembered that the authority-obedience relationship is situated in the larger context of the mystery of the Church and constitutes a particular actualization of its function as mediator. In this regard the Code of Canon Law recommends that ‘superiors are to exercise their power, received from God through the ministry of the Church, in a spirit of service” (Congregation for Consecrated Life: *The service of authority and obedience* – 2008).

Solicitude and watchfulness: as Saint Angela so wishes. . . *“I beg you with all my heart, please be watchful and most vigilant, like so many caring shepherdesses, for this heavenly flock”* (T 10, 1-2). At times this also calls for being *affable and human, exemplary and consistent.*

o *Be gentle and compassionate...* (Counsels 2,1) is a criterion, a mode recommended by Saint Angela for our relationships within the Company.

o *As for you, live and behave in such a way that your daughters may see in you a model. . . . Act therefore in such a way that, also following your example, they may stir and spur themselves to virtuous living* (Counsels 6).

o *And what you want them to do, do it yourselves first ... For it is right and fitting that the mothers be an example and a mirror for their daughters, especially in modesty, and in behavior, and other actions, ordinary and extraordinary* (Counsels 6).

THE ASSEMBLY OF THE COMPANY...

24.1 *The Assembly, deliberative organism of the Company, also represents a great moment of communion.*

The tradition of consecrated life in general customarily sees in the 'synodal' figure of the General Chapter (the Assembly for us), the Institute's supreme authority, to which all the members, beginning with the leaders, must refer.

The Assembly is the *deliberative organism of the Company*. . . the major decisions regarding the most important matters in the life of the Company can only be made in the Assembly. . . which *also represents a great moment of communion*.

"My last word to you, by which I implore you even with my blood, is that you live in harmony, united together, all of one heart and one will" (Counsels 9,1). The Assembly is a practical expression of the Company – its maximum expression. It is the greatest sign of communion among the members making up the Company. It is a great moment of collegial governance: all the members have equal rights in the decisions to be made. The Assembly must safeguard the charism and foster suitable renewal in fidelity to it. Participation in the Assembly is a **festive family gathering**. . . . Certainly, this is a delicate moment because it is an important one. Nonetheless, let's not get stirred up, this is family... Let us neither undervalue or minimize the Assembly with an all-too-human and political management style; and let's not live through it in indifference, disengaged, letting others decide and struggle through. The Assembly must be celebrated as a family gathering, as an occasion of grace and growth for all. It is a moment when, with peace of mind and congeniality, we are invited to look each other in the face, familiarize ourselves with each one's features, with her abilities and willingness; thus will we discover gifts and attitudes. . . Major festive gatherings, also require preparation. . . *it's necessary to kill the fattened calf*. . . as the Gospel would say, and pull out the best and the most precious of what the Company has. Don't *let us kill* charity. . . .but, if necessary, let us get rid of our own self-regarding love and any other feeling that is unworthy of dwelling in the heart of the *spouse of the Lover of us all*.

Let us trust in the Lord's help. . . Well knowing that no one will really want to run for election. . . we nonetheless also know how to accept, in all serenity and trustfulness, the will of God expressed through the sisters' choice if we are *entrusted with a task of guidance and service*. The tasks of responsibility and service also have to be accepted with joy, accepted as a new call and a summons to greater fidelity and perseverance. And the Lord will perform miracles. . . .if we trust in His help and the sincere understanding of our sisters.

The strength of each member of the Company is rooted not only in values and possibilities. . .but rather in the esteem, warmth and trust of daughters, sisters, mothers. . . .journeying *together* along the road of the Lord.

It is a matter of mutual obedience based on the recognition of the role of the other person, on respect, fidelity, collaboration, and communion. It is a matter of obedience where the whole Company obeys the leader it has freely chosen. It is a matter of a Council that carries out a service by virtue of a mandate received from the Assembly, and, at the same time, maps out the course that the Company will have to travel, once again all together.

Let us willingly continue this journey of responsibility and grace in this obedience to God's will, sought and loved with upright intention, in this obedience which is a *great light*. . .

Verification for the

To the first disciples who began to follow a new Rabbi, perhaps still uncertain and doubtful, the Lord put the question, "What are you seeking?" (Jn 1:38).

In these questions below, we can also read other radical questions:

- *What is your heart seeking?*
- *What do you busy yourself with?*
- *Are you looking for yourself, or are you looking for the Lord your God?*
- *Are you following your own desires, or the wish of Him who made your heart and wants it to be as He knows it and is familiar with it?*
- *Are you running only after things that pass away, or do you seek Him who does not pass away?*
(from Congregation for Consecrated Life: *The service of authority and obedience* – 2008).

- *How do you live authority and co-responsibility in the Company?*
- *You have tasks in the Company... how do you carry them out?*
- *You are an instrument. . . for what, for whom, in whose hands?*
- *Diligent and watchful, affable and human, exemplary and consistent. . .verification. . .*

THE GOVERNING BODY

25.1 *The Directress and her Council make up the Governing Body of the Company.*

“Be moved to this care and government solely by the sole love of God and by the sole zeal for the salvation of souls. Because all your works and actions as governors, being thus rooted in this twofold charity, can bear nothing but good and salutary fruits” (T 1,3-4).

More than an organizational task alone, this is a particular style of governance since authority is at the ‘service of’ and must attend to the growth of each member in Christ, as well as to the mission of the Company according to the charism inherited from Saint Angela Merici. *“It means guiding the life of the Institute in co-responsibility in such a way as not to betray the ‘gift,’ not to discredit its substance, not to lower the quality of its life, and not to reduce the intensity of the proposal for others” (G. Sarzi Sartori).*

“Make sure that you all meet with the leaders twice, or at least once a month, and thus confer together, and make a careful examination of the government” (T 7, 1-3).

For the Council. . .the gift of counsel. . .

Believers realize this gift of the Holy Spirit acts on their intelligence, opening their minds in order to understand God’s design, shedding light on their conscience in the moral choices they have to make each day, helping them in choosing good when life offers other alternatives, and avoiding hasty judgments and decisions.

The faithful see in the gift of counsel the way to know God’s will in the particular situations of their own life and that of others. The gift of counsel is the foundation of spiritual guidance.

In the spiritual life we go beyond choices connected with moral duties alone. It is not a question of choosing to follow the rules or choosing between good and evil; such choices are taken for granted. It is a matter of more demanding choices that bring us closer to God and help us in fidelity to our vocation in our journey of holiness.

Experience too is naturally important in counsel, and since we are talking here about counsel as a gift of God, it is necessary to experience God in both prayer and the consistency of life. The first duty of each councilor is to pray.

The fruit of counsel is above all the rediscovery of one’s own vocation and that of others: so-called spiritual discernment.

Tasks of the Council in the Company:

25.4 *It is the task of the Council to collaborate actively with the Directress in order to promote the life of the Company in fidelity to the charism; to seek together solutions to problems that arise.*

In the management of things and activities, as well as organizational matters and decisions, it is a matter not only of respecting *democratic style*, but developing an evangelical and ecclesial sense of *counsel* at the service of communion, co-responsibility, and the missionary nature of the Company. It is necessary to ask for the gift of *counsel*, *purify one’s heart and conscience*, and be open to verification, dialogue, and continuous conversion.

“Oh, how much you have to thank him for this, and at the same time to pray to him, that as he has deigned to place you at the head of so noble a flock, so he would deign also to give you such knowledge and capacity that you may be able to do work worthy of praise in his sight, and to put all your zeal and strength into carrying out your duty” (T pr,17-21).

The sense of the norms relative to duration and terms of office:

24.9 *The Directress will be re-eligible for one other consecutive six-year term, and for other six-year terms, but not consecutively. The sense of this norm must be kept in mind, when appropriate, also for the elections of the vice-Directress and the Councilors and for the assignment of other officers in the same office.*

The Constitutions stipulate *six-year terms of office*, and no more than two consecutive terms for the Directress and for the proposal of the Ecclesiastical Assistant. It is also stated that the sense of this norm has to be kept in mind for the election of other officers.

The reference to opportunities for change and rotation in the Company is crystal clear, to be done in faith, with neither fears nor great difficulties.

The elections. . . Whom to elect:

24.7 *Participants in the elections will elect persons whom they recognize as suitable and who are open to dedicate time and energy, gratuitously, to the new office, if elected.*

“In order to govern said Company it is provided that four of the most capable virgins of the Company ought to be elected. . .” (R 11,1).

Company elections link faith and life very closely. It is a matter of electing a Council that fosters total self-giving to God and to our sisters in consecration and the mission, with “good governance,” good directives, and an intense spiritual life.

Criteria in the choice of leaders. . .

It is not possible to elect or focus only on the basis of personal feelings, alliances, favoritism, or revenge. . . none of these can be a criterion in the choice and decision for one person as opposed to another. We choose the leaders with all due peace of mind and abounding trust. . . nothing is impossible for God.

They will always be persons with their inevitable defects, but, instead of stopping there, let’s look at their positive features, their efforts to give the best of themselves for the good of others. We are not the ones who renew the Council. . . this is done by the Spirit of the Lord, who enlightens our choices and the choices of the new leaders.

We have to assess the following criteria as the most meaningful ones:

- Fidelity to the charism, to the writings of Saint Angela, and to the Constitutions: *“Live and behave in such a way that your daughters may see in you a model”* (Counsels 6,1).
- Joy. . . personally regarding her own life-choice and joy in living the life of the Company.
- The spiritual life. . . a leader who knows how to listen to the Word of God and let herself be guided by it; knows how to find the time to reflect, meditate, pray, and not just keep busy doing things; knows she belongs to the Lord and is in service to the Company. A person who *believes* in the small history of her own mysteries of joy, light, sorrows and glory.
- The ability to read the signs of the times in a prophetic way.
- Capacity for intuition, good judgment, reflection, taking risks.
- The desire and the commitment to live unity and communion.
- Effective readiness to engage in service, as well as the ability to take it upon herself and carry it out in a competent, consistent and loving manner. . . *“among the most capable virgins of the Company. . .”* (R 11,1).
- The ability to listen, be patient, and be humble in the Company just as in a family, and, in a family, the members are both receptive and prepared to offer sincere, generous and gratuitous help without undue complications.
- Capable of giving gratuitously. . . without seeking unreasonable personal satisfaction and gratification. . . ready to become somewhat like Simon of Cyrene (Mt 27:32).
- Sufficient time available.
- Mental, emotional and affective balance. . . *affable and human.*
- Experience in participating in the life of the Company. . . The leader must regularly attend meetings, know the sisters, be willing to keep herself up-to-date, maintain interest in formation, and be open to the world wideness of the Institute.

Company is. .

Company is beauty of life. . .

It is truly an honor for us to be among those called to the Company.

Let us make sure we recognize such a gift, and become able to hand it on and conserve it unto the end.

*“What beauty of life, what honor of profession it is to be one of the number that God has chosen in His own special way! To be one of that Company which, for a certain specific privilege, is called the Company of the Son of God. Oh, new happiness, oh fortune beyond all others, if it will be recognized! . . . Consider the great gift that God from heaven above has offered you. . . The sisters **are to pay attention**, pay attention I say, to the great good fortune to which God has summoned them, and the great loss if they will not be wise enough to understand this”* (Cozzano Epistola confortatoria 963 r v).

“First, be willing to recognize what such a thing means and what a new and wondrous dignity this is” (R.pr, 8). *“For how many great persons, and others of every condition, do not have, nor will be able to have, such a grace”* (R.pr, 6).

Let it be our hope and our commitment to be enthusiastic, grateful, attentive, intelligent. . .

This is the Company of Jesus Christ. . . .

Jesus Christ wanted it, planted it, preserved it, and will preserve it until the end of time.

“God inspired and also compelled our mother foundress to plant and found this sacred rule of life in His name. This is so true that she called the Company not hers, but of Jesus Christ” (Cozzano Epistola confortatoria 963 r).

Let it be our hope and our commitment to be at the service of the Company of Jesus Christ. . .

This is a Company loved with eternal love. . .

The Company was already in the heart of Jesus before 1535 and will continue throughout the new millennia of history. . . . Down through the centuries, the number of the daughters of Saint Angela will be the number established by the Lord.

*“God having known this Company with its Foundress from His eternity and in Himself, having **loved it with eternal love** before He planted it here in the world, and also, in His eternal counsel, having **established that number** and that certain multitude of virgins of this company of His, that He wishes to glorify in his reign, no one will ever be lacking from the legitimate number that will be pleasing to Him for it to be. . . . The Company was before it became, and is already complete and perfect before becoming complete”* (Cozzano Epistola confortatoria 960 r).

Let it be our hope and our commitment to be free, serene, and trusting. . . in a Company willed and loved by the heart of Christ. . .

This is a glorious Company. . . . with a canonized Foundress and so many holy sisters. . .

*“And what more worthy congregation will we find than that of Saint Ursula? Great in number, royal in dignity, triumphant in victories, mighty in merits, and divine in honors. Thus is it, and thus will it be, at least interiorly. Glorious indeed will those become who will be faithful, **striving to do what the Foundress has ordered**”* (Cozzano Epistola confortatoria 964 r).

Let it be our hope and our commitment to be faithful to the Word of God and the wishes of Saint Angela. . .

This is the Company of Saint Ursula. . . strong as the martyrs and persevering unto death. . .

*“This name has come from Heaven, by the strength and power of the Holy Spirit has it been given; new grace from the Most High is promised to each member who will **persevere with fidelity** in total*

obedience. That strength that sanctifies, that strength of the eleven thousand virgins who followed the will of Saint Ursula is promised. . .that strength by which they prevailed over themselves and death itself” (Cozzano Epistola confortatoria 964 v).

Let it be our hope and our commitment to be strong and persevering in our life and our commitment.

This is a Company always accompanied by the Mother Foundress. . .conceived, begotten, nourished and preserved in the Blood of Jesus Christ.

Saint Angela, *“the friend of the Son of God, by virtue of whose Love she conceived this sacred Company, birthed it, nourished it, and preserved it, and will always preserve it for as long as the world will last. Amen” (Cozzano Dichiarazione della Bolla 970 v).*

Let it be our hope and our commitment to be contemplatives of the mystery of Christ, dead and risen.

And a Company able to live in the world. . .the fidelity and the perseverance of the many, many sisters who have gone before us bear witness to us of this fact. . .This we see in the sisters of our Company who have lived down through years and centuries.

“They have already persevered for so many years, not through human help, but through their own fortitude, given to them, however, by God. Nor will they fall into dangers, because many have died, steadfast and holy because they persevered” (Cozzano Epistola confortatoria 24 v).

“My very own sisters, it is necessary that we be vigilant, and so much more so, as the undertaking is of such importance that there could be no greater, in which lie our life and well-being” (R.pr,15-16).

“But one needs to be careful and prudent here, for greater labors and dangers may be involved when the undertaking is of greater value” (R.pr, 18).

Let it be our hope and our commitment to be seculars. . .vigilant, wise, and prudent. . .

This is a beautiful Company that makes its members fortunate. . .

*“It is important to **consent willingly to be** among this sacred number and faithfully persevere there unto death. Faithfully, I say, in safeguarding this new plant of the Spirit given by God through His [intermediary – Saint Angela] to those who truly give **their free consent** here [= in the Company]. For such a person the Spirit makes life fruitful: the most beautiful life there has ever been, or ever will be” (Cozzano Epistola confortatoria 964 v).*

Let it be our hope and our commitment to be happy, free, and feel we are fortunate.

This is an eternal Company. . . because its Lord, the Spouse, the Lover, the sole Treasure is eternal. . .

*“This Rule of life was planted and introduced by the great force and **the eternal virtue** of the Son of God. His Vicar [the Pope] could not but confirm for eternity what had come from his eternal Lord. It was not possible for the mediator of so much good [Saint Angela] not to implore from the immaculate Spouse what she wanted, since her will was the same as that of the Son of God” (Cozzano Dichiarazione della Bolla 969 v)*

*“...He will **never abandon this Company as long as the world lasts. Because, if he has planted it in the first place, who is there who can uproot it? Believe it, do not doubt it and have firm faith that it will be so” (T.11,7-11).***

“Now to the task, with courage! Therefore let us all embrace this holy Rule that God through his grace has offered to us” (R.pr,29).

Let it be our hope and our commitment to be capable of faith, hope, ardor. . .

Company is being and feeling. . .united together. . .

Etymologically speaking, the word ‘Company’ (cum pane) means persons who eat at the same table and share the same bread, but also ‘hyacinths’ for the soul.

Our belonging has a solid foundation. . .

Let us revisit our origins, go back over our history, deepen our charism, form ourselves at the school of our codes of holiness. . . the writings of Saint Angela, and the Constitutions of the Company.

*“Pay attention to **what you are doing and where you lay the foundation,**”* said St. Augustine.

*“**And you, in the meantime, do what has to be done. . .**”* says Saint Angela (T11,26).

Let it be our hope and our commitment to be consecrated laywomen with solid foundations. . . responsible in doing what has to be done. . . here and now, at this precise moment in history.

Belonging is akin to the water of the ocean . . .we are immersed in it. . .there is nothing to be gained by looking for it elsewhere. . .

I give this suggestion with an example from A. de Mello:

*“Excuse me” says one fish to another one in the ocean;
you are older than I am, more of an expert than I am,
and can probably help me.*

Tell me, where can I find that thing called ocean?

I’ve looked for it everywhere in vain.”

“The ocean,” replied the older fish, “is what you’re swimming in right now.”

*“Oh, this? But this is only water. What I’m looking for is the ocean,”
said the young fish, who, disappointed, swam off to look elsewhere.*

Let it be our hope and our commitment to swim in the right sea and not look elsewhere. . .to feel we belong, to feel at home in the Company. . .only in this way will we still be able to accompany others to dive in and enjoy this marvelous ocean of our charism and our spirituality.

The

- **Feel you are responsible for one and all. . .**
- **Respect persons even if they have their limits. . .**
- **Accept persons as they are, without forcing them to be as you would like them to be. . .**
- **Spontaneously praise the qualities of those you encounter, and highlight their merits. . .**
- **Be polite in a sincere and natural way. . .ask for forgiveness, always be able to say thank you. . .**
- **Stimulate, help, gratify...**
- **Be yourself, transparent, sincere, genuine, consistent. . . Never allow yourself to be two-faced, deceitful, or wear a mask. . .**
- **Live the joys and sadness of others as if they were your own. . .**
- **Strive to love and serve without expecting anything in exchange. True friendship, service, love and the new commandment. . .exclude any self-interest. . .**
- **Accept and love people for who they are. . . show constant and sincere interest in them. . .**
- **Make an effort, even a great one if necessary, to understand, forgive, and forget misunderstandings and tension. . .**
- **Live in unity, interiorly. . .in your heart, not in a superficial way. . .**
- **Carefully cultivate a good sense of good humor, joy and optimism. . .**
- **Express your faith in a spontaneous and sincere way. . .pray and help others to pray.**

United together ... Verification of unity ...

1. *And may they seek to bring peace and concord wherever they will be. . .* how do I live this recommendation of Saint Angela in my life surroundings?
2. *Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole mind, and with your whole strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. . .* what does this commandment of the Lord mean for me?
3. *United together in the Company, we share the grace of the Lord's presence among us, experience communion, and find support and help for living our vocation and mission. . .* what gift and what commitment does the Company itself bring for me?
4. *The more you are united, all the more will Jesus Christ be among you. . .* how do we come to terms with this *the more. . .all the more* in order to guarantee the Lord's presence?
5. *So consider how important such union and concord is. Therefore, desire it, seek it, embrace it, and preserve it with all your strength. . .* do I engage in personal verification regarding this quest, this embrace. . .?

Prayer for the Company

Holy and indivisible Trinity

I heartily thank You For granting me the grace
to unite myself with the other Sisters
in joining the Company of Saint Ursula.
I now pray for this Company, for every Sister and every leader.
Grant us skill, prudence, honesty, maturity and experience.
On our spiritual journey, let us guide and teach one another,
and act as caring mothers for the well-being
of every individual member and all the Company.

Saint Angela, Mother and Foundress,

ask our gentle and kind Bridegroom Jesus Christ
to grant us comfort and help, especially to those among us who are alone, old and sick ...
We also present to you the Company
that is already enjoying heavenly glory, where each one is crowned
with the shining, golden crown of virginity.
And now, thanks to the graces that sustain us,
our hearts are filled with longing desire to care for the Company.
Saint Angela, please continue to embrace us and grant us the kiss of peace.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and
of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

CONSTITUTIONS CHAPTER SIX

IN THE SAME CHARISM: THE FEDERATION

I tell you, living all together thus united in heart, you will be like a mighty fortress, or a tower impregnable against all adversities, and persecutions, and deceits of the devil. And moreover I assure you that every grace you ask from God will infallibly be granted to you. And I shall always be in your midst, helping your prayers.

(Ninth Counsel, 15-20)

Unity is a strength for each Company and for the Federation of the Companies. . . able to surmount every internal and external difficulty.

It is an indispensable condition, the 'authentic document' through which the request to God will be answered infallibly.

The title: *IN THE SAME CHARISM: THE FEDERATION*

The Companies come together in sisterly communion in the Federation, responding among themselves to the invitation to concord and unity handed down to us by the Foundress.

We sustain each other together in the ongoing rediscovery of the original charism of St. Angela Merici and making it ever relevant.

The **charism** is to be discovered and lived ever anew, because, as Pope Francis reminds us: "*the charism is not a bottle of distilled water; the charism, just like water, takes on the taste and the elements of the soil through which it passes.*"

Federation comes from the Latin word *foedus* and means covenant, alliance, union, company, aggregation, pooling together, faith, bonding, union. . .

All these elements combine in the Federation of the Companies to become *a mighty fortress or a tower impregnable*.

OUR INSTITUTE ...

We are Companies. . .we are Company

30.1 *The diocesan and interdiocesan Companies united among themselves constitute the Federation: "Company of Saint Ursula," Secular Institute of Saint Angela Merici.*

The union among the Companies constitutes the Federation.

We are diocesan or interdiocesan *Companies*. . .and yet we are *Company* as united together.

The Federation of the Companies consists of our being united together in the same charism.

The Institute is one, the Companies are many; autonomous, yes, but only united together are we the Secular Institute recognized by the Church

The Federation in purpose and service

30.2 *The Federation has as purpose: to foster growth in sisterly communion among the Companies through meetings and mutual help; enhance the exchange of experiences; promote conventions for study and for in-depth knowledge of the history of the Company and its proper charism, of Merician spirituality, of the Constitutions, of topics of general interest; care for the publication of materials for common use; maintain relations with the Holy See.*

The purpose is sisterly communion, the *united together* of St. Angela. . .in the same charism.

Pursuit of the purpose gives rise to the commitment together as Federation to seek instruments and means of sisterhood.

As the Federation is not a superstructure, it is nothing other than the Companies united together. . . each and every one of us must feel this finality and these commitments to be our own.

It is true that there is a service body (the Federation Council). . . a full time service, but it certainly cannot serve in an isolated manner. Therefore, this service body asks for help, accepts help, involves, and says thank you.

This is a delicate task all the more deeply felt as the strength of some Companies gradually declines, and as new buds blossom all around the world.

The Companies in the Federation

30.2 Each federated Company is called to contribute toward reaching the purposes of the Federation through prayer, mutual charity and collaboration.

All the Companies are active agents and jointly responsible for the life of the Federation, and are called to manifest their concrete participation.

The Federation Council is not a pastime; it is a full-time engagement, at times entangled amidst other time-consuming endeavors: *how much we must pray to God so He may enlighten us, guide us, and teach us what we must do out of love for Him in such a task.*

Since we are the Federation all together, we certainly must pray for the Federation Council, but also so each sister and each Company may feel active and responsible.

THE SERVICE BODY

Time, energy, gratuitousness...

Those willing to accept a service in the Federation *must be open to dedicating time and energy, gratuitously, to the new position, if elected (Const. 31.8).*

Service demands **time, so much time . . .** it is not a question of getting together for one meeting or another. . . and then returning to the routine of ordinary life.

It is necessary to be readily willing to write, remain up-to-date, travel, visit groups and companies, do formation, provide information, take on responsibility for sisters and companies, work on carrying out programs and other endeavors. . .

It requires gratuitousness. . . not only for gratuitous service, but service without claims, without imposition, without commands, without immediately evident results. . . service of true sharing, just like dear sisters.

It also calls for all kinds of energy: physical, intellectual, psychological, spiritual . . . as well as economic, but the Lord's most abundant grace comes into the picture for all these energies.

An out-going service ...

32.1 The Federation Council is a service body for the benefit of the federated Companies.

It differs entirely from the Company Council which is a governance body.

The beautiful and demanding service of the Federation Council is *for the benefit of the federated Companies.*

This *for the benefit of . . .* is precisely what makes the Federation Council's service out-going in nature. It is not withdrawal, not focused on itself, but rather service for the benefit, the good of Companies, sisters, groups, for the benefit of the common Merician charism.

As Pope Francis invites us, this out-going service will *be grateful for the past, live the present, and become open to the future with hope.*

Carry out the purposes of the Federation

32.2 The Federation Council will be careful to carry out the ends of the Federation and in particular, will be available for: supporting initiatives for a deepening of the Rule and the Constitutions, in fidelity to the spirit proper to a Merician institution; to help the Companies upon their specific request, to resolve possible difficulties;...

The Council's task is action-oriented. . .it must take action on, carry out. . .the purpose of the Federation; in other words, it must *heighten sisterly communion among the Companies*.

A 'doing' that is entirely formative and spiritual, a guarantor of the charism. . . also when this 'doing' will involve very concrete and material responsibilities.

Insofar as it is a service body, the Federation Council *will be available. . . .*

The Federation Council never imposes its service. At times it may propose, but practically always acts in response to a request, an invitation, an appeal. In fact, many times it is unable to respond to all the requests received, and will engage in discernment, giving priority above all to moments of communion, in-depth discussion and implementation of the Constitutions and the Merician spirituality.

Financial support

Spirituality is life, and hence everything is spirituality, including administration and the management of goods.

33 *The Service Body of the Federation. . .will be supported for activities of a financial nature by offerings sent freely by the individual Companies and by individual members.*

The offerings are all freely given, and are mostly generous ones. Despite the decline in members, it has therefore been possible to meet the expenses necessary for what is foreseen and requested by the Constitutions regarding the service of the Federation Council, in particular for:

- Council meetings;
- Annual membership fees to CMIS, CIIS, CNV;
- Various translations
- Consultation with experts
- Printing and mailing of *In the same charism*;
- Support for websites
- Printing of books and pamphlets
- History of the Federation
- Federation conferences
- Consultation with and work of experts
- Expenses for the meetings of Companies and groups in Italy and in other countries
- Economic assistance to members and Companies in difficulty, and support to nascent Groups.

It must be recalled that the Federation has no forms of fixed income or revenues from property, nothing like an 'annuity,' and can only count on free offerings. Therefore, while thanking sisters and Companies for their assistance and support, please note, **also for formative and vocational purposes**, that requests may not be submitted to the Federation to provide subsidies to cover the **personal subsistence expenses** of sisters, because the Federation neither is nor wants to become a centralized Institute, and must sustain the secular vocation. The very necessary assistance given to groups and Companies is intended for gatherings and for **the formation of the sisters**.

Federation and Companies. . .going out

THE ISOLATED GROUPS

34 *The Isolated Groups are those groups that are formed without the possibility of any Company's taking care of them.*

During this globalized age it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak in terms of groups in unity. . .in communion. . .Thanks to powerful means of communication, we are all much closer, better connected. .

This, however, does not remove requirements and difficulties, because not everything can be solved via Internet; relationships, visits, on-site knowledge, the sharing of life and culture make it impossible to do everything from home. We still have to go out, set forth, share, spend time together. . .

The Companies are a resource in this sense. However, where there are no Companies, or where they are in great difficulty, we cannot just forgo our charism. It is necessary to cultivate it, make it grow, keep it ever alive and timely.

Therefore, we have the Groups. . .How do we live this reality in our Institute? We all await vocations, but when these are offered to us somewhere in the world, what can we do about it?

We can't just say: that's beautiful, someone will take care of it. . .something will happen.

It is up to me, to you, to us. . .to understand what to do, and do it. . .obviously in consultation with one another, in unity in the Federation, praying.

Ordinarily, for example, it is good for a Company to look after nascent Groups. . .in order to make them immediately feel they are part of a spiritual family, close in fact or in psychological and spiritual terms.

This, however, is not always possible, and at times not even opportune because of the difficulties of effective formation and accompaniment. In such a case, the Federation Council steps in. But the Federation Council is neither omnipotent nor a 'know-it-all'. . .it needs persons who are capable of providing this service and willing to do so.

At present, numerous nascent Groups are already being cared for by some Companies outside their respective regions, and even nations or continents.

Where it has not been possible to have them accompanied by a Company, other Groups are being assisted by the Federation Council.

There may also be isolated Groups in the same country, where perhaps a Company is no longer able (for reasons of age, number of members, capacity) to accompany new vocations.

There is still room for so much commitment!

verification and

1. *Federation. . . what does it make me think of? What reality does it enshrine? What is this Institute of ours?*
2. *The Companies of the Federation. . . what involvement? What responsibility? What commitment?*
3. *United together in the Federation. . . what does it mean? What does it entail? What does it promise?*
4. *Sisterly communion among the Companies. . . methods, instruments, plans. . . How to welcome and live them? Collaborate? Be an active part?*
5. *Safeguarding the Merician charism. . . deepening of the Rule and the Constitutions. . . What helps me? What use do I make of formation instruments and materials? How do I get all this across within the Groups and the Companies?*
6. *Financial support to the Federation. . . Does this ask something of me? Do I know the Federation is my Institute and will be able to do its work and operate with the assistance of all?*
7. *The new off-shoots. . . Groups in the world. . . what can I do to accompany, form, and support them?*

To love each other and be

Saint Angela,

*I pray to be like you, watchful and most vigilant
as a caring shepherdess for the flock
that is the Company you have entrusted to me.*

*I wish to take care especially that **they are all united and one in will.**
I also want to exert myself to be united in this way with all of them,
because I know well that, **the more** we are united, **the more**
Jesus Christ will be in our midst as a father and good shepherd.*

Saint Angela,

*you have assured us that **loving each another
and living in harmony together**
are a sure sign that we are walking the path right and pleasing to God.
And we want to walk this way, even if, sometimes,
we may find these roads thorny and rocky; but we know
that they will be strewn with flowers for us, and paved with finest gold.*

Saint Angela,

*you were insistent in calling for unity;
you have warned us that, if we let weeds of discord grow in the Company,
this would be a plague of bad example
for the city and even beyond; it would be ruinous...
Keep us united in your motherly affection
And in the heart of the Lover of us all, **Jesus Christ! Amen!***

The Company will last as long as the world lasts. . .

... And he will never abandon this Company
as long as the world lasts.
Because, if he has planted it in the first place,
who is there who can uproot it?
Have firm faith that it will be so; I know what I am saying.
(T 11,7-12)

How to stay alive. . . merging

35.2 *Once it is constituted, a Company remains in existence regardless the number of its members.*

35.3 *When a Company decreases to fewer members than the number established by the Assembly of the Federation (five), it is desirable, also in order to ensure the necessary formation and support of the members, that it merge with another Company, which, in ecclesial terms, will be considered an interdiocesan Company.*

We are still talking about merging, even if many Companies have been thinking about this possibility for some time, while others drag along in an ever increasing inability to deal with the requirements of the governance of a Company in spiritual, formative and economic terms.

The Council Decree *Perfectae caritatis* (1965) had recommended:

Institutes and monasteries should, when opportune and the Holy See permits, form federations if they can be considered as belonging to the same religious family. Others who have practically identical constitutions and rules and a common spirit should unite, particularly when they have too few members (22).

For the Companies it is the same Rule and the same Constitutions.

Paul VI's *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae* (1966) dealt with the same topic and set criteria: *Taking all the circumstances into account, the following criteria especially are to be considered together: the small number of members in proportion to the age of the institute, the lack of candidates over a period of several years, the advanced age of the majority of its members* (Part II, VIII, n°41).

Lived in a spirit of faith, a merger is not a synonym of death, but becomes a new plan open to the gifts of grace and the strength of the Companies.

When to think about mergers

This must always be in the mind of the Companies reduced in numbers. . .this must always be in the mind of the larger Companies in the sense of being readily willing to accompany, help, welcome.

It is true that. . .*once it is constituted, a Company remains in existence regardless the number of its members* (Const. 35.2).

It is likewise true, however, that each Company is called upon to observe the Constitutions in every way, also with respect to term limits and renewal in governance positions.

When a Company has a very small number of members it is difficult to guarantee the life of the Company in an autonomous manner, as well as in spiritual and formation activities.

“Having assessed the situation with sufficient lucidity, thinking about the good of the persons concerned, the very future of the Company, and the value of its presence [...] it is conceivable to envision the possibility of union with another Company in the rationale of mutual and sisterly support among sisters and daughters of the same Merician charism. [...] Union must not be looked upon merely as the loss of something. . .it can produce good fruits also in the sense of vocations for a new vitality of the individual diocesan Companies” (G. Sarzi Sartori 1995).

It will be necessary for one and all, small Companies and larger Companies, to think along these lines in order to mature in the solidarity that unites, sustains, encourages, and offers new possibilities and renewed vitality.

Service, receptivity and joy must and can grow in the federated Companies. . .

I believe this is a propitious moment to ask God for life, hope and consolation for each one of us and for our Companies. . . committing ourselves together, with responsibility and in obedience to the Church, to do what is better according to God's will and the wish of Saint Angela. We are in good company and are sure of being heard.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL ASSISTANT

The appointment. . .an ecclesial requirement

36.1 The special bond that unites us to the Church and the will to be in total and filial union with the Holy Father and in docile adherence to the teaching of the Magisterium, finds expression in the appointment of the Ecclesiastical Assistant.

On one hand, it is a requirement for the Federation of the Companies to feel it is universal Church, and, on the other hand, it is a gift of the Church to us. We have had and do have Assistants, true brothers, fathers and pastors, who share the Merician charism in full and give us the sense of the universal Church.

The task of the Assistant

36.3 The Ecclesiastical Assistant: will bring to the Council the authoritative voice of the Church and his specific competence in the spiritual area; he will promote fraternal relationships among the Ecclesiastical Assistants of the Companies; collaborate with the President and the Council in the spread of the knowledge and esteem of the Merician institution in the universal Church; on request of the Council, he will animate formative and spiritual initiatives of the Federation.

Just as the Assistant of the Company brings the voice of the local Church into the Company, the Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Federation will assist the Council in this adherence and in this ecclesial and spiritual commitment. He will maintain fraternal relations with the Assistants of the Companies and will collaborate in all initiatives of the Federation, also in the area of vocations.

Vice-Assistant/s

36.5 The President with the consent of the Council can suggest some nominations to the Ecclesiastical Assistant for the choice of one or more vice-Assistants who will collaborate with him.

The Federation has had vice-Assistants in the past, and, thanks be to the Lord, now relishes this great gift. Let us pray for the Assistant and the vice-Assistants, who help the world Company persevere in filial union with the Holy Father and in docility to the Magisterium.

The beatitude of Saint Angela applies for them as well:

Blessed are those who will take very good care of it (T 11,13).

UNITED TOGETHER. . .AUTONOMY AND HARMONY

"Autonomy does not exclude harmony," affirmed Benedict XVI.

The Federation is a great gift: a gift given by God to His Church. It beckons us to live particularity and universality, which is the experience of the Church. It brings us to a broad and free dimension. It is union in the same spirit, in the same charism, it is ***the united together*** recommended so earnestly by Saint Angela.

Autonomy stimulates and fosters creativity, initiative, respect for each place and each culture, incarnation where one lives and in the local Church, a sense of being part of a diocese, and sisterliness; it also permits immediacy in practical choices, more direct attention to the sisters and to their formation. It likewise fosters participation and the sense of belonging. It requires more direct responsibility.

The Federation guarantees that we are not alone in our autonomy and sustains our Mother's promise that the Company will last. It fosters encounter, growth in the charism and in one's life-style, circulates what is beautiful and good. It is an experience of diversity, helps us get out of our own "back yards," and offers possibilities for more extensive and qualified formation

Being federated Companies entails: pooling our material and spiritual treasures. It involves prayer, effort and commitment to keep the different individual Companies united in a harmonious way, acquaintance among members of the diverse Companies, and overcoming our egoism and provincialism. It stimulates acceptance, participation and collaboration, esteem, greater conformity in living the Merician charism, an exchange of experiences, and readiness on a personal level as well. It calls for mutual assistance, evaluation, mental flexibility, and going beyond our own needs and our own reality in order to become open to the reality of the Institute at large. It asks us to give our own contribution – albeit small – to the Federation's mission, with no proxies or absenteeism.

It involves living with a sense of openness, including an open mind, and openness to our world-wideness; knowledge of diverse realities and cultures, acceptance of both positive and negative elements. We have to be willing and prepared to **get on the move**. . .to venture away from our own corrals.

It entails living according to the Rule and the Constitutions, because this alone is necessary..

It also involves learning the 'humility' to ask for help and to accept being helped, launching even small forms of possible collaboration, presence and attention.

We should become active in taking responsibility and accompanying nascent Groups and Companies in difficulty, doing so in the most opportune forms and ways. The Companies close by should be "closer," and together be able get closer to the distant Companies.

During the periodical Company meetings it would be a good idea to find time and space for an update about the life and service of the Federation and our world-wideness.

The strength for living *united together* is found:

In prayer: first and foremost, it is necessary to assume responsibility for the worldwide nature and the service of the Federation before the Lord, *the Lover*. Prayer also as support for those who are engaged directly in the service of the Federation.

In fidelity to the meetings of the Federation and the Companies.

Give priority to participating in the Federation's meetings and encounters as an opportunity to become open to world-wideness and live it.

Perhaps we too have to take the step *from dreaming to the planting* . . .It is useless to store dreams in a drawer. . .being in a drawer doesn't help them mature. In order to believe in dreams it is necessary to plant seeds, cultivate them, and help them grow, otherwise we will never see the tree with many offshoots.

Yes, planting a seed means to risk losing it. . . .it is up to us to choose what we want to do; whether to continue narrating the dream, or decide to take the risk of planting it.

For a believer, and even for the Company, it certainly isn't easy to live the rationale of the seed that dies in the furrow; the seed that doesn't make news, but does make history, and generates it as the history of salvation. Being courageous enough to sow the seed of the Company again and anew, in every season and every epoch, means entrusting the seed to Someone, to *the Lover of us all and to Mother Angela*, who always takes our dreams to heart.

Travel the road of secularity

This road is not paved with evident signs and banners, but is a rather normal and mundane road.

As Saint Angela reminds us, this is the road of *Jesus Christ, Our Lady, so many Christians of the early Church, so many saints*, so many of our sisters.

When Jesus became human He did not take on the features of sacredness, but remained a layman, lived like everyone else, and worked as a carpenter, not a rabbi. Ours must be the secularity of incarnation.

At times we find it difficult to understand this in our reality, and the same applies to getting this message across on other continents. Along the road of secularity we must remember that *the oil does not last forever*.

..

We do not want to end up like the foolish virgins in the Gospel. . . .without enough oil. It is true that we have the oil of Saint Angela, the oil of so many virgins now already in the Company of Heaven, but we are the ones who have to fill our lamps today.

We cannot live an anonymous secular consecration, nor can we believe we can live on our reputation. The Companies as well are going through a period of uncertainty, but perhaps the response is to be sought in living with greater authenticity what we are and what *the Lover of us all* and Saint Angela want us to be. It is necessary to fill the lamps once again with the commitment to live our vocation with passion in today's world.

Continue in the unity of the unique charism. . .

"They were of one heart and one spirit. . .": thus do the Acts of the Apostles depict the life of the early Christian community. *"United together, all of one heart and one will,"* says Saint Angela in her last Counsel, and *"take care especially that they are united and one in will, as we read of the Apostles and other Christians of the early Church,"* she specifies in the 10th Legacy.

Scholars of consecrated life are now rediscovering the value of communion not so much and not only as common life, but as life "in communion." We are certainly in good company, and in company we have to rediscover our charism, our strength, our hope continuously. . . .unity and communion.

Together in the following of Christ, together with the *Lover of us all*.

Though it has always been the right time to work together. . . today we cannot do otherwise. Only if we are convinced of the complementarity of all the resources available in the Company of the world will it be possible to continue hoping, and seeing *wondrous things*.

Precisely where the future appears more difficult, it is all the more urgent to embark upon the road of being together as rapidly as possible, when some resources and some energy are still available.

Precisely because of the fragility of many Company realities and situations, it is no longer either possible or advisable to work alone, not even if we were to still find ourselves in a favorable situation with a good number of members and plenty of initiative. In this case, collaboration, openness, and welcoming will foster a process of maturation and growth for the good of the entire Federation.

Only if we strive **to be active and present**, every time we can, may we continue to believe and hope, may we give our contribution so that proposals are manageable for the Companies, more incisive, more meaningful. The presence and participation of each sister are an eloquent witness of attention, trust and responsibility.

Together we shall continue to journey in Company, and make a beautiful history of our Institute.

verification and

- 1. The need for union. . .Do I ask for help? Am I open to change? Do I know how to accept help for the governance of the Company, also accepting the directions of the Federation with a spirit of humility and faith?*
- 2. If I am in a difficult situation, do I consider merging as a new resource and hope?*
- 3. Autonomy, harmony, unity. . .how can we combine these words as Company in the Federation?*
- 4. How are we to pool material and spiritual treasures?*
- 5. Am I willing to overcome certain forms of attachment to goods and works in order to live secularity in full, with everything that entails in terms of responsibility, spirituality and service?*
- 6. Federation meetings, encounters, publications and initiatives. . . Do I feel they are mine? Do I participate in a responsible and active manner? Do I collaborate?*
- 7. Work small scale and think large scale? Is this possible in the Companies and in the Federation?*
- 8. Prayer and unity. . .our strength, our hope, our certitude. . .Am I committed?*

In order to live

*Lord Jesus Christ, who prayed that all might be one...
help us to live unity itself in the world and in the Company.
Grant that in you, in this spiritual family,
we may be bound to one another with the bonds of charity,
grant that we may esteem each other, help each other, support each other...*

*Lord Jesus Christ, we know that, if we stay united,
you will be among us and will grant that heaven and earth support us...
we trust that everything we are and everything we do will come to a good end...*

*Lord Jesus Christ, we have the certainty that, being united together,...
every grace that we ask of you will infallibly be granted to us.*

*Saint Angela, you are always in our midst, helping us with our prayer,...
Grant that we may take seriously your earnest call for unity.
We want to be united together, all of one heart and one will.
We know the importance of such union and concord, and therefore we desire it,
we seek it, we embrace it, we preserve it with all our strength.*

*Saint Angela, who assured us that, united together in heart,
we would be like a very strong fortress, like an impregnable tower...
help us now to carry out courageously the task we have begun.*

*Saint Angela, help us to be fosterers, comforters, full of trust...
because, without doubt, what you told us will happen.
You, faithful friend, with your Lover, who is also ours,
will be with us to implore every grace, throughout life and until the final moment of death.*

*And we wish to remain happy; we want to have a lively faith and hope;
we yearn to be blessed*

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen!*

CONSTITUTIONS CHAPTER SEVEN

CONSTITUTIONS AND REGULATIONS

*And tell them they should want to be united and in concord all together,
all being of one will, remaining under obedience to the Rule, for in this is everything.*
(Counsels 5,20)

This chapter summarizes the value of the Constitutions and any regulations of the Company, which become the norm of life to be accepted and observed.

Chapter 7 does not concern the life of the Company directly, but rather the essence of the Constitutions themselves and their role in our life.

Let us begin with a series of synonyms in order to understand the importance of the Constitutions.
Constitutions = **soul, code, decree, law, expression, physiognomy, foundation, establishment, scaffolding, framework, norm, regulation, organization, skeleton, profile, rule, substance, statute, unity, vigor, life, vitality.** . . .

Let us think over these words that project the substance of the Constitutions for us.

From a spiritual viewpoint, let us now comment on the few expressions in this chapter which, as a whole, is more prescriptive.

Reference to Saint Angela and her writings

37.1 Every consecrated person will constantly refer to the Rule, the Counsels and the Testament of Saint Angela Merici, because referring to one's origins preserves and nourishes the spiritual energies capable of always paving the way for an authentic renewal.

This chapter has to be read in conjunction with article 1.5, commented on earlier: *In the life of the Foundress, in the Rule, the Counsels and the Testament, inserted into the current historical context by the present Constitutions, we find the fundamental guide of our life and the way for carrying out the purpose of the Institute: striving for the perfection of charity; honoring Jesus Christ; serving God and His Reign; and collaborating in the salvation of the world.*

Constantly. . . .this is constant and continual reference to. . .the writing of Saint Angela. . . It is tantamount to saying: observe the Constitutions and refer continuously to the Merician spirituality and charism. Neither the former without the latter, but permeate them, one with the others, in order to *preserve and nourish the necessary spiritual energies.*

Adherence to the origins and authentic renewal

Spiritual energies are indispensable so we may renew ourselves authentically.

The Constitutions here evoke words of Paul VI:

*“What is to be kept in mind at this moment bringing you from life already lived to the life the Lord is preparing for your Institute? **First and foremost, the origins.***

“If you are truly devoted to Saint Angela, if you understand what that holy soul wanted to do at her time and in society around her, you will immediately find suggestions also for yourselves.

“Adhering to the origins truly preserves spiritual origins and charts the way also for progress”
(Paul VI, Rome, 27 Aug. 1966, Conference of diverse Companies).

Let us review our history

Historians are right in having us return to the origins. During this year of consecrated life which is also the 480th anniversary the Company's foundation, Pope Francis invites us to review our history:

“During this Year [of consecrated life], it would be appropriate for each charismatic family to reflect on its origins and history, in order to thank God who grants the Church a variety of gifts which embellish her and equip her for every good work.

“Recounting your history is essential for preserving your identity, for strengthening your unity as a family and your common sense of belonging” (Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter to all consecrated persons*, 21 Nov. 2014).

THE OBSERVANCE OF OUR CODES OF HOLINESS

Once again, it is Saint Angela who recommends observance.

Let us read words from her **last Legacy**:

*“Finally, take the **greatest care** that the good directives given, especially those in the Rule, be **most diligently observed.**”*

The last recommendation of a mother is always the most important one. . . .it is the one to be preserved as the most precious treasure. Saint Angela left unity as her last counsel to the colonelle.

She entrusted the matrons with the task of exercising utmost care in making sure the good directives given were followed.

Most diligently observing the Rule remains the duty of all the daughters.

It is a matter of guaranteeing fidelity to an original charism and to a heritage that cannot be lost.

Faithful to the origins in the changed situations of times and places

“And if, according to times and circumstances, the need arises to make new rules or do something differently, do it prudently and with good advice.”

Immobility has to give way to dynamism, that is to say to the ability to adapt continuously. . . .Know how to ‘be’ here and now.

Saint Angela, a farsighted woman, had foreseen the opportuneness of new and different norms, and, without fearing the future and new requirements, had advised leaders to act *prudently and with good advice*.

The Constitutions and the Regulations

37.2 *In the present Constitutions and in possible future Regulations of her Company, each consecrated member will find norms and directions for a life-giving journey in the Church and in the world.*

This article is to be read together with the Decree of Approval, where the Holy See expressed the hope that the Constitutions *will offer to all the consecrated members of the Institute a path of holiness for a more effective witness in the Church and in the world.*

We therefore know where to find *norms and directions for a life-giving journey of holiness in the Church and in the world.*

Here is the spirituality! The writings of Saint Angela are for us the root and the origins of our spirituality, and to which we must always return for our renewal.

The Constitutions give us directions for being alive in the Church and in the world today.

For us, the Constitutions are mediation of God’s will

In the document *The service of authority and obedience* (2008), the Congregation for Consecrated Life proposed a certain style for Institutes:

“Consecrated persons, moreover, are called to the following of the obedient Christ within an ‘evangelical project’ or a charismatic one, inspired by the Spirit and authenticated by the Church.

“Approving a charismatic program that is a religious institute, the Church guarantees that the inspiration that animates it and the norms that regulate it can provide a path for seeking God and holiness.

“Therefore, the Rule and the other indications concerning the way of life also become means of mediating the will of the Lord: human mediation but still authoritative, imperfect but at the same time binding, the starting point from which each day begins, and also for moving forward in a generous and creative impulse towards that sanctity which God ‘wills’ for every consecrated person.”

THE CONSTITUTIONS OF AN INSTITUTE ACCORDING TO CANON LAW

By way of conclusion to this our spiritual reading of the Constitutions, we cite canon 587 dealing specifically with Constitutions, while recalling that in this reading we intentionally overlooked more juridical and organizational aspects which are accessible in the other booklet: *The Constitutions, food for thought* (2005).

Can. 587: §1. *To protect more faithfully the proper vocation and identity of each institute, **the fundamental code or constitutions of every institute must contain**, besides those things which are to be observed as stated in can. 578, fundamental norms regarding governance of the institute, the discipline of members, incorporation and formation of members, and the proper object of the sacred bonds.*

§2. *A code of this type is **approved by competent authority of the Church** and can be changed only with its consent.*

§3. *In this code **spiritual and juridic elements are to be joined together suitably**; nevertheless, norms are not to be multiplied without necessity.*

We will comment on and briefly summarize this article of the Code of Canon Law, finding brilliant expression of all these indications in our beautiful Constitutions.

Protect and guarantee the proper vocation and identity

In order to protect its proper vocation and identity more faithfully, each institute of consecrated life must have its fundamental code or constitutions.

Harmonization of contents

Spiritual and juridic elements are to be joined together suitably in this code, avoiding the multiplication of unnecessary norms.

The spiritual principles animating the life and action of each consecrated person, and the fundamental requirements stemming from those principles regarding action and concrete attitudes of life are to appear in the Constitutions side by side, and as harmoniously as possible.

Rule of life

The constitutions must be a rule of life in the deepest sense of the expression.

They are to be composed and written in such a way that consecrated persons may fall in love with them, and often return to them in personal and community prayer and reading.

Constitutions must not just be a work to be used for purposes of meditation and spiritual reading, even though it is indispensable for them to be so; they must be “a book of life” in which each consecrated person finds directions regarding the concrete style of life requested of her.

Therefore, they cannot be limited to enunciating principles of spiritual theology or describing purely interior attitudes, sentiments of the heart.

Language

The language used must be clear and straightforward, and easy to memorize, just like that of the rules of yesteryear.

The constitutions must be able to last and endure in time, and hence be made up of expressions that are simple and clear for all time.

Support for witness

The fundamental code must clearly outline a very visible form of life that may be a sign and a witness within the people of God.

Vocations

The Constitutions represent a rule of life to the degree that we begin to lay out a path clearly enough for people to take it in without having to settle for hearsay. If someone asks, “Who are you? What are you living?” it must be possible to offer them a copy of the Constitutions, saying: “Read this, you will find the answers.”

Charism and spirituality

Constitutions must first of all define the spirit of the institute, its nature, its mission in the Church and its typical apostolic service. All these elements together constitute the charism of the institute, and it is obvious that this cannot be expressed with two or three phrases of such a generic nature that they can be applied to any form of Christian life.

Moreover, considering an institute’s specific charism and what is imposed upon every form of consecrated life, the constitutions will list the ensuing and indispensable requirements regarding the life of prayer, and will specify the proper object of the sacred bonds.

Lastly, they will provide the necessary norms for formation, governance, the management of goods, and separation from the institute.

TO BEGIN ANEW WITH THE CONSTITUTIONS ... BY OUR SIDE AND IN OUR HEART

I would like to present some thoughts about Constitutions offered by Cardinal Rodé, former Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. These thoughts can confirm for us how important our Codes of Holiness are.

They are a book of life

*“The constitutions or the “fundamental code” are not to be looked upon as a cluster of detailed norms, but rather as a **book of life** containing the attitudes consecrated persons must translate into their life and their daily endeavors.”*

A book of life written in the heart

*“This is a law written not in a set and unchangeable way as if on a slab of stone, but **in the flesh of the heart**, at the service of life and hence open to possible changes and progress.”*

The way for authentic renewal

*“In a context of creative fidelity, and with a view to a renewal ever faithful to the original inspiration, **a renewed reference to the rules and the constitutions** is needed as a sure criterion in seeking forms that are adequate for a witness capable of responding to today’s demands.”*

Constitutions demand fidelity

*“The first thing to focus on, therefore, is **fidelity to the constitutions**, because the charism recognized as authentic by the Church is found in them.*

*“This fidelity entails **the acceptance of the constitutional norms in their totality**.*

“Consecrated persons cannot interpret them, that is, take just what they like and refusing what may be less in line with their own tastes.”

A book to be read and studied continuously

“The constitutions are not just any other book which, albeit important, ends up forgotten on a library shelf.

*“The constitutions are a book **to keep with you**, to read always, because in it is not a history already known, but **a plan of life, a divine call** which begins each morning and whose full realization demands a journey of fidelity to God and others throughout the day.*

*“If they are **read and studied continuously**, something new will be found each day that will stimulate ongoing growth concerning one’s being as well as one’s doing.”*

They call for persevering fidelity

*“In conclusion, the constitutions, today as in the past, are there to be observed in **persevering fidelity**.*

“Each consecrated person in his or her own way is a guarantor of the founder’s charism, the institute’s patrimony.

“The power of the rule and the constitutions is not in their literary beauty, even if that is not to be disregarded, but in the way they are translated in the life of each member and in that of the entire body, the institute.”

A sure path to holiness

*“As a **sure guide to holiness** and specific assistance for living the vocation received from God, the constitutions show each consecrated person the way to live on the basis of Christ and to announce His Gospel in fidelity to the charism of his/her institute.”*

Constitutions to be taken up, studied and observed

*“Taking them on with faith, constantly studying their substance and value **at both the personal and community levels**, and observing them with fidelity and freedom of heart, therefore, constitute the daily and indispensable commitment for each consecrated person.*

“Without such awareness and intimate conviction, not only is the word missing, but there is a true risk of losing the sense of belonging to a community’s shared plan and its common path of holiness.”

Let us end with words St. Francis addressed to his Order:

*“Heed me, sons of the Lord and my brothers,
and listen to my words.
Turn the ear of your heart
and obey the voice of the Son of God.
Observe his precepts with all your heart
and perfectly follow his counsels.
Praise him because he is good, and exalt him in your works...
Persevere in discipline and holy obedience
and, with good and firm intent,
fulfill those things you have promised to him.”*

And Saint Angela, Franciscan in spirit, is no less inspiring:

*“Willingly put into practice **with every solicitude** these few reminders . . . these recommendations will be to you like legacies, which, as my greatest desire, I leave you **to carry out faithfully**” (cf T. pr).*

verification and

- 1. Every consecrated person will constantly refer to the Rule, the Counsels and the Testament of Saint Angela Merici.**
Does this **constant** reference challenge me?
How do I refer. . .how do I refer my sisters, my group, my Company to our codes of holiness? Our ongoing formation, our updating, our reflections. . .what do they refer to, what do they deepen, what do they suggest?
- 2. Most diligent. . . .** is the observance required for the Rule and (by us today) for the Constitutions! They are our codes of holiness. To be proposed continuously as formation by the leaders. Continuously to be observed by each sister. How do I stand with this superlative of diligent? What difficulties do I encounter in living it, proposing it, and sharing it?
- 3. Nourish the spiritual energies**
Where do I look for and where do I find the spiritual energies for vocational fidelity? How do I nourish my spirituality, the charisma, holiness?
- 4. The way for an authentic renewal...**
The continuous return to our codes of holiness is the right way for our renewal in fidelity. . .
Do we wish to renew ourselves or do we prefer settling back in laziness and indifference? Renew ourselves how and in what way?
- 5. A life-giving journey in the Church and in the world. . .**
Is ours a life-giving journey, or is it sluggish, tiresome and discouraging?
Where do I find norms and indications for this journey?
From whom and from what do I seek and accept help?

To live in fidelity and joy

Jesus Christ,

*continue to remain in our midst as a true and good teacher,
to enlighten us and instruct us
about what we must do.*

*We want to return continually to your feet;
we want to pray most fervently with all the sisters of the Company,*

Saint Angela,

*I want to observe **most diligently** the good directives that you have left in your writings
and that I find today, pointed out for me in the Constitutions.*

***I do not want to doubt** the future of the Company,
I want to continue to care for it, I want to rejoice and be of good will.*

***I want to persevere** faithfully and joyfully,
I want to renew my fervor.*

***Saint Angela,** continue to embrace us
and to give us the kiss of peace.*

***May God bless us,** in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Amen