

IN THE SAME CHARISM...

with responsibility



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

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Istituto Secolare di Sant'Angela Merici
Federazione



Convegno Internazionale

*Chiamate per fede
con una vocazione santa*



Mascalucia
5-10 luglio 2019

ACTS

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TO THE READERS

*Called by Faith to a Holy Life...
... chosen to be true and chaste
spouses of the Son of God*



Again this year we have celebrated the international conference of the Federation, organized amazingly well, and in every detail by our Sicilian sisters.

The title of the conference was a prelude to deep content and a message that must be translated into a vocational response of faith and holiness.

This is the hope that we find in the decree establishing our Constitutions: to *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.*

Now, at the conclusion of the conference, and with the proceedings of the official presentations made at the conference in hand, it would be nice to hear how it resonated in each participant in order to grasp what we have experienced in the days in Sicily, how much we have experienced, how much we have grown in the awareness of our vocation and how we want to respond to *such a singular gift...*

We commit ourselves, participants in the conference in person or in spirit, to relive this gift, to share it, to experience synodality in our Groups and in our Companies, knowing well that it is a matter of knowing and recognizing being *chosen...what such a thing means, and what a new and wondrous dignity this is.*

May Saint Angela, a faithful friend, accompany us to rediscover this vocation for which *we give infinite thanks....*

Called by faith...

For St. Angela, call to is directly *a choice, a grace, a separation, a unity, a service...*

"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..." (Constitutions. 3.1).

A holy vocation of grace and freedom...

The vocation comes from God and is a call to holiness, it is a gift of grace: *God has granted you this grace...*

The vocation is a **grace** that can be accepted or refused. St. Angela asks us to *keep ourselves as we have been called by God, seeking and wanting and willing all the means and the ways necessary to persevere and progress until the end.*

The vocation is for free people and **requires freedom**: *enter happily and of her own will*, says Saint Angela, and she adds in the Third Legacy: *God has given free will to each one and does not want to force anyone, but only show, invite, counsel....* And in her prayer: *I beg you: receive my free will, every act of my will....*

A holy vocation is a nuptial grace...

In our Constitutions we find the echo of Saint Angela who invites us to a vocation of espousal, in the way she herself responded to God's call: *The Foundress, Saint Angela Merici, docile to the Spirit, welcomed the mystery of Christ ... in the common and ordinary conditions of human existence, united in a spousal stance to the Son of God, her "Lover"* (Constitutions 2.1)

A holy vocation of women in the Church and in society...

Ours is a secular institute of women. It is up to us to accept the call to holiness as women and to live it as women in the Church and in the world: *God willing in his eternal wisdom to call forth from the vanity of the world many women, especially virgins, that is, this our Company* (Testament, Prologue 5).

I am thinking of all of Saint Angela's emphases and the proposals for women, pointed out in her writings: *mothers, daughters, sisiters, wives...*

I am thinking of all those human virtues suggested by the Foundress to be women who are *happy, joyful, content, brave, free, humble, affectionate, pleasant, affable, gentle, sweet, aware, attentive, concerned, thoughtful, prudent, vigilant, wise, patient, firm, stable ...*

A holy vocation of sisterhood and of mission in synodality...

During the conference, we were presented with the need for sisterhood that both precedes and accompanies the mission, in the style of synodality.

I find these points in our codes of holiness: the writings of Saint Angela and the Constitutions of the Company.

Sisterhood: We are together *as dear sisters*, and we walk together, in company, *along the path that is good and pleasing to God*.

"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" (Constitutions 4.4).

Mission: I find our mission indicated in the Constitutions, with regard to the charism, 3.4: *"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."* And further: *"We will share in the missionary dynamism of the Church, wholly bent on evangelization"* (Constitutions 4.3).

The synodal method: This is the method already put forward by Saint Angela in the Seventh and Eighth Legacies:

You must take care to have your daughters come together ... 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...

Make sure that you all meet with the leaders ... and thus confer together, and make a careful examination of the government. ... And provide for everything as the Holy Spirit inspires you. ...



And it is the method intended by our Institute as the experience of being a Company: *"United together" in the Company, we share the grace of the presence of the Lord among us; we experience sisterhood and find support and assistance for living our vocation and mission* (Constitutions 23.1).

So enjoy the reading, meditation, and formation...

A holy vocation!

Caterina Dalmasso

Greeting and Welcome to the Conference

Saturday, July 6, 2019

Valeria Broll, President of the Federation

Dear sisters, Italian and non-Italian (USA/Canada, Malta, England, Slovakia, France...), Assistants and vice-Assistants, candidates, seekers, those on a path of vocational discernment, in initial formation (and others...): hello and welcome to Mascalucia for the international meeting of the Federation.



Sincere and well-deserved thanks to all the sisters of Sicily and above all to Enza and Aurora, who have worked for months to prepare a welcome and hospitality; we already feel its warmth and appreciate its special zest.



May **St. Angela's blessing** descend abundantly upon each one of us, on each one of you. May the blessing of her two daughters, our venerable sisters **Lucia Mangano and Marianna Amico Roxas** descend abundantly on you. Our sisters of this land made it great and better and more beautiful through their holiness, thanks to their fidelity to love for God and for their neighbor. In their life for the

Lord, they encountered the Merician charism in other women who incarnated it in their lives. Each in turn identified in this vocation (secular consecration in the Company) the path to holiness. They lived in society, in the Church, and in the Company as women consecrated to God as spouses, as mothers, as sisters, always attentive and listening to the voice of the Spirit and in total service to their brothers and sisters.



Let us feel their presence here, invoke them and pray to them during these days of our meeting, so that the seeds that are being scattered through the speakers' words, through our experiences of sisterhood, sharing and studying our faith and our vocation may bear fruit in renewal, in conversion, and in spiritual, human, cultural, and missionary growth, in us and in all the Companies of the world.

Watched over and accompanied by them, let us experience these days with a serene and free spirit, open to mutual listening, willing to be shaped and reshaped, to be molded by the "potter": the Holy Spirit.

"Called by faith to a holy life" (2Tm 1:9)

This is the Word which has called us together this year. What is its source? Where does it take us?

It is born from **listening** to the voice of the Church. It is born from the desire to walk in unity and in harmony with the Church. It is born from **watching** attentively the face of the Church, the faces of her children: youth and the young generation, as Christ's face present among us. It is born in **obedience and through love of the Church** and of Pope Francis, who is not afraid to face and encounter reality, topics, and humanity, such as that of the young world, pregnant with hope but also with anguish; this young humanity, full of dreams but also of fears, desiring relationships but amid the snares of solitude and isolation.

—With great affection, I address this Apostolic Exhortation to all Christian young people. At the same time ... I am also addressing this message to the entire People of God, pastors and faithful alike, since all of us are challenged and urged to reflect both on the young and for the young. Consequently, I will speak to young people directly in some places, while in others I will propose some more general considerations for the Church's discernment" (Christ Is Alive! n.3).



The Pope was not afraid to announce a synod on youth. Why?

Because he believes and helps us all to believe that the Lord reveals himself through human beings... perhaps through the weakest, most vulnerable, smallest human beings: the young.

And we, who by our calling are inserted in the Church with the charism of secular consecration, wish to be helped by the Pope's boldness and by our Constitutions:



“Our consecration makes us sharers in the Church of the mission of Christ Jesus, priest, king and prophet” (Constitutions 22.1).

“In union with Christ and in communion with the Church, we will be inspired by our commitment ... to serve the Kingdom and its growth in history” (Constitutions 22.2).

“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 ... for evangelization and the service of charity” (Constitutions 22.4).

So it is our responsibility, for love of the Church, to know and to accept what the Lord **announces** to youth and to the whole people of God, through the Pope and his pastors. It is our responsibility to listen again and to let ourselves be fascinated by this wonderful good news about the Father's faithful, liberating, patient, merciful love.

Where does this Word take us: **“Called by faith to a holy life”?**

It takes us to **confront** ourselves with the gift of our vocation, to **grow** in awareness that each gift is for mission, to devote more **attention** to the gift received, rather than to our infidelities and laziness, to give **birth** to new questions, to **walk** in faith and in hope rather than on the beaten paths (secure but perhaps less evangelical for this very reason), to **go forth**, to **dare**, strengthened only by the Word of God that continually repeats to us: **“do not be afraid”** ... **“I am with you”** ... **“go”** ... **“follow me”**....

In this first year of the six-year term

The ordinary Assembly of last year, 2018, expressed to the Council of the Federation some requests regarding **formation**: *“to study secular consecration according to the charism of St. Angela and to grow in awareness of our own identity. Formation for secularity and for Merician spirituality.”*

In his address to the Assembly, Mons. Tessarollo, Assistant to the Council of the Federation, said to those present: *“Continually review how the Company is living the Gospel. Make choices about formation and about life in the Company that are a real support for Gospel living. Boost more and more whatever will express and manifest the beauty of your charism. Assume a serious and solid lifestyle consistent with the Gospel. It is necessary to put forward fearlessly the ideals that help people face the challenges of our time.”*

We unite ourselves to this mandate from the Assembly, expressed by the Constitutions as the Federation’s task *“to foster growth in sisterly communion among the Companies through meetings and mutual help; enhance the exchange of experiences; promote conventions for study ... of topics of general interest”* (Constitutions 30.2).

In this first year, the Council of the Federation has tried to keep these words in mind and, in continuity with the service rendered by the previous Council, took up these petitions.

One of these requests was that we walk with the Church, in the Church, and for the Church.

The final document of the synod of bishops on the theme *–Youth, faith, and vocational discernment*” has motivated us to identify which themes/subjects are useful and necessary to **revisit our vocation, our call, our mission, our sisterhood, our being women and being women consecrated in the Church....**

From here arose the topic of this meeting that brings us together today, united to let ourselves be evangelized one more time, to let ourselves be



penetrated by the Word that is Life, to let ourselves be blown by that gentle wind that is the Holy Spirit, to experience sisterhood and thus to make concrete the word of St. Angela that we find in her Eighth Legacy: *“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 (Eighth Legacy 1-6).

We all wish for one another that our listening and study in these days, **may reinvigorate our faith and our hope**. May **our love for Jesus Christ** be renewed and reinforced among us, growing in this sisterhood. May **“united together”** become our gift and grace, our joy and strength, our good news to experience not only in this short time of our meeting, but may it be carried with us, everywhere and always, so that it maybe come bread for sharing with all the other sisters of our Companies and Groups. We wish for one another that the motivations that will come to us here may be transformed into **formative journeys** in the communities we belong to, our Companies.

We want the experiences of these days to be like that Gospel episode that tells of those **5 loaves of bread and those 2 fish** that the Lord Jesus asked the apostles for so that he might complete the miracle of multiplication. In fact, the miracle happens if each one of us takes upon herself some of the hunger and the need of others. When this happens, God himself is at work. Let us be here, with the little that we are and the little that we have, to receive and to be satisfied by the bread of the Word and of sisterhood but then to share them. Nothing should be withheld, but rather given. The vocation is for mission, and so our participation will be alive and active so that we ourselves may become bread to be broken, to be ourselves manifestation of God to today’s men and women.

Let us help one another as St. Paul directs in his second letter to Timothy: *“I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have.... For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control. So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God. He saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us”* (2 Tm 1:6-9).

We are here to stir into flame the gift of God that is in us (our vocation). We are here to receive the spirit of God that is strength and

charity. We are here to reinforce ourselves in witness to the Lord. We are here to learn to work and suffer for the Gospel. We are here because the Lord has called us to a holy life, not as a foundation for our works but according to his project and his grace.

**What does St. Angela have to tell us, in this meeting,
about the theme: vocation/mission?**

She tells us *“First be willing to recognize what such a thing means and what a new and wondrous dignity this is”* (Prologue to the Rule 8).

With these words of hers she tells us to grow in awareness that we are a gift, that we have been thought of, chosen, loved, clothed in dignity and grace through God’s pure, unmerited gift. Only if we cultivate this awareness do our hearts expand and open in gratitude, open up to the gift, and our life becomes a gift for God. A gift for others.

As Pope Francis suggests, let’s not waste time in self-seeking often, or perhaps always: *who am I? Who are we? but rather seeking who am I for, who are we for, because every call is for a mission. We are a mission on this earth.* Are we aware that we are a mission for others? What is our mission? What is the mission in the Company and of our Company today?



In her prayer St. Angela expresses her awareness and passion for mission and bears witness to it: *“willingly would I shed my own blood (if I could), in order to open up the blindness of their minds”* (Rule, Ch. 5:34).

- ✚ Are we aware that we are a mission for others?
- ✚ What is our mission?
- ✚ What is the mission within the Company, and of the Company today?

What does St. Angela have to say to us about sisterhood?

“God has granted you the grace of uniting you together to serve his divine Majesty.”

The foundation of being united together is in the Lord, in recognizing that He is the magnetic pole and only if we help each other remain steady in His Love do we bring about the signs of sisterhood, of communion. Only if we are impregnated by God’s love is it possible to give life to all the expressions of reciprocal charity: respect, esteem, comfort....

“Freely you have received, freely give.” The gratuity of love is measured in sisterhood. St. Angela points us to a sisterhood consisting of *amiability, gentleness, agreeableness...* characteristics of the Heart of Jesus, whose heart has conquered our hearts. Sisterhood, then, is an expression of gratuitous and merciful love.

- + Do we have an attitude of sisterhood?
- + What do we share in our sisterhood?
- + How do we express sisterhood?
- + Do I demand it, insist on it, or do I circulate it by giving and giving of myself freely because I am full of the experience of love with the Lord God?

St. Angela recalls for us the pillars that support sisterhood: prayer, gratitude, service, welcome. The Constitutions tell us: *“In sharing among the sisters we will find help for living according to the Spirit in our personal, social, and ecclesial life...”*

- + What do I/we communicate for each other by *rejoicing together and consoling each other?*
- + by remaining steady in His Love?
- + Does the Company help us to live according to the Spirit?
- + Do I help my sisters to live according to the Spirit?

Pope Francis says: *“If we journey together, young and old, we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future. To revisit the past in order to learn from history and heal old wounds that at times still trouble us. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom. Together, we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands”* (Christ Is Alive! n.199).

What does St. Angela have to say to us about freedom?

Live as true spouses of the Most High... Be watchful and prudent because the value of our vocation is inestimable and it is natural that it involves effort and danger because we live in the midst of traps and dangers and all types of evil try to oppose this project of God (cf. Prologue to the Rule).

She seems to be listening to the words of St. Paul to the Galatians: *"I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing."* (Gal 2:19-21). *"For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.... For you were called for freedom. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love"* (Gal 5:1, 13).

Liberty comes from on high. Liberty has a name, and it is Jesus Christ. God the Father first of all loved and saved us. Liberty is sought, wished for, and pursued, through asking pardon of God and our sisters. *"Receive my every thought, word and deed, finally, everything of mine, interior as well as exterior, all of which I offer before the feet of your divine Majesty. And I pray that you deign to receive them, although they be unworthy. Amen"* (Rule, Ch. 5:40-44).

This experience of gift and of pardon (in Italian: *dono* and *perdono*) is the landscape where we live in the freedom of God's children. Thus, liberty to love, not when I want to and as much as I want to, but to love always also what is not appealing. Let us situate liberty within all the dimensions of life: God, the world, our brothers and sisters. If accepted, this liberty become responsibility.

In her writings St. Angela expresses respect for the liberty of each creature. She says: *"For how do you know, you ... what God wants to make of this creature? God, who ... can turn stones into children of heaven"* (Eighth Counsel 3-6) and she recalls St. Augustine's words: *"Love and do what you will."*

St. Angela is a liberated and liberating woman, because she knows well that it is God who brings to fullness all our good. And the Constitutions (3.2) tell us: *"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... ”

✚ Are we walking this road of liberty?

✚ Is the oneness of our faith, our liberty, and the centrality of Jesus Christ the foundation of our daily experience?

What does St. Angela have to say to us about women?

Her life speaks of a sensitive woman, one of feelings that had been refined because she was always listening to the Spirit and always a lover of Jesus Christ. Always listening to the world and to the Church. A simple woman, always thankful and happy because in God she had found the pearl of great price, the treasure of her life, and in the school of the Holy Spirit she had learned to be both creative and holy. Because of this, she put her hand to God’s work and founded the Company. A completely female Company, an institute of virgins consecrated in the world to collaborate for the salvation of the world.

An institute *—striving for the perfection of charity; honoring Jesus Christ; serving God and His Reign; and collaborating in the salvation of the world*” (Constitutions 1.5).

She brought about in her life the words of St. Paul: *“I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me”* (Gal 2:20).

A woman with a great heart, where the Spirit’s wisdom dwelt, and therefore a courageous woman, a creative woman, a woman who was free and not blocked by fear or by calculations about the present and/or the future, but happy and full of faith, wisdom, and charity. Just how much we can see in the Last Legacy:

“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. And always let your principal recourse be to gather at the feet of Jesus Christ, and there, all of you, with all your daughters, to offer most fervent prayers. For in this way, without doubt, Jesus Christ will be in your midst, and as a true and good master, he will enlighten and teach you what you have to do. 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” (Last Legacy 2-12).

A woman who seeks something new, without fear. A woman of great desires and a strong will. A woman able to understand that, with God in one’s heart, new things can succeed and be completed. St. Angela’s ~~yes~~” allowed her to involve herself in and take a chance on a plan greater than herself.

This poses a question to our vocation and calls for our response..... Let us allow ourselves to be challenged by her holiness and creativity, or otherwise we may lose our ~~youthfulness~~” and transform ourselves into an antiquarian museum, sealing ourselves off though we are in the middle of a family and a community that are alive and open to the life and liberty that they seek from those near them.

- ✚ Are we, her daughters, able to understand which road to travel today, and are we able to travel it?
- ✚ Are we silent, timid women, or humbly able to listen to God’s voice and the voices of people of our time?
- ✚ Do we want to be like St. Angela, in holiness and creativity: women with enduring patience and an ever-lively imagination?
- ✚ Women with strong faith and hope, who never lose heart, who are always ready to get involved, always ready to take a chance to start over?

By our vocation we are women with a precise task: to guard the charism and to have the courage to interpret it: *“keep to the ancient way but live a new life.”*

Therefore, we are women not preoccupied with **self-preservation** but always **going forth** because we are able to generate life, to search for truth, to discern and orient each and all toward goodness and beauty.

In these days, may these words accompany and console us: *“The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior, who will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love, who will sing joyfully because of you”* (Zep 3:17).



Vocation: Grace and Freedom

July 6, 2019

Most Rev. Pietro Fragnelli, Bishop of Trapani



A particular
greeting to
His
Excellency
Bishop
Adriano
Tessarollo of
Chioggia,
ecclesiastical
assistant of

the Council of the Federation, and to the two vice-assistants, Mons. Gaetano Zito and Father Raymond Nkindji Samuangala.

May the Lord bless your valuable role of accompanying this glorious Company that "unites in the same charism" so many women in Italy and around the world.

Heartfelt thanks to Mons. Zito, always my dear friend and brother Don Gaetano, whom I have known since our years of study in Rome, for having thought of me in this situation that is so significant for the Federation of the Secular Institute of St. Angela Merici, having chosen Sicily for this international convention titled "Called by Faith to a Holy Life" from July 5 to 10, 2019. I thank the president, Valeria Broll, who courteously called and assisted me in the time of preparation.

With great joy and with trepidation I prepare to communicate to you what I have thought and pondered in view of the two meetings I have been asked to attend. I'm sure that the following talks will help flesh out the dimensions of the vocation that this convention intends to offer to the sisters who have come together. I am referring to the presentations on "Vocation: Woman in Today's Church and Society" by Professor Marinella Sciuto and to "Vocation: Mission and Brotherhood/Sisterhood" by Professor Father Massimo Naro.



I conclude this introduction with a sense of deep gratitude to St. Angela Merici, whom I have heard spoken of many times in meetings of secular institutes in Rome and especially in friendly gatherings with my

colleague at the Secretariat of State, Mons. Silvio Gilli, who died on March 28 at the age of 98, and who was the assistant of the Daughters of St. Angela in Trent from 1974 to 1992. To borrow Don Gaetano's words at the end of his talk for the centenary: "The Church of Sicily is as heavily indebted to Angela Merici in terms of spirituality and holiness as it is for pastoral service and social commitment. The Ursulines bring forward into our time and on our island all that she pointed out as style and example of Christian living, as the formula of their consecration expresses: ~~May~~ Christ the Lord help me to be salt, light, and yeast among my brothers and sisters and along the roads of the world"¹.

FIRST PART

I. Bending the present?

- ✚ How have these "roads of the world" changed, these roads on which the Ursuline sister is called to live her consecration?
- ✚ What is the context in which the trio "vocation, grace, and liberty" resounds today?
- ✚ Come parlare di vocazione in un tempo in cui nodi strutturali e interrogativi culturali stanno rivoluzionando linguaggi e contenuti?

¹ Quoted in G. Zito, *I 100 anni della Compagnia di Sant'Orsola in Sicilia*, www.angelamerici.it/redazione_news_doku/1/78. See also G. Zito, *Radici di un carisma. Le suore orsoline della sacra famiglia (1908-2008)*, LEV, Vatican City 2013.

✚ How does one speak about vocation in a time in which the structural crises and cultural questions are revolutionizing languages and their contents? –The strains of the future, bending the present” are increasing (P. Triani).



✚ How is this relevant to our reflection?

Sociological analysis makes us aware above all of the great structural crises: the needs and rights of each generation are always more difficult to respect; for the first time, the older generations are more numerous, they are squashing the younger generations; the generations that are numerically stronger are harming the weaker; the use of the planet's resources is more and more senseless, insofar as they are concentrated on immediate advantages and not on long-term sustainability. From this flows a list of cultural crises connected to this situation:

✚ Why do we not exert ourselves to look beyond our own boundaries?

✚ Beyond the interests of our family and our immediate community?

✚ Beyond our own generation?

✚ Why do we tend to use the resources of Creation as though they were our property and not common goods to be passed on from generation to generation?

✚ Why isn't investment in material goods always balanced by care for interwoven relationships?

✚ Why do people exert themselves to educate, that is, take the responsibility of giving the new generations good reasons‘ for living?’².

A further structural crisis is communication. "This unedited condition, in which we do not know how to distinguish the value of the information which drowns us every day, like a rising river, maybe even incapacitates the citizenry in this Digital Age, where the media are the

2 P. Triani, *Il „senso del noi”: Le promesse tra le generazioni*, in *“dialoghi”*, Anno XIX – 73 (The future between promises and illusions), p. 36.

major cultural expression. The media, especially digital media, are the agents of socialization in this contemporary world that has already arrived, according to several analyses, replacing traditional agents such as family, church, and school.” A glance at the world – moving so fast that it is out of breath – makes us aware that “As a Church, may we never fail to weep before these tragedies of our young. May we never become inured to them, for anyone incapable of tears cannot be a mother. We want to weep so that society itself can be more of a mother, so that in place of killing it can learn to give birth, to become a promise of life. We weep when we think of all those young people who have already lost their lives due to poverty and violence, and we ask society to learn to be a caring mother” (*Christus Vivit* 75).

✚ have sometimes seen young and beautiful trees,” says the Pope, “their branches reaching to the sky, pushing ever higher, and they seemed a song of hope. Later, following a storm, I would find them fallen and lifeless. They lacked deep roots. They spread their branches without being firmly planted, and so they fell as soon as nature unleashed her power. That is why it pains me to see young people sometimes being encouraged to build a future without roots, as if the world were just starting now” (*Christus vivit* 179). Your convention is an invitation to seek the shared roots, to be able to invest ~~across~~ the board in cultural formation and in tools for active participation” by our young people in constructing the future³. We too can and must offer our roots as a gift those who were 18 years old in 2000 (the so-called millennials) and to those who have turned 18 by 2018 (the so-called Generation Z): let us hand on to them the embrace of our religious and social history, with its inevitable miseries and its great resources. Our confident look at the past – of the Federation and of the Church's history – will make a significant contribution to the present generation: help in finding its direction in life, in rediscovering the traces of its own history, in taking care of itself, in discovering its sources, in declining

3 Cf. A. Rosina, Introduzione. Un ritratto dell'adulto italiano da giovane, in Istituto G. Toniolo, *La Condizione giovanile in Italia. Rapporto Giovani 2019*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2019, p. 18.

to enter into competition, in serving justice, and in becoming aware of God⁴.

II. Vocation: Possession or Journey?

To everyone comes the moment of awareness or, at least, of asking oneself about God; then one becomes aware of our condition as human beings invited ~~to~~ dialogue with the Creator and, as a result, to choose to live according to a plan of happiness and salvation"⁵. From that is born a relationship that "determines and defines" our very being, our position of intimacy with God, from which emerges the idea that ~~all~~ human existence is like a _vocational task." According to the biblical way of thinking," writes De Virgilio, "the human person does 'not have the vocation,' but 'must ripen the vocation' as a gradual discovery to be completed in relationship to the plan of God, the origin and source of every vocation." All existence is configured as a "journey of vocation," a sequence of "calls," both "appeals that come from the context of one's life, and points of intervention through which God reveals himself to human beings and invites them to "welcome, confirm, persevere, and bear witness to" the truth of their dialogue with him.

Opening the Bible means listening attentively to the "vocational Word," to the one calling, who purifies our words and comes to meet us as a "fountain of truth"⁶ and liberty.



4 Cf. R. Mancini, *Orientarsi nella vita* (Tracce giovani, 7), Qiqajon, Magnago (BI) 2015.

5 G. De Virgilio, *Vocazione/Chiamata*, in *Dizionario Biblico della Vocazione*, Editrice Rogate, Roma 2007, p. 987. My biblical overview on vocation draws on this.

6 A. Cencini, *Luce sul mio cammino. Parola di Dio e iter vocazionale*, Paulines, Milan 2002, p. 8s.

1. The Message of the Old Testament

In the Pentateuch, "the act of the call presupposes a previous pattern in the life-story and a freedom of response on the part of the ones who are asked. Therefore the call from the Almighty that the various biblical persons hear always implies a previous 'choice' for a mission"⁷. The choice-mission of the 'just and upright' Noah (Gen 6:8,13-22) launches the new beginning of the human story in the cosmic covenant with the Creator (Gen 6:9-11); the vocational interaction in Abram (Gen 12:1-4; 15:1-2; 22:1-19; Dt 26:5) is marked by God's initiative and by Abram's response in faith, free and responsible (cf. Rm 4:1-25); we understand the "casting of lots" in the didactic account of Joseph (Gen 37-50) and in the events of Esther (Est 4:26). In Moses' personal exodus we glimpse the people's exodus (Ex 3-6). "The entire journey of the Exodus through the desert and the entry into the Promised Land can be understood as a 'vocational journey,' which culminates in the choral response of the tribes in Sechem before the fulfillment of the divine promise: 'We will serve the Lord our God and will obey his word' (Joshua 24:24)"⁸.

In the historical books we recall Gideon's vocation and Sampson's tragic events (Gideon 16:21-31). In the person of Samuel (1Sam. 3:1-18) "one encounters patriarchal themes and prophetic roles that render this figure a point of reference for the history of Israel and the institution of monarchy ... the collected accounts of investiture can be understood through a vocational lens, in that it is God who chooses and indicates who should be consecrated king of Israel (cf. 1Sam 9:15-25; 1Sam 16:1-13 of the consecration of David).

In the prophetic writings "the vocational experience is not the result of human calculations, nor of dynastic succession, nor of power-struggles, but rather is manifested as God's free and unforeseeable choice of his consecrated persons, without any distinction of persons or of social class"⁹. We verify this in the cycles of Elias and Eliseus (1Kings 17-2Kings 11), besides the vocations of Amos (7:14-15), Isaiah (6:1-13), Micah (4:1-5), and Hosea (1-3). It has been said

7 De Virgilio, p. 988.

8 De Virgilio, p. 989.

9 De Virgilio, p. 990.

quite appropriately, "A personal encounter takes place between the prophet and the Lord, in which there is a revelation of the mystery of a God who is intimately involved in human history, who suffers through his concern for human freedom, dignity, and happiness, and who also rejoices in all that makes his creature more true, more noble. And in such a relationship – deep involvement – is inscribed the choice and the call of the People of Israel to be a sign for the world of this divine interest, this passion of the Lord for humanity"¹⁰. Among the prophets of the Exile, it is important to pause over the vocational events of Jeremiah, analyzed in three phases (Jer 1:4-9): faith as an offering, typical of the young (4:19-22; 7:16), and finally an adult faith. In this phase –the prophet passes from resistance to consolation‘ when he understands that it is God who writes‘ the history of the salvation and liberation of his people” (cf. Jer 30-34). Jeremiah becomes the prophet of God’s mercy (Jer 31:3).

Second Isaiah (Is 40-55) also belongs to the epoch of Exile, and largely develops the theme of mercy in the songs of the "servant of God" (Is 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53,12). The Christological re-reading of these songs "from the perspective of Christ's passion highlights the meaning of the Christian vocation and its salvific relevance"¹¹. Ezekiel’s exilic story presents the prophet to us as "the sentinel of the house of Israel" (Ez 3:16-21). He is the son of man "in all his frailty, called to live with his people and protect the people from the recurrent danger of idolatry and from the danger of false prophets"¹².

There are also numerous vocational stories. Jonah, "after preaching conversion to the Ninevites, discovers that he is 'called to be converted' and to acquire a new vision of God and of his redemptive work (Gen 4:10-11)". He opens up to the vision of a universal and merciful God. Zechariah's writing highlights how God calls the chosen ones subjected to trials and persecution: "he who is 'lord of history' does not abandon his people, but 'changes the fate' of the poor and those who

10 P. Rota Scalabrini, *Eccomi, manda me! La vocazione di Isaia (Is 6,1-13)*, Rogate, Rome 2010, p. 7.

11 De Virgilio, p. 992.

12 De Virgilio, p. 992.

persevere in faith. It is precisely the reason for perseverance and fortitude in persecution that characterizes Jewish identity in the face of the challenge of imperial paganism"¹³.

In the Wisdom writings there are not so much tales of vocation, but rather the search for the meaning of human life and wisdom in leading one's own life to achieve happiness. The vocational dimension emerges first of all in the formation of the wise person, who lives the fear of God (Pr 1:7; Sir 1:9-21), who faces trial (Sir 2:1), who forges freedom in the observance of the commandments (Sir 15:11-21). Secondly, Wisdom books such as Job and Qoheleth, in a vocational key, invite us to address the theme of the presence of pain and evil. Job questions the traditional wisdom of "retribution" and appeals to the absolute and free justice of God which goes beyond the rational schemes of the three friends (Jb 4:17ff): "Job solves the devastating experience of pain through the exalting encounter of faith" (cf. 42:6). Qoheleth revolves around "the meaning and the nonsense of human existence" (B. Maggioni) and asks, "Why engage in a journey whose goal is not seen? The author, pushing the limits of Jewish orthodoxy, finds a rationale in the conviction that life comes from the hands of God (2:25), on whose fidelity we hope. The Book of Wisdom opens the reflection on vocation to the eschatological perspective, to re-reading the history of Israel (Wis 10-19) and to the bliss of the just "loved and made happy by God" (Wis 3:1-9). Special attention should be given to the vocational dimension which is widely present in Israel's poetry and prayer. The Song of Songs celebrates the beauty of spousal love connected with the search for vocations: "God's call is always a vocation of love, the search for meaning and belonging, the memory and desire of others, the eternal covenant (cf. Song of Songs 6:3). One experiences a call "in the attraction, in the search and in the fidelity shared between the two spouses. In this dialectical tension one can grasp the symbolic and theological richness of a vocational search"¹⁴.

The Psalter is "a literary and theological macrocosm" (G. Ravasi), through a profound vocational conversation. It is revealed in the dialogue between the person and God, who knows the depth of the

13 De Virgilio, p. 993.

14 De Virgilio, p. 996.

human heart (Ps 138:1,14) and can give wisdom to the heart (Ps 7:10; 50:8). The prayer for the "straight way" is profoundly vocational: "Show me, Lord, your way" (Ps 85:11). Human beings, made of dust, pray with their fallen humanity: "The prayer of Israel 'comes from the dust' of human history (Fr. Beauchamp) and becomes a vocational plea addressed to God, the origin of every vocation"¹⁵.

2. The Message of the New Testament

a) In the Gospels

It is advisable to check the use of the verb call (*kalein*). In 148 occurrences it has a relevant theological use: God and Jesus are the ones calling, especially in the Gospels. It is enough to scroll through the 'tales of vocation': Jesus sees and calls the first disciples (Mk 1:2), he invites them to free themselves from whatever keeps them from responding to the call (Lk 9:57-62; Mt 8:19-22); he calls everyone to conversion: "I did not come to call the just, but sinners" (Mk 2:27); he calls the twelve and makes them apostles (Mk 3:13-19). From this call comes the new style of common life and preaching, since they must not be called great by the people (Lk 22:25-27); he calls them to enter the Kingdom (Mt 5:19; Lk 5:32). The call is also relevant in the parables: the banquet that calls the poor and excludes those who have refused the call (Lk 14:16-2); the call to wear the wedding garment with the right moral disposition (Mt 22:11-13); the master of the vineyard who calls laborers to work (Mt 21:1-16); the ten virgins with the eschatological cry that calls them to the wedding feast (Mt 25:6); the talents and the call to responsibility for goods (Mt 25:14); the merciful father and the son with a wounded identity who does not feel worthy of being called a son (Lk 15:19-21). "It is well understood that the idea of the call, evoked by the theological use of the verb *kalein*, links the action of the caller to the identity of the person called in a decisive relationship"¹⁶. The anthropological-vocational meaning is found in various ways: in being called by name (Martha in Lk 10:41; Lazarus in Jn 11:43; Zacchaeus in Lk 19:5); in giving a name to the unborn child (Lk 1:13-21...), in changing the name for a disciple (Jn 1:42), in invoking the name of the

15 De Virgilio, p. 997.

16 De Virgilio, p. 998.

Father (Mt 6:9) in a way that is not in vain (Lk 6:46), in being called children of God (Mt 5:9).

b) In the Acts of the Apostles and other writings

In the Acts of the Apostles the relational-historical sense of the verb *kalein* is evident. Thus in Paul's call: Acts 9:1-21; 22:5-16; 26:9-18. Its theological meaning emerges in the Letter to the Hebrews in which Jesus "calls [those who have been saved] brothers" (2:11): thus the "family" of the saved is born. Believers are spoken of as "the called" (9:15) by God (5:4) and are encouraged (called) to faithfulness (3:13), following the model of Abram (11:8). In the Letters of Peter, on the other hand, the verb *kalein* has a persuasive meaning: the disciples are called to holiness (1Pt 1:15; 5:10). In the other letters, the Christological-ecclesiological depth of the verb *call* can be seen.

c) In Paul's letters

For Paul the term *klesis* (call) is technical: it indicates the new condition of believers, renewed in the light of the Christian mystery. *Kalein* always indicates the "sovereign call of God": it is the "process by which God calls out of their bonds to this world those whom he had previously chosen and predestined, to justify and sanctify them (Rom 8:29ff) and take them into his service"¹⁷. In particular, one can grasp the hopefulness about salvation seen in Rom 8:28-30, where Paul proposes the interpretation of the past (Rom 8:1-17) and future (Rom 8:18-30) history of humanity and the cosmos in the light of the action of the Spirit: the interpretative key is the experience of the 'call' of God to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). For Paul, the origin of salvation and its entrance into history depend solely on the free initiative of God who calls" (cf. 1 Th 5:24).

In order to gain a closer idea of the Pauline theology of the call, we can examine three significant texts in which the term *klesis* is used. First of all, Rom 11:29, where it is said that "God's gifts and call are irrevocable." For Paul, the covenant of his people with God is not only about the past, but also about the present and the future. In 1 Cor 1:26 Paul addresses the Christian community of Corinth with these words:

17 De Virgilio, p. 1000.

"Consider your call, brothers and sisters: there are not many of you who are wise from a human point of view, nor many who are powerful, nor many who are noble ... God has chosen [3 times]." The apostle presents the 'qualitative difference' of the Christian vocation, which arises "from the theological development of the concept of 'election' no longer from the perspective of the Sinai covenant, but from the new Christological-salvation perspective accomplished in Christ, 'who has become for us wisdom, justice, sanctification and redemption'"¹⁸. Finally, in 1 Cor 7:20, Paul exhorts everyone to remain "in the condition in which he was when he was called". Here "the term *klesis* defines the theological status of the believer inserted in Christ, capable of reading all situations of life from a vocational point of view, as a gift and a task, an appeal and an answer, an expectation of future fulfillment and a responsible commitment to the present"¹⁹.

3. Overview

The quick panorama of vocation in the Bible has shown that it is "a comprehensive category of biblical theology." In fact "the experience of faith is marked by the continuing back-and-forth between call and response, which is evident throughout the biblical journey and especially in the Pauline letters." Overall, it can be said that vocation/call (*klesis*) has four main trajectories:

- *Christological*: every vocational model finds its deep root in the person and mission of Jesus Christ. He is the image to which every Christian is called to conform; he is the firstborn of every creature.
- *Ecclesiological*: the chosen community (*ekklesia*) is made up of persons 'called' to live unity and to realize their vocation in holiness, through accepting the Gospel and fidelity in daily life.
- *Anthropological*: God's call defines the reality of the free person, touched by the Word of salvation within history and involved in the journey of faith through a constant, free openness to the transcendent mystery.
- *Eschatological*: the call (*klesis*) includes the space-time limitations of human beings; therefore Paul links it to hope (*elpis*). To say *klesis*

18 De Virgilio, p. 1003.

19 De Virgilio, p. 1004.

is to place the vocational dialectic in the present and to foretell its future dimension. This is the tension between the already and the not-yet of redemption.²⁰



SECOND PART

III. Grace and Freedom

The second part of this talk presents a brief series of reflections on some qualities of the relationship between God, who calls, and the people – the human beings – who respond. In particular, we ask ourselves about the meaning of freedom for the person who is called, about the aids to our response, about studying God's face in the vocational dialogue and, finally, about the model of grace that illuminates the relationship.

1) Freedom to sin?

All vocational histories are histories of freedom, and freedom allows for sin. It is worth reading what Luigino Bruni writes in introducing the Books of Kings: "We will not enter into the great beauty and wisdom of the Books of Kings if we are afraid of the sins of men and women, if we read them to find only pure words, words purified of human filth. The Books of the Kings (and the whole Bible, Old and New Testament) open themselves only to readers who are not scandalized by the whole of humanity, their own humanity and that of others, because it is from their damnable depths that they will lead us to the summits of true blessings. Too many words of life never reach us because, frightened by their wrappings of pain and sin, we block them and do not let them enter our flesh to heal and redeem it. We will try to be touched by the flesh-words of these books, with courage and without

20 De Virgilio, pp. 1004-1005.

fearing their humanity. Then let us expect everything.”²¹ Relationship with God comes through our full humanity. Rejection is part of the world of those who have been called; if we put it aside we do not understand a single vocational dialogue.

2) *External helps?*

Realism about our fragile human freedom invites us to look at the call as an act of love that comes to meet humanity in order to save our history. Pedro Arrupe, expressed himself in this way at the beginning of his service to the Society of Jesus: "Today's people tend to free themselves, as much as they can, from the clutches of laws. They find that independence is sacred, sweeter than any other good. The echo of this music so dear to the masses has also penetrated through the half-closed doors of religious houses. ... Young people very frequently seek to escape from disciplinary rules, from every external norm. All this constitutes a hindrance to the free development of one's own personality. Heaven wants for all of us to have an inner spirit powerful enough to curb every unregulated instinct; to so tame our passions that they no longer require the external help of rule and discipline! In any case, let us remember that in the Sacred Heart we will find the secret of our full personality, united to our interior life. We too can have as our only rule Saint Augustine's famous words: "*Ama et fac quod vis*: love and do what you will! But only on the condition that we have entered so deeply into the Heart of Jesus that we love him "*usque ad contemptum nostri*": love him, that is, to the point of losing ourselves for his sake."²² The words of Father Arrupe re-echo today and confirm that in the vocational dialogue with Jesus one goes deep because of "external" help that educates one to seek an adult spiritual relationship, free and responsible, "in love." The Pope quotes Father Arrupe: "nothing can be more important than meeting God. That is to say, falling in love with Him in a definitive and absolute way. What you fall in love with captures your imagination and leaves its footprint on everything. That's

21 L. Bruni, in *Avvenire*, June 2, 2019, p. 3.

22 P. Arrupe, S.J., in *Message for the Feast of the Sacred Heart*, June 1919, pp. 22-23 (text from 1965).

what will get you out of bed in the morning, will decide what you do with your evenings, how to spend your weekends, what you read, what you know, what breaks your heart and what overwhelms you with joy and gratitude. In love! Stay in love! Everything will be different" (*Christus vivit* 132).

3) A God "free to give himself away"?

The concept of the Christian God creates problems for all the images of divinity and of the relationships between human beings and God in the ancient world, and also in the modern and contemporary world. This dense and lyrical text by the young theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar can help us in our reflection. He questions the freedom of God, who in Jesus manifested himself as the freedom of a love that "gives itself away." This is what he wrote in 1936: "Do you wish to be like God? Look at me. Walk my way. I could not be anything more, you say, because I was already God? Is this the God I have revealed to you? The self-sufficient God who needs nothing, the God of the wise men of this world? My love for you puts their philosophy to shame. Because being God was not enough for me. I believed that in my fullness I would miss your absence, and the only way I wanted to demonstrate my divinity to you was by making myself your servant. Do you want to go to the Father by going around me? I am the path, and no other path exists. I am the door, and whoever climbs in over the wall is a thief, and would steal eternal life. All this was the most divine thing in God (and I was sent to show it): God was so free to give himself away.

—Call love your yearning for fullness. But who knows the essence of love if not God, because God is love? Love is not that you love God, but that God loved you and gave his life for you, his brothers and sisters. This was his eternal bliss: to feel the pleasure of throwing himself away in his unprofitable love for you. This was his supernatural unity: in the mystery of bread and wine, he allowed himself to be ground into particles, like snow and like sand on the seashore, to nourish you with eternal life. This was his self-satisfaction: to begin to suffer hunger and thirst, and to suffer all kinds of poverty and shame and imprisonment and nakedness and illness in his own body. This, my brothers and sisters, was my victory, in the fact that I also won my divinity and could reveal the meaning of love as God's servant and in

the context of sin. In the fact that I was able to be God outside of God”²³.

4) *Nuptial Grace*

How, then, can we think of the relationship between God's grace and human freedom? Reading the Constitutions of the Company of Saint Ursula, we are struck by the spousal attitude of the foundress. We read that she lived the mystery of Christ "in the common and ordinary conditions of human existence, united with a spousal attitude to the Son of God, her 'Lover'"²⁴. This spousal relationship appropriately recounts what happens in the mysterious encounter between God, the creator and redeemer, and creatures. Theologians remind us that "the Christian history of the doctrine of grace bears the signs of every age, of every cultural transformation and of humanity coming to understand itself"²⁵.



Three constants emerge from this history:

- a) God offers salvation through a process that is both personal and communal: "God moves freely toward reconciliation with humanity, toward re-establishing the original union that has been wounded... the structural center is in the free incarnation of the Word and in the gift of the Holy Spirit."
- b) Theology is concerned with "safeguarding [awareness of] God's freedom, benevolence and mercy." God's love precedes human response: "This active love constitutes the space of possibility for every human response."
- c) At the same time, theology is concerned with "not minimizing humanity's freedom and role (→works)". A human being is not a passive

23 H. U. Von Balthasar, *Il cuore del mondo*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1994, p. 143 (reprinted 1988 - original 1936).

24 Company of St. Ursula, *Constitutions*, 2.1.

25 B. Petrà, voce *Grazia*, in "Teologia" (Dictionary of San Paolo), Cinisello Balsamo 2002, pp. 752-753. This study made a substantial contribution to my reflection.

object that God works on. Every diminishment of the human role reduces the sense of salvation and is unworthy of human beings and of God, who loves them to the point of giving his life for them.

—We must conclude that God wanted us not as a simple 'other', but as an 'other' that can be assimilated, traced back and united to himself in freedom and love."

Now, how can grace be thought of today?

The Flemish theologian Piet Fransen lists three classical models: inhabitation (which is linked to the theme of the temple and the *Shekinah*), divinization and filial adoption. To overcome the "static" quality of these models, he proposes another: the "God's living presence, loving and creating." For the theologian Basil Petrà this last model also seems inadequate. The category of nuptial grace seems more suitable to him. In fact, the use of the spousal model allows one to think of creation and redemption in terms of grace and continuity. Grace and continuity become moments in the unique history of nuptial grace, which involves each person's individual reality and at the same time the human family as a whole. The difference is the essential connection that exists between redemption and freedom.

The grace of creation, in fact, has a partial necessity: it is a free gift but it is also an inevitable reality, because it includes the conditions that give us existence.

The grace of redemption, on the other hand, does not have the same character of necessity: it is a reality that one can avoid; certainly, one cannot ensure that grace is not given, but one can avoid accepting it. In terms of the nuptial relationship: one cannot avoid being chosen, but one can avoid carrying out the espousal. Redemption, in fact, has the form of a marriage proposal; it is an offering that proposes a bond, a vital bond. But no matter how powerful and saving the love offered by the Bridegroom is, it has the radical powerlessness of every love proposal: it depends on the reply of the beloved and on the free gift of her *yes*, which might never be pronounced."

The international conference of the daughters of Saint Angela Merici illuminates the vocation of "brides of Christ" with a new light.

Vocation: Woman in the Church and in Society Today

July 7, 2019

Prof. Marinella Venera Sciuto



Introduction

Good morning, everyone. I'm glad to be with you. I would like to express at the beginning my gratitude for this invitation to take part in this important assembly of the Federation of the Secular Institute of Saint Angela Merici. Thanks to Msgr.

Gaetano Zito for the kind thought. I have already been able to meet and appreciate the solicitude of President Valeria Broll. I am pleased to be able to speak with Bishop Fragnelli, whom I thank for his kind greeting, and with Don Massimo Naro, whom I have been able to listen to several times in conferences organized by MEIC, the Ecclesial Movement of Cultural Commitment. In this three-year period 2017-2020, I serve as its national vice-president for women.

Allow me to briefly mention this ecclesial reality. In 1932, thanks to the passion for cultural formation of believers of Igino Righetti and Monsignor Giovanni Montini, who later became Pope Paul VI (canonized in October 2018), this movement was born in Cagliari.

MEIC itself was born in 1980, from the experience of the Movement of Graduates of Catholic action, and is characterized, according to its name, by keywords such as Movement, Ecclesial, Commitment, and Cultural.

Movement is composed of groups of men and women of all ages who work in local churches and are organized on a diocesan, regional and national level, and who recognize themselves as protagonists and recipients of educational and cultural commitment. On the international level, MEIC is an international member of Pax Romana *Mouvement Internationale des Intellectuels Catholiques*

(MIIC); it participates in world assemblies and encourages exchanges with other national movements.

MEIC is **Church**, that is, a significant portion of the people of God in Italy, cooperating with the Italian Church in its mission of proclamation, seeking ways of encounter between the Gospel and culture, spiritually forming lay people who work as Christians and citizens within the human community, within daily history, men and women of faith who seek the Truth and maturely and responsibly experience their talents and profession as a **vocation, as in the title of this conference**.

MEIC is **culture**, that is, it fosters the culture of the civic community with much knowledge and professional skill and an opportunity for interdisciplinary study of ethical, civil, social and political emergencies. If culture is the cultivation of humanity, the cultural developments where MEIC is committed are critical situations. They invite and offer direction and they propose that one question the trends and tensions of personal and collective consciousness. Consequently, MEIC's cultural commitment is open to **dialogue** with the different expressions of culture and society and, in general, "with those who, while coming from different religious and cultural positions, wish to contribute to the promotion of the human person" (art. 1, paragraph 4 of the Statute).

I thank the organizers for inviting me here, because it allows me to take up a theme that MEIC recently addressed during the theological week at Camaldoli. Camaldoli is dear to us for having hosted Catholic intellectuals, jurists, philosophers, and economists during the war (July 18 to 24, 1943, the fall of fascism). Encouraged by Msgr. Montini, they developed the document known as the Code of Camaldoli. Published in 1945, it constituted a sort of "work plan" for the future republican constitutional charter. Well, the title of the speech that I gave during the theological week at Camaldoli in summer 2013 had a certain energy that may be interesting again now: *"The Pink Hope: Woman in the Church between Novelty and Needs for Change."* So the emphasis was on a future nourished by the theological virtue of hope. My speech today will attempt to project itself into the future, but starting from the analysis of the present time with respect to the theme of women's

situation in relation to our social dynamics as citizens and to the Church we belong to as believers.

It is therefore obvious that my point of view will express my personal and social status as a forty-year-old woman, believer, worker, daughter, wife and mother of two teenaged sons.

First Part: WOMAN IN SOCIETY

1. A fresco of social dynamics

In the introduction to Bishop Fragnelli's talk, "bending the present," a characteristic of our time, explained by anthropologists and sociologists, emerged immediately: what Marc Augé calls the "dictatorship of the present." He explains why today it is so difficult to hope: *"All time is concentrated in the present happening-event, which contains all the dimensions of individual and collective behaviors"*²⁶. It is like saying that "we live longer, but we begin to live later." We are no longer the "owners of our future," says Augé in an interview with *Repubblica* in 2012. Among the causes of the disappearance of the future from our horizon at least two are decisive for the anthropologist: the acceleration of our lives by new technologies and the financial crisis.

With respect to new technologies, I'm interested in the position of psychoanalyst Massimo Recalcati. He described our state of "alienation" as hyper-connected subjects in the so-called *Digital Age*, as "hypermodern." Unlike the modern state of alienation by expropriation, the hypermodern produces assimilation by constant connection or immersion without any pause in the network²⁷. This involves emotion ruling over reason. The backlash from being bombarded by emotions – on social media, on TV, on the radio, in newspapers, in advertisements – is avoiding new emotions. Catozzella wrote about "The primacy of the current emotion, which can be translated into the spasmodic search for the number of ~~likes~~" received on our Facebook posts. The situation has eliminated waiting in favor of avoidance. But only waiting

26 M. Augé, *Futuro*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2012

27 Cf. M. Pacini, *Chi si rivede. L'alienato* in «L'espresso» March 17, 2019, pp. 48-52.

(considered "wasted" time), only boredom in the days' pauses, and stretches of imagination create the space necessary for desire [Italian *desiderio*], that literally is the distance separated from [*de*] the stars [*sideriale*], the distance that gives us the courage to fill it and become stars. Only in waiting - continues Catozzella - do we remember the answer to the question about who we are. Only in waiting for something or someone (our beloved at a date, a solution to a problem, a creative inspiration) are we someone"²⁸.

Not only time is a category rethought by sociological conditions; so is space. In fact, globalization is the era of anthropological "non-places": "if a place can be defined as one's relational and historical identity, a "non-place" is a space without relation or historical identity. Non-places are not only transit places (airport lounges and main roads) but also everyday places (supermarkets, shopping malls). Augé himself, however, pointed out the limits of this definition of non-places, which are not absolute. He pointed out that "the place of one can be the non-place of the other and vice versa." For example, young people who constantly meet in a superstore transform a non-place into a place. So it is necessary to implement a *place-based* approach because that is how to contrast the movements of the traveler, i.e., one who crosses many spaces, but does not choose any to live in.

In the techno- nihilist society where we live, there has been a nerve-wracking substitution: "*The infinite has been replaced by "infinitezation," that is, by the multiplication of opportunities, possibilities and differences.*" "*Everything is played out,*" as Magatti notes, *—around the capacity to redirect the word spirit. That is, to say freedom differently.*" ... "*The term spirit,*" Magatti continues insightfully, *—comes from the root spas/spus, which means to blow, exhale, breathe, in Italian to breathe. The wind, in fact, breathes. It is interesting to note that the word **hope** also comes from the same spas-spus root in the sense of breathing and pushing towards. So hope – as a spiritual act – indicates the capacity of the human being to desire something good, beautiful, true. A further development. Something qualitatively different from what exists. Hope is exactly what is lacking*

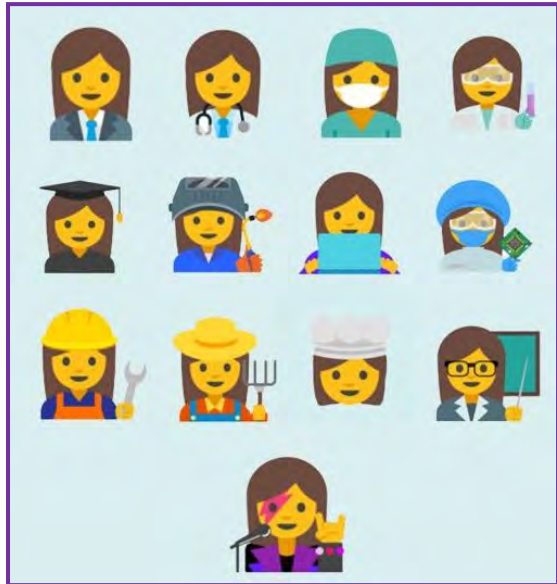
28 G. Catozzella, *Il potere delle emozioni* in «L'Espresso», March 31, 2019, pp. 58-62.

in our time, which therefore has no future”²⁹. Christian hope in particular must be connected with social and theological hope within the world in order to avoid being ghettoized and infertile.

In this picture, the role of the educator can be decisive. As Bruno Forte has argued so well, commenting on the episode of the disciples of Emmaus, "The educator either testifies to a reliable hope, courageous in the truth and transforming in love, or does not. (...)

Whoever wants to be an educator must be able to repeat with the Apostle Paul these words, an authentic educational plan: "Not that we lord it over your faith; rather, we work together for your joy" (2 Cor 1:24)"³⁰.

The challenge is clear: "Crisis is *kairos*, the time to change." If this true in human affairs generally, what is the role of women's situation today? If it is true, as Lucy Irigaray argued, that the 20th century was "the century of women," the Year Zero of the women's revolution, how has the social perception of being a woman changed in 21st century society?



2. The role of women today

In my opinion, Chiara Palazzini's recent analysis is very clear when she states that "*today's women live at an unsustainable pace, often working in extremely competitive environments where the fact of being*

29 M. Magatti, *Sulla crisi (spirituale) dell'Occidente neo-materialista* in «La rivista del clero italiano», March 2012, pp. 183-189, p. 188.

30 B. Forte, *Educare significa donarsi come Lui si donò* in «Avvenire. Agorà. Cultura», September 6, 2018, p. 22.

a mother is not given much consideration, where work-time is extended and accelerated to an incredible degree. Compared to the previous generation, women are more stressed and often carry this tension with them even at home, in the family, with little time left during the day"³¹. From this comes what Maria Rita Parsi calls "The unhappiness of mothers," truly a very likely picture: *"Thirty/forty-year-olds with children live in a hurry, carry on their shoulders the weight of the family, of the daily organization, of work; they are asked to be good wives, good mothers, good workers, maybe even beautiful and in great shape and they try to be up on everything, but the blanket is short. They are young women who do not feel appreciated. They are not given the credit for everything they do and, in addition, feel guilty over the short time they spend with their children. And the fathers?"* Here her tone gets harder. *"I don't accept that children be born and then dumped on women: the whole educational chain, from nursery school to secondary, from the nanny to the grandmother, is female"*³².

If we accept Parsi's critique, we must have the intellectual honesty to dispel the prejudices that burden young women, especially in our country. In a survey carried out by three scholars of the University of Turin, pay attention to these three women(!), Daniela Del Boca, Letizia Mencarini and Silvia Pasqua. I was particularly struck by a statistic about the well-being of the children of working mothers, given the scarcity of time to devote to these. Well, in Italy, most men and women – in a much higher proportion than in other European countries – believe that pre-school children suffer if their mother works outside the home. The proportion of men (interviewed in 2008) who believe that children suffer if their mother works is 76% in Italy, while in other countries it ranges between 40 and 60%, up to 25% in Sweden. Women in general everywhere disagree with the statement in question, but the percentage ranges from just 17% among Swedish women and as much as 74% of Italian women who agree. The conclusion that has been drawn is clear: *"the concern for the possible negative effects on the children"s development on account of the mother"s work, in terms of*

31 C. Palazzini, *Oltre l'emergenza, educare ancora. Il significato autentico, i problemi attuali e le risorse dell'educazione*, Cittadella, Assisi, 2011.

32 *Ibidem*

*less time dedicated to children, seems widespread, especially where there is little or no public network of quality childcare services, which can play a compensatory role, especially in less well-off families or those with fewer familial networks"*³³.



Even the widespread stereotype that a low employment rate corresponds to a high fertility rate, statistics come to our aid.

Countries with a high rate of female employment have an equally high fertility rate, confirming a positive relationship between female employment and fertility under certain conditions. Where there are policies that are more attentive to working women, both the fertility rate and the rate of female participation in the labor market are high. On the contrary, where welfare systems are less oriented towards supporting motherhood, both rates are very low. In Italy, the Emilia-Romagna figure stands out. There the female employment rate is among the highest in Italy (over 60%), and the number of children per woman has risen in the last fifteen years from 0.96 to 1.48.

In this social framework, there are implicit questions; young women live with them silently. Let us therefore confront these questions:

- ✚ How can we reconcile the right aspiration to fulfillment in work (which is not in itself a career) and the desire for motherhood? Side note: the right to work is the only one explicitly stated among the fundamental principles of our Constitution, because it is a measure of the dignity of the person.
- ✚ How can we reconcile the desire for essential economic autonomy with the need to create bonds?
- ✚ How can we combine family care and the urgent demands of work?

33 D. Del Boca-L. Mencarini- S. Pasqua, *Valorizzare le donne conviene*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2012, p. 73.

- ✚ How can we manage an image of an emancipated woman without resorting to the power schemes invented by males?
- ✚ How can we redirect the excellent Italian women graduates who are rushing to line up with girls who crave a spot as a showgirl?³⁴

I fully share the observation of Lorella Zanardo, author of the text *Il corpo delle donne* [Women's Bodies]: "*We didn't want to become visible by having to let go of the deep feminine (...) The masculine model that we have introduced and that makes us now look at ourselves as we think a man would look at us, that model is the same one that made us cling to a system of life based on masculine values, to which we aspired because it seemed to promise us an incredibly attractive goal: to exist, finally. With effort and bewilderment, some of us are becoming aware of the fact that today the change at stake is much greater and more laborious, since it envisions a new paradigm*"³⁵.

As Luisa Muraro observes in her book *Non è da tutti: The unspeakable fortune of being born a woman*, the only function to be assigned to feminism is to bring "out of invisibility and silence" the experience and desires of women, called "the other half of the sky"³⁶ (or rather in the English translation of the Chinese saying, "Those who 'hold up' the other half of the sky").



Faced with this "epochal" challenge, a certain number of young women flee. They yield, for example, to the false consolations of the charm of perpetuating endless youth, what Galimberti calls "the myth of youth": "*an unhealthy idea that contracts our life into that brief arc in which we are biologically strong,*

34 Le domande avanzate nel testo prendono spunto by A. Matteo, *La fuga delle quarantenni. Il difficile rapporto delle donne con la Chiesa*, p. 77.

35 L. Zanardo, *Il corpo delle donne*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 2011.

36 L. Muraro, *Non è da tutti. L'indicibile fortuna di nascere donna*, Carocci, Roma, 2011.

economically productive and aesthetically beautiful, throwing into insignificance and sadness all those years (most of our lifespan) that follow this happy age. Thus, once youth is assumed as a paradigm of life, all the rest of life looks like some form of sad survival"³⁷.

From the myth of youth, which produces psychic discomfort because it is a "sick idea," we move on to the "dictatorship of youth." Its corollary is "beauty terrorism": its greatest followers in the Italian population are between fifty and sixty. "Forbidden to age" means a profound discomfort with oneself. In a society such as Italy's (with the oldest average age in the world after Japan), we should often meditate on the splendid reflections of James Hillman on the subject. In *The Strength of Character*, Hillman argues that the purpose of aging is not to die but to reveal our character, which needs a long gestation time to appear, in all its particular aspects, to ourselves before others. "*It is clear*" Galimberti notes, *—that if we have fled from ourselves all our lives, as if we were our own worst enemy, there is no consolation in knowing ourselves in old age, where the relationship that everyone has with himself/herself, for those who are not used to it or have always avoided it, becomes a frightening relationship. ... In fact, one does not age only because of biological degeneration, but also and above all for cultural reasons, precisely because of the idea that our culture has created of old age. It is thought of as a useless time that has its purpose in death. Anticipating death, all those elderly people who in other eras would already have disappeared survive, thanks to medicine and social services*"³⁸.

Even on this issue, which may seem to affect men and women equally, there are inequalities in treatment by our consumer society run by advertising companies. It is easy to see that commercials normally present aging men appreciatively, while they are simply cruel with women of advanced age. Becoming an *old woman* means becoming *childish or hysterical*.



37 U. Galimberti, *I miti del nostro tempo*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 2009, p. 44.

38 U. Galimberti, op. cit., p. 57.

3. Potential ways to change relationships between men and women

Women's voice

Faced with what has been called the "silent revolution" of changing the social *status* of women in various areas, the obligatory path is "**politics of conciliation**"³⁹, The aim of the project is to harmonize the work and family times of men and women, but above all, culturally, is changing the mentality, *metanoia* in theological terms: **the culture of complementarity** ⁴⁰ by virtue of which man and woman work together in order to achieve the common good, thus bypassing the stage of feminism and its model of emancipation.

Woman is equal to man and man to woman because woman and man are different expressions of the human being, of common humanity and in this they are radically equal, that is, equal in the **difference** of sex or gender. Considering difference, it may be useful to use the distinction, proposed by Elena Pulcini, between *difference from* (from the other, from the male) and *difference in* (i.e. difference seen from within the same female). In a nutshell, Pulcini asserts that this conceptual distinction is important to avoid any temptation to absolutize the feminine difference, even in a positive way. That would bind women, each woman, to an image "of gender" that can in fact sacrifice individual differences and the right to the always distinctive voice of singularity⁴¹.

From this statement it follows that each of the two, man and woman, connect with each other through communication and exchange. Each of the two, man and woman, cannot, therefore, alone cultivate the illusion of presenting themselves as the standard version of all humanity.

The interpretation of the problem always involves this criticism: men are not the standard human, and women are not partial human beings. This understanding offers the **possibility of a relationship**

39 C. Tintori, *Donne e lavoro: un puzzle da ricomporre*, in *Aggiornamenti Sociali*, July -August 2012, pp. 593-601.

40 To be understood as working in full reciprocity.

41 E. Pulcini, *L'identità femminile europea e l'idea di passione* in "Ricerca," July-August 2013, pp. 3-7.

between woman and man as mutual recognition between beings endowed with dignity, therefore between free beings.

It is therefore possible to conceive of alternative models of man-woman relations starting from the supreme value of **Freedom**.

Massimo Recalcati's reflection on "La Repubblica" (November 25, 2014, the Day against Femicide), was very effective: "The need for love that moves one towards the other must never be exchanged for the abusiveness that annihilates freedom; it is a **gift of freedom**. Isn't this the highest and most intense **form of love**? To love the freedom of the other, to love the person's intrinsic difference, of which woman is the symbol. (...) By loving "we expose ourselves unreservedly to the freedom of the other who always has, at every moment, the right to choose whether to renew or interrupt the pact that unites us. It is contrary to this right of loving discourse, when male violence is thrown like a poisoned arrow against the body of women."

There are two female voices from the 20th century that have passed and that, in our opinion, have been able to look at the relationship between the sexes in a new way, even paying the price of their "diversity" in their own bodies. They are the Spanish Andalusian philosopher, **Maria Zambrano**, who died in 1991, and **Etty Hillesum**, a Dutch Jew, who died in 1943 at Auschwitz at the age of 29.

Two women linked by discovering the theme of the "**Beauty of Life**" vigorously affirmed precisely in conditions of disadvantage, of difficulty. Zambrano was marked by disease (tuberculosis in 1929) and exile. Hillesum was imprisoned, for racial reasons in the Nazi extermination camps.



Let's start with the theme of exile: **Maria Zambrano**, a devoted republican in a Spain first tormented by civil war and then dominated by the dictatorship of Franco. From 1939 onward she endured a 45-year-long exile that took her to Latin America and Europe (Paris, Rome, Geneva); she returned only on November 20, 1984. The philosopher gave this glimpse of her return to Spain: "From exile you cannot return I have

not returned, I cannot return, because I never left. I brought Spain with me, inside me, in that secret, luminous or dramatic place, or simply visible in my heart."

There is a tragic vision of history, always captured from the point of view of the victims with whom she had voluntarily associated: history was "her cross," the cross that everyone must bear. Zambrano associated this dramatic reading of political events with a Christological perspective: her exile (as well as that of all other refugees) is the passion that brings her back to the passion of the innocent Lamb sent to the slaughter.

Zambrano's conception of her philosophizing connects this intense biographical experience, a source of inspiration with the pattern of her own thinking: her own thought bears within itself the power of the "feminine." Her thought, halfway between the mystical and the poetic, constitutes a *way of philosophizing* **other than and completely different** from the traditional western way that assumes an opposition between thinking and feeling, spirit and life.



and universal, and the other sphere incarnated by Antigone: divine, feminine, nocturnal, unconscious and individual.

Zambrano constantly seeks a link between these two worlds, these two laws so far apart, an alternative way in which these two possibilities are not mutually exclusive, but intertwine to create possible new relationships. Yes, think, but without forgetting the soul. Yes,

know, but without forgetting feeling, emotions, particularly mercy and compassion⁴².

According to Zambrano, **women have something "extra,"** that is, "being **for love**," being on the side of love, whatever it takes, even the possible exclusion of women from the field of rationalistic-academic logic and from the type of politics based on it⁴³. In a passage in the work *In the Shadow of the Unknown God: Antigone, Eloisa, Diotima*, the expression "the woman refused to be objective" appears: she preferred to remain faithful to her dark matrix, "mysterious interior life." This condition, far from being a defeat (versus a man's "conquest"), can become a new style of presence in the world, thanks to its "great transformative political force"⁴⁴. The secret lies in not wanting to replace a dominant language with another language that proposes itself as dominant.

The same paradigm of **motherhood** is extended by Zambrano, from the exclusive biological condition of women to a "universal paradigm," that is, a way of being for women, but also one that can be assumed by anyone. "The receptivity of the female body, the patience of gestation, the strength of giving birth to a new life, are based, rather than on a specific body structure, on a way of being and existing that goes back to the soul"⁴⁵.



It follows that **"those who want to understand the radicality and intensity of action must listen to the experience of motherhood."**

42 Maruzzella S., "Introduzione" to *Maria Zambrano. Sentimenti per un'autobiografia. Nascita, amore, pietà*, Mimesis, 2012, p. 13.

43 Zucal S., Una donna filosofa e la sfida della politica in *Humanitas*, Maria Zambrano. La politica come ~~destino~~ "destino comune," p. 13.

44 Zamboni C., Il materialismo di Maria Zambrano in *Humanitas*, Maria Zambrano. La politica come ~~destino~~ "destino comune," p. 107.

45 Falappa F., Ripensare la politica con Maria Zambrano in *Humanitas*, Maria Zambrano. La politica come ~~destino~~ "destino comune," p. 125.

The dynamic perspective that derives from it involves a reversal of the usual terms: birth is assumed not as a look backward (a past event, already finished) but as a look forward (thinking about the future): a matter of the future, where "the future suffers before being born."

Zambrano was the first to introduce into philosophy a reflection on referring to people as "birthing" rather than using the traditional definition of people as "mortal" [destined to die] beings in contrast to "divine." In this way of thought, we are beings capable of "dis-birth" through **memory**: *"Dis-birth is a continuing return to the core of existence from which we all derive, recalling what we have seen in life and always implementing the same core of existence from which we all descend. And in this return, we recollect what has happened along our path, seeing life reborn, but in a new light"*⁴⁶.

The generative perspective, typical of women but present in every man, is what links the intellectual experiences of Maria Zambrano and **Etty Hillesum**. The young Hillesum wrote in her diary on March 7, 1942, *"If it does not generate love for others, even the feeling between a man and a woman impoverishes them and becomes a limitation."*



"I carry within me this great love for humanity, and yet I wonder if I will not continue to seek my one-and-only man. And I wonder to what extent this is a limitation of a woman, to what extent it is a tradition of centuries, from which the woman must free herself, or a quality so essential that a woman would do violence to herself if she gave her love to all humanity instead of to a single man Perhaps the lack of women who become important in science and art is explained as follows: with the fact that the woman is always looking for a particular man, to whom then she transmit all her awareness,

46 Maruzzella S., *Introduzione* a Maria Zambrano. *Sentimenti per un'autobiografia. Nascita, amore, pietà*, Mimesis, 2012, p. 14.

warmth, love, creative ability. Woman is looking for a man and not for humanity. This feminine question is not really simple.... Perhaps the true substantial emancipation of women has yet to begin.... We are still bound and constricted by centuries-old traditions. We still have to be born as people. Woman has this great task before her"⁴⁷.

Etty embarked on an extraordinary spiritual journey, starting with a very special love affair with Julius Spier, her fifty-five-year-old psychoanalyst, also of Jewish origin. The erotic component was marginal, though not insignificant. It was not an easy relationship because he was engaged to a young woman in London and she was cohabiting with Han Wegerif, a sixty-two-year-old Dutch widower, her landlord. Despite her emotional excesses, intensified by her conscious choice of abortion, Etty entrusted herself to God, asking him to accept her as she was, with her own limitations and contradictions.

Etty came to discover the presence of God in her: a particular discovery, new, original. It marked a turning point. She did not return as a Jew to the synagogue, nor did she become a Christian. She opened herself up to God, but she did not embrace any religious faith-group. God revealed himself in her as a flow of life, of potentiality of universal love. Etty would come to understand that getting down on her knees (she, the girl who didn't know how to kneel) was a spontaneous gesture, a response to a command that came from within, from the depths of herself. She knelt in the bathroom, in her room, in front of her desk, no matter where she was. She began to pray.

How? She prayed for many people, but not asking for external help. Prayed to thank: thank you for the gift of life, thank you for the beauty, thank you for the joy in my heart. She discovered a new way: *"Listen to yourself inside"*⁴⁸. *No longer let yourself be guided by what is coming from outside, but by what is rising inside."*

By virtue of this discovery, certainly guided by the deep relationship with Spier, a man who played the multiple roles of friend, lover, and teacher, Etty was able to address God in a new way. Meanwhile **"you have to dare to say what you believe."** From the

47 E. Hillesum, *Diario 1941-1943. Edizione integrale*, edited by J. G. Gaarlandt, translation by C. Passanti, T. Montone, A. Vigliani, Adelphi, Milan, 2012.

48 Etty uses the German term *in-sich-hineinhören*.

Westerbork camp, a transit camp before being deported to Auschwitz, she wrote to God: *"Where are you? You are defeated here; you can do nothing for me. But it is I who can do something for you! The only thing we can do in these times and also the only thing that really matters, is a small piece of you in ourselves, my God"*⁴⁹.

Her profession of faith was simple, but it came from extraordinary strength.

It is not possible to truly believe in God without believing in human beings. She knew that the world is full of evil, hatred and violence. However, she has an inner awareness that it is possible to free human hearts from hatred and evil.

She was able to write in 1941: *"I find life beautiful and I feel free. The heavens stretch out within me just as they do above me. I believe in God and in people and I dare to say so without false modesty. Life is difficult, but it is not somber... a future peace can only exist if it is first found by everyone in themselves – if every person is freed from hatred against neighbors of whatever race or people, if we overcome this hatred and transform it into something different, perhaps in the long run into love if it is not asking too much. It is the only possible solution"*⁵⁰.

Amid the full implementation of the Nazi plan to deport and eliminate all the Jews of Europe she writes: *"I am a happy person and I praise this life, I praise it, in the year of the Lord 1942, the umpteenth year of war."*

Still from the pages of her diary of 1942 we get an important source to understand her innovative and surprising spirituality: *"I am sick, I can do nothing about it.... Yet I arrive at the same conclusion. Life is beautiful. And I believe in God."*

Etty – as Hillesum scholars perceptively note – does not mean that life is beautiful because she believes in God, suggesting that the primary statement would be that she believes in God, and the secondary, that life is beautiful. Nor does she mean that life is beautiful, so consequently I believe in God. "They are two affirmations that stand at the same level with their own specificity. It was not easy for Etty to

49 E. Hillesum, Op. cit.

50 E. Hillesum, op. cit.

come to the conclusion that life is beautiful. It was a journey through which her grey existence, in black and white, was illuminated with all its colors and their nuances"⁵¹.

No surprise then, that Etty decided not to seek escape, nor to be saved from the extermination that was already underway. Her motivation was expressed in the form of an inner dialogue: *"Once again you think of yourself as too important. You have to go beyond yourself, opening yourself to the trans-personal... You do not have the right to lose sight of the whole [in this case the Jewish people] to benefit its small components [a single individual]"* and again *"Anyone who wants to save himself must know that if he does not go, someone else will have to go in his place"*

We are faced with an act of moral responsibility: Etty felt a profound responsibility towards others, Jews like her, who, if she had managed to save herself, would have been sacrificed in her place. She did not want to save herself at the price of someone else's life.

Her rejection of hatred is surprising, in light of the tragedy underway. At a time when all souls were poisoned by violence, hatred, resentment and the desire for revenge, Etty practiced her love for her neighbor and rejected indiscriminate hatred, directed at an entire category of people, even if they were Germans or Nazis. She wrote:

"If only one decent German remained, this one German would deserve to be defended against that gang of barbarians, and thanks to him one would not have the right to pour out one's hatred on an entire people."

Despite the growing restrictions and discrimination against Jews in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands, she did not react aggressively to provocations but always maintained a sense of her own dignity: *"To humiliate someone you have to be two people: the one who humiliates and the one who is humiliated and (especially) lets himself be humiliated."* If the latter is immune from humiliation, only "annoyances" remain, but his own dignity is not affected.

In conclusion to this first part, we have tried to draw two portraits of women, first the philosopher, second the eclectic

51 A. Barban, A. C. Dall'Acqua, *Etty Hillesum. Osare Dio*, Cittadella Editrice, 2012, pp. 124-125.

intellectual, different but linked by the same search for "knowledge of the soul" and knowledge of the "inner parts." They are the authentic realists, not those who hold the androcentric vision, the idealists who pretend to subordinate all of reality within the orbit of reason alone.

If a woman does not want to betray herself, she must always be inside reality, the concrete, real, tragically real (and this is what we have seen linking the lives of Maria and Etty, both victims of violent and oppressive political systems). This style of presence in the world (writes Zambrano, "a way of being planted in existence") makes her a "strange creature" but certainly unique and unrepeatable.

Second Part: WOMAN IN THE CHURCH

1. The woman-question between past and future



Fifty years have passed since Pope John XXIII, now a saint, greeted the movement for the emancipation of women as a "sign of the times" in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* "for the first time in a document of the pontifical magisterium women were considered as subjects and bearers of human rights,"⁵² announced Ida Raming, Catholic theologian at the University of Münster, author of a petition to the Council in 1963 on the equality of the priestly ministry for men and women, a message that remained unheard. "This passage is a prelude to the important affirmation of the Council's Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which in at least two places anticipates the changes that would occur in society in the '70s. (Serious studies attest to the participation of women theologians and experts in the drafting of G&S, for example,

52 I. Raming, *Il messaggio delle pioniere al Concilio Vaticano II* in «Concilium» 49 (2012/59, pp.164-174).

the English Catholic economist Barbara Ward, forerunner of sustainable development⁵³.)

I think it's worth dwelling a little on this point. I would like to dwell on at least two paragraphs of the Constitution, n. 29 of the chapter –The Human Community” (in Part 1, –The Church and the Human Vocation”) and n. 55 in the chapter –The Promotion of the Progress of Culture” (in Part 2, –Some More Urgent Problems”). These are two very important specific topics: the dignity of women and their role in promoting culture. With regard to the first point, the Church condemned *"any kind of discrimination in the fundamental rights of the person, whether in the social or cultural field, on grounds of sex, race, color, social status, language or religion"* and, with regard to the second point, the Council affirmed that both men and women are promoters of their community's culture. Faced with such an openness of horizons, it is very disappointing to read the **Council's Message to Women**, which is the fruit of work by the Curia rather than by the Council Fathers. In the opinion of Cettina Militello, it *"adds little, indeed nothing. In fact, in it the stereotype of care prevails"* and the reference to the "ecclesial subjectivity" of women is really weak, a problem identical to the "problem of lay subjectivity."

In short, although it is useful to look for explicit references to women in the texts of the Council, today – says Militello with healthy realism – *–it is even more important to go beyond the precise statements to recall the Council program in its entirety"*⁵⁴. The ecclesiology of the Council has enshrined equality between men and women in the common dignity of all the baptized who, even before any other legitimate distinction, are members of the People of God.

Certainly one of the healthiest fruits of the Council is to have given academic status to the hyphenated term women's-theology without, however, being silent about the resistance which, in 1966, after the Council, the theologian Jean Galot expressed: *"Women are less*

53 Cf. A Valerio, *Madri del Concilio. Ventitré donne al Vaticano II*, Carocci, Rome, 2012. It is known that Paul VI invited 23 women as auditors: ten women religious and thirteen lay women and about twenty as experts.

54 C. Militello, *Il ruolo delle donne nel Vaticano II* in «Aggiornamenti sociali» February 2013, 127-137, p. 137.

capable of objectively taking in the deposit of doctrine, of developing it, of explaining it rationally. Man is more endowed with the intellectual capacity necessary to grasp and express in clear and precise terms the content of Revelation"⁵⁵.

Centuries seem to have passed since this caustic statement when we compare it with the analysis of another Jesuit theologian from beyond the Alps, Joseph Moingt, who, in my humble opinion, has precisely intuited the direction in which the wind of change blows: *"The effective recognition of the emancipation of women, in the Church as in the world, has become the condition of possibility for evangelization in the world; and since the evangelical mission is the raison d'être of the Church, the new welcome that the Church will give to women will be the working „symbol" of its evangelical presence in today's world, the pledge of its survival. Women no longer wear corsets: the Church herself must emancipate herself from the tradition that binds her to the patriarchal societies of the past in order to give herself the right to survive in this new world, through the place that she will know how to give to women*"⁵⁶.

In other words, perhaps more raw: **the future of the Church is linked to the question of women.**

The theme becomes even more urgent as it was posed by Don Armando Matteo in his provocative study, *The Flight of 40-year-old Women: The difficult Relationship of Women with the Church*. At the beginning, it is properly noted that *"perhaps it is precisely the condition of women that best restores the sense of the metamorphosis that has happened to society, to the family, to the educational processes, to the political and public management of the Italian system,"* one of the most chauvinistic countries in Europe⁵⁷.

55 A. Valerio, *Donne, teologia e vita pubblica all'indomani dell'Unità d'Italia*, in «La Civiltà cattolica» 2012, pp.550-564.

56 J. Moingt, *Francia-Chiesa e questione femminile: nel futuro della Chiesa* in «Il Regno/ attualità» 56 (2011/4), pp. 76-79.

57 Italy is the country with the lowest rate of employed women after Malta and Hungary. Millions of Italian women of working age do not participate in the workplace. Those who are employed have quite low wages and must put up with positions that do not correspond with their educational level.

Young women are not "substantially" different in the practice of faith from their male peers.

In this regard, the evaluations of Don Armando Matteo are interesting: *"So something new exists between the generations: in our country, the younger one is, the further away from the ambit of the Church There is also a differentiation within the female world: the traditional gap of greater adherence to beliefs and practices of faith – which has always characterized women more than men, substantially confirmed in older generations – tends to disappear with the appearance of new generations of women"*⁵⁸.

"This," concludes don Matteo bitterly, *–is really something new for the Catholic Church*". The Church's privileged relationship with women's universe, the 'silent fortress' of the past, has been undermined. Young women are the great absentees from our ecclesial communities"⁵⁹.



2. Beyond the "feminine genius"

Yet two popes of the 20th century, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, introduced into their magisterium the category of "feminine genius," first by John Paul II in the encyclical *–Mulieris Dignitatem*" of 1988! We must ask ourselves why this doctrinal

"leap in quality" has not produced concrete changes in ecclesial practice regarding the role and participation of women in ecclesial life. Where would the problem lie? What would be hidden behind this exalted expression?

The problem, warned theologians like Benedetta Zorzi, is that in the encyclical there is no reference to the "male genius." Therefore, once again women's freedom of expression and fulfillment, solemnly

58 A. Matteo, *La fuga delle quarantenni. Il difficile rapporto delle donne con la Chiesa*, Rubbettino, 2012, p. 77.

59 A. Matteo, op. cit., p.19.

affirmed in the aforementioned Council documents, is crystallized in a single form, to women alone, as "care." Woman, by virtue of her difference from man and therefore her spousal nature, has two possibilities: to be a wife and mother or to be a consecrated woman.

Also in the following document on women, entitled "On the Collaboration of Man and Woman in the Church and in the World," written by Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In 2004 he addressed this message to the bishops of the Catholic Church, taking up the same repertoire of images: "they [women] are called to be models and irreplaceable witnesses for all Christians of how the Bride must respond with love to the love of the Bridegroom"⁶⁰.

Moreover, already in 1994 in the document "Priestly Ordination," John Paul II had closed the question of the priestly ordination of women: this is the given conclusion. The emphasis on female genius appears to be linked to the theme of the exclusion of women from the priesthood. Personally, I share the synthesis that Benedetta Zorzi made in her recent work, *Beyond the Female Genius: Women and Gender in the History of Christian Theology*: the combination of women and priesthood is false. Proof of this is that "The problems arising from an androcentric mentality remain unchanged even in the churches that have given women access to the ordained ministry. The themes connected with femininity, on the other hand, must be disentangled. That could shed new light on typically theological issues such as revelation, language about God, dynamic anthropology, sexual morality, the exercise of power and the construction of a Church capable of accepting not only the feminine difference but every type of difference"⁶¹.

Along these lines, the German Bishops' Conference concluded its assembly in Trier in February 2013 with a document that declared with a certain *pathos*: "We also know the disappointment of many

60 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*, Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church, Documents of the Holy See, p. 88.

61 B. S. Zorzi, *Al di là del genio femminile. Donne e genere nella storia della teologia cristiana*, Carocci, Rome, 2014, p. 258

women involved in the Church and express our regret that the possibilities of positions of responsibility for women in the Church are not sufficiently taken advantage of. Many women, including young women, therefore feel the lack of female models of ecclesial leadership as points of reference”⁶².

So, is it just a *leadership* problem? Cardinal Kasper asserts that today we are suffering from the heresy of "institutionalism." That view holds that the power of proclamation can come from the reform of the institutions. Even if he is right, it still seems to me, in the light of all we have considered, that this issue is absolutely not secondary.

"Clearly, the ordained ministry is not necessary” Zorzi still maintains, –for women to exercise leadership roles in the Church.... Today more than ever, there is a push to make that ‘de facto’ reality a legal ‘right.’”

As long as the argument over male-only ministry is linked to discourses on women, it will not be possible to have the mental clarity to deal systematically and deeply with the many questions raised by the presence of women in ecclesial spaces.

One possible way could be the construction of a new symbolic universe through using new words. *"In the Bible – in fact – there are dozens of female images of God that have been deliberately ignored in the processes of constructing images of God. This mutilation of our symbols has deprived women of the right to recognize themselves 'in the image of God,' a God who would also be according to their image”*⁶³.

Even the image of Mary herself has not escaped this mutilation. A bestseller titled *Ave Maria and the Church Invented the Woman*, by Sardinian scholar Michea Murgia concludes that the Marian imagery developed for centuries by the Church results from a bipolar logic of male-female power. According to this interpretation, the human and spiritual life of Mary of Nazareth has been exploited to the point of making her a "niche statuette" far away and indeed unattainable by a normal woman.

62 *Ibidem*

63 M. Murgia, *Ave Mary e la Chiesa inventò la donna*, Einaudi, Torino, 2011, p. 133.

On this point, the analysis of Zorzi is interesting. She says, "To understand a woman's difficulty in approaching Mary, we must start from the experience of the mother-daughter relationship, very different from the mother-son relationship. It is not simple for a daughter to deal with such a perfect mother, an unmatched model of completeness, sinless, always a virgin but an upright wife and obedient daughter, mother of an absolutely exceptional son. Therefore, Mary will appear as an unattainable mother in her perfection and will end up assuming an "overwhelming function traced back to male-centered behaviors." "Mary," wrote Militello in her book *Mary with the Eyes of a Woman*, ~~weakened~~ *weakened by Eve and absolutized in her goodness, was able to satisfy male nostalgia for safety and female protection, and she offered women (held in low regard) consolation for their affliction.*"

On the other hand, the theological view of Mary has always been thought up by males, hence the recent attempts by many theologians to rediscover Mary as an ordinary woman, **concrete** and perhaps a sister in faith, to understand her beyond the stereotypes that have clustered around her, while remaining aware of her unique path as the mother of Jesus.

1. Has women's hour come?

The pontificate of Pope Francis and the woman question

One of the first steps of Pope Francis's pontificate indicating something **new** in handling the topic appeared in the editorial novelty of May 2013. Then Pope Francis presented the monthly women's supplement to *Osservatore Romano*, directed by the historian Lucetta Scaraffia and the journalist Ritanna Armeni, entitled *Women-Church-World*. The director of *La Civiltà*



Cattolica, Antonio Spadaro, expressed his appreciation for it. A year after the publication of the first issue, he published an interview⁶⁴ with Lucetta Scaraffia in which she observed that the contribution of women in the Church, whether religious or lay, "is becoming increasingly large and significant – just think: today there are 740,000 women religious in the world, compared to 460,000 male religious and priests – but their contribution is still hidden. Making it known, therefore, will also help to change prejudices and preconceived ideas about the Catholic Church and its attitude toward women"⁶⁵.

It is well known that, unfortunately, in April of this year, 11 editors, including the editor Lucetta Scaraffia, resigned on the grounds that they disagreed with the editorial line of the new editor, which sought to reduce the scope of complaints made by the editors regarding the scandal of the abuses of nuns.

Apart from this "incident," it should be noted that in recent years, during the pontificate of Pope Francis, the question of women has become increasingly visible.

"It's not a question of giving more functions to women in the Church" – yes that's good, but that's not how the problem is solved – *–it's a question of integrating woman as a figure of the Church into our thinking.*" This is how Pope Francis spoke in his impromptu remarks at the end of February this year, in an event dedicated to discussion of the protection of minors in the Church. He spoke after the presentation by Linda Ghisoni, Undersecretary for the Section for the Lay Faithful in the Department for Laity, Family and Life.

Already in *Evangelii Gaudium* [The Joy of the Gospel], Pope Francis had inserted the question of women in the context of the most radical changes in a poor and powerless Church: "There is still a need to expand the spaces for a more incisive female presence in the Church ... in the different places where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures" (E. G., 104).

64 A. Spadaro, "Intervista" in «La Civiltà Cattolica», 2013, May 18, 2013, pp.370-374.

65 «Donne Chiesa Mondo». Supplement to «L'Osservatore Romano», May 2012, number 1, p. 1.

As historian and theologian Adriana Valerio notes, "Only the process of overcoming clerical control can offer space for a different female presence in the ecclesial reality. The Church must study new criteria and methods so that women do not feel like guests but are fully involved in the various areas of social and ecclesial life"⁶⁶.

Pope Francis himself, in his direct style, expressed the urgency for the Church to address the question of women in the Church: *"I am convinced of the urgent need to offer space to women in the life of the Church and to welcome them, taking into account the specific and changed cultural and social sensibilities. Therefore, a more widespread and incisive presence of women in church communities is desirable, so that we may be able to see many women involved in pastoral responsibilities, guiding individuals, families and groups, as well as in theological reflection"*⁶⁷.



An important step toward progressive declericalization of the Church shows up in the document of the CTI (March 2, 2018), n. 105, in very clear words on this subject are still not adequately accepted and absorbed by the ecclesial community: *"Pastoral*

conversion for the implementation of synodality requires that some paradigms often still present in ecclesiastical culture be overcome, because they express an understanding of the Church which is not renewed by the ecclesiology of communion. These include: responsibility for the mission concentrated in the ministry of Pastors;

66 A. Valerio, *Donne e Chiesa. Una storia di genere*, Carocci editore, Quality Paperbacks, pp. 212-213.

67 Pope Francis to the participants in the plenary assembly of the pontifical Council of Culture on the topic *Le culture femminili. Uguaglianza e differenza*, Roma February 7, 2015.

insufficient appreciation of consecrated life and of charismatic gifts; insufficient appreciation of the specific and skilled contribution of the lay faithful and among them of women, within their sphere of competence"

In order to correct the evident imbalance in the Church between the male and the female, dogmatic theologian Simona Segoloni thinks it necessary to start with experiences that can lead to changing ideas from the prevailing mentality. In authentic synodal practice, the word "consultative" will not be synonymous with "accessory." In a consultative body, the decision-maker is bound to listen obediently to what the Spirit discerns in that portion of the assembled Church. If men and women sit together in this council, then the decisions depend on the women too.

I would like to quote, in this regard, what Serena Noceti recently wrote: "To work to become a church of men and women,‘ in a discipleship of equals‘ (not identicals‘), going beyond the formal affirmations of parallel opportunity or parallel dignity. This would overcome the excessive injustices and discrimination truly present and would be a strategic step for overall church reform. Women seek to have their voice‘ recognized, to have men and women together speak and know the faith. They want to have their service‘ to the Gospel and the ecclesial body accepted, without having to demand it, but with the awareness that they make an essential contribution. Otherwise the imbalance in ecclesial relations remains"⁶⁸.

It is legitimate to hope that the papacy of Francis can represent a turning point. In fact, I share Valerio's position that "Renewing the Church in the line of shared communion would also change the image of God, no longer a punitive Father and Lord surrounded by fearful subjects, but a **maternal Father**, compassionate, merciful Wisdom that welcomes everyone and that urges sons and daughters to create opportunities for communion and solidarity: brotherhood and sisterhood. Only in this way – Etty Hillesum reminds us once again –

68 S. Noceti, *Uomini e donne soggetti dell'evangelizzazione* in "Itinerari," 4, 2017, p. 94.

could we "help God and ... unearth God from the devastated (and violent) hearts of men"⁶⁹.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Marinella Venera Sciuto (Catania, 1971), high school classical diploma; graduated in piano as a student of the Higher Institute of Music "Vincenzo Bellini" of Catania under the guidance of the teacher Maria Pia Tricoli; graduated in Philosophy at the University of Catania, thesis entitled "The art of the sublime. Genesis and problems of a category of Hegelian aesthetics" under the guidance of Prof. Gaetano Compagnino; PhD in Philosophy and History of Ideas, thesis entitled "The crisis of the papacy in the History of the Popes by Ludwig von Pastor" under the guidance of Prof. Marilena Modica. Lecturer in History and Philosophy at the Liceo Scientifico "Archimede" in Acireale, teacher admitted by Miur to participate in 2018, for the region of Sicily, in the training course on the history and teaching of the Shoah at the Institute of Higher Studies for the Holocaust of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.



Professional associations

President of the Italian Catholic University Federation, Acireale group, from 1992 to 1994; Regional Representative for Sicily of the Italian Catholic Federation from 1994 to 1996; President of the Ecclesial Movement of Cultural Commitment, Acireale group, from 2007-2013; National Councilor of the Movement for the three-year period 2011-2014; Regional Representative of the Sicily Region of the Movement for the three-year period 2014-2017; currently a member of the national presidency of Meic as vice-president for the three-year period 2017-2020.

69 Cf. A. Valerio, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

Vocation: Brotherhood/Sisterhood and Mission

July 8, 2019

Don Massimo Naro



Thank you for your welcome. In particular thanks to those who invited me to share this time of reflection and formation here in Mascalucia: to Valeria Broll, obviously also to Bishop Tessarollo, and thanks to all of you. I would also like to thank Monsignor Zito because he made himself the bearer of the invitation a few months ago. I am sorry to

that he is not very well.

I would like to propose to you in two stages a sort of simple explanation, a progressive explanation of the three terms that make up the title that has been assigned to me.

The explanation that I would like to develop here is stimulated by the New Testament, but it's not a matter of doing a mere linguistic exercise, much less just an exegesis. Rather, it is a matter of finding in the word of God the **paradigm of a vocational experience** that is also proposed again to us today, in the environments where we live.

I will try to return continually to evangelical images, which I will bring out gradually and try to connect to the cultural circumstances we are going through and therefore to our situation, to the historical horizon on which we are placed.

Vocation

The first Gospel image I would like to recall in this regard is the one illustrated in Matthew 19:16-22 and also in its parallels found in the other



synoptics in Mark 10 and Luke 18.

It is the episode that recounts the dialogue between the teacher of Nazareth and that **rich young man** or even that man, that notable man who at a certain moment, meeting Jesus along the way, asks him what he must do to enter the kingdom of God and thus reach perfection: "*Teacher, what must I do to be perfect?*" What do I lack for my perfection?

This is a question that seems to be on the lips of all consecrated persons, consecrated in our day, not two thousand years ago. It includes the so-called religious institutes or, as in your case, the secular institutes, but all of them have in common the wording of institutes of perfection. Jesus' response to that culminates in a true and proper vocation, in a sort of call to follow him. Jesus tells him what he must do and finally adds, "*Then come and follow me.*"

The pro-vocation of poverty

That "*then*" presupposes something that precedes the call and this something is the **commitment to become poor** that Jesus demands of him: "*Go sell what you possess, distribute it to the poor, then come and follow me.*"

I consider the requests of Jesus not only as a **pre-vocation**, that is, something that lies a little before the call, the invitation, to follow him. These requests of Jesus to the so-called rich young man are rather also and more precisely a **pro-vocation**, not only in the sense that to this word we give today, the provocation, that is, not only in the provocative sense. Jesus never wants to poke his fingers in anyone's eyes. On the contrary, at that very juncture when he met that person, according to the Gospel accounts, he "looked at him and loved him"; Jesus did not want to annihilate him at all, mortify him, reproach him. Certainly his talk with him has a provocative value in the literal sense, that is, something that serves to promote the vocation itself, that opens a way to make room in the conscience of that man, but he left sad because he was very rich.

Rich in himself in his own biography, not only rich in a monetary sense because he had a lot of money, material possessions...

In fact, he replied: *"I have always obeyed the Torah since I was a child."*

He is rich in his own good qualities: "But I have always done so." He is also rich in his religious manners, in his good and beautiful religious education: "I have always behaved as you are asking of me."

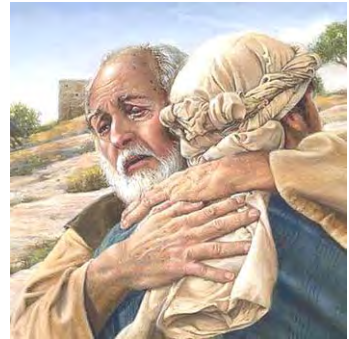
Provocation instead invites us to start from scratch. Saint Paul would have said in reference to himself: "All that I have committed myself to, my religious zeal, my observance of the law, of the Torah, everything by now I consider to be rubbish, that is to say, a surplus that I must get rid of."

The provocation in this perspective is the invitation, first of all, to step out of the frame of the portrait that we have made of ourselves, to throw away our self-portrait or at least put it aside. In fact, we have not been called into existence to be the self-portrait of ourselves, but rather to be the image of another, the image of God above all. This does not mean that vocation has nothing to do with our personal identity. Vocation does not mean renunciation, let alone loss, of our identity, but rather vocation means recovery of what we are truly destined to be, recovery of the awareness of who we truly are, of who we are called to be.

A second Gospel image can help us to understand that vocation means to return to oneself, to return to ourselves. The image I am alluding to is the famous one of the **prodigal son**, also now known as the merciful father, in Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke. In that parable the inner dimension of consciousness is emphasized.

That young man, the younger son of that rich landowner, has the experience of **returning to himself**. He lives the experience of becoming aware of himself again, of his own state, even of his own error, of his own sin, of his own measure.

Because of his distance from his father, the return to himself sets in motion the return to his father's house.



Conversion

When biblical language speaks of return, when the Gospels speak of return, it always means conversion, and this makes us realize that vocation is always a **conversion**. We are called to make an important movement, a sort of journey that is a journey out of ourselves to someone else.

The son returns to himself, finds his own place, and finally becomes aware of it, so he knows that he is out of place, is not really in place. That place is somewhere else, and he must regain it, he must reach it again.

This conversion is not first of all a change of behavior, but rather a realization. Converting in the New Testament does not only mean changing the way one acts, but it literally means changing direction, turning one's back on oneself. One has been facing in a certain direction, and converting means spinning around in the opposite direction, and doing it concretely.

In practical terms of behavior, this means: if I previously did something, now I don't do it anymore, I do something new.

Before changing the way we act, conversion means changing the way we are, being able to understand that our being is something else, that our destiny is different: returning to realizing this destiny, or more precisely of this vocation.

We are called to be something else or someone else. Conversion means changing the way we think about ourselves.

Another word in New Testament Greek is "metanoia," which expresses the experience of conversion. Metanoia means a new knowledge, going beyond the knowledge that we had before. It is a matter of "freeing ourselves" from all this, as happens every time Jesus calls his disciples to follow him. Most of his disciples were fishermen in Galilee, and he makes them fishers of human beings when he calls them. This is the reason he suggests to them, Come because if you are fishermen in the Lake of Galilee, now I want to make you fishers of human beings instead.

In any case, vocation is always a conversion for the disciples of Jesus. For example, Jesus calls Levi, the tax collector, and, calling him, asks him to leave himself behind, to leave his very self behind. He even

changes some of their names, like Peter or like Levi, the publican tax collector who becomes Matthew.

This very evident conversion of identity appears in the case of St. Paul. He first appeared in the Acts of the Apostles as Saul, Saul of Tarsus. Later, after his conversion, he was called by a nickname (Paul),

Paul, Saul's nickname, which he himself declared at the beginning of the Letter to Romans 1:1: “I am Paul, servant of Jesus Christ, apostle by vocation, chosen or called to proclaim the Gospel.” These descriptive pairs seem to be self-contradictory because of the dynamism they express. Paul declares himself an apostle by vocation. Apostle literally means “sent,” a missionary, but he can only be so because he was first attracted, he was called by the Lord Jesus.

What happens to Saul happens to the great people who are called to the great vocations of the Bible. His name too is changed, as if to say that he has a new destiny.

At the time of his calling, his conversion, the greatest patriarchs of the Old Testament undergoes this change of name, from Abram to Abraham. Note: a single letter [in Hebrew] changes everything. It does not change our world, but we change ourselves in our world.

Our legal name registration remains fundamentally the same as before, but the accent is new, the tone, the tonality of our name is new. So Saul becomes Paul. What changes? A single consonant, the initial one, the S that becomes P. Paul in Latin means inadequate, small, and therefore available for service. Only those who know they need someone else then agree to serve. In this perspective, vocation is the invitation to become what one is already in the mind of God, the reason why the prodigal son becomes a son, rediscovers that he is a son and not simply a servant He had told his father, “Treat me like the least of your employees.”



A healing

Experienced as a call, as conversion, as overcoming oneself, and as openness to the other, vocation is also a healing.

It is a healing of our **hearing** because, if the vocation is a call, then our healing involves our ability to listen, our ability to hear the One who is calling us.

The sin from which we are converted when we are called is precisely a sort of illness, a mistake, a transgression, that is to say, slipping off the road. To trans-gress means to detour. It's like when one has to follow a road and swerves, ending up somewhere else. Sin as a detour is swerving. Instead of following the straight road one takes a wrong road and goes somewhere else. One would like to reach the original goal but loses the way and gets lost and ends up elsewhere.

Sin is a sort of illness and misunderstanding, straying from obedience. But obedience means listening.

God tells us that he is a father and we interpret that as master. God proclaimed that he is our Lord and we interpret that as Pharaoh, a king who wants to exploit and crush us.

This is the experience of the prodigal son; this is why he does not consider himself a son, because he thinks of the father as his master; this is why he does not consider himself an heir to the same dominion as his father. Because he understands this as the lordship of Pharaoh, he wants to escape from it.

In short, vocation in this perspective, implying conversion, implying healing, leads to knowing one another and leads to recognizing God. Every time we are called by the Lord we finally recognize ourselves, we know ourselves again and we recognize God himself; we finally know the Lord.

Brotherhood/Sisterhood

Vocation calls us to a radical experience: **brotherhood/sisterhood**. From this relationship, then, the mission must come forth.

Also in the case of brotherhood/sisterhood we can start from a Gospel image that we find at the beginning of the Gospel of John 1:35-39 where we read that the Baptist sends his disciples to the teacher from

Nazareth, and these disciples ask the teacher from Nazareth: *Where are you staying?* Jesus answers them: *Come, and you will see.*

Come and see...discipleship

We must immediately emphasize that the disciples sent by the Baptist are in turn invited by Jesus. The Baptist sends them to verify what is happening, and the teacher ends up inviting them first to follow him, to stay with him. The two words of Jesus, "*come*" and "*see*" are complementary: one is dynamic and the other seems to be contemplative. One has to do with movement, with the journey, the other has to do with vision, thus with contemplation. One word involves following someone, and the other involves knowing something new, or rather knowing the newness embodied by Jesus himself.



In this sense, the vocation to brotherhood/sisterhood is above all an invitation to **discipleship**. We are called to a close, intimate and friendly relationship with the Lord Jesus. The vocation is first to be his brothers, a condition that can be experienced as disciples: come and see.

Staying and walking

Brotherhood/sisterhood as discipleship has two stages: to be with Jesus and to walk with him. In this case too, two Gospel images help us. The first is that of the **sisters in Bethany**; the second is that of the two **disciples of Emmaus**. The sisters entertain Jesus, and he stays with them. In the second instance Jesus, now risen, shares the path and they walk with him. These two times: staying and walking with Jesus are contextual; they are not simply one before the other, but interwoven with each other.

Together, **staying and walking** express discipleship and brotherhood/sisterhood with Jesus. He is the itinerant teacher who is always on the road; he is not the teacher who has a school where his disciples must reach him within its walls. In the Gospel Jesus tells his disciples that he does not even have a home, much less a school: "*The*

son of man has nowhere to lay his head," while even animals have a regular place to return for the night, as foxes have their burrows. Those who are with him cannot help but walk with him. This walking is also a way of staying: staying together with Jesus dynamically, staying in motion. Walk with him, and while walking with him, one stays with him, remains with him. It is not a matter of first staying and then walking, it is rather a matter of **staying while walking and of walking while staying**, and this is very important especially for people like you who are consecrated lay people in the world.

Like all the baptized and consecrated people, you too are called to sisterhood with Christ and in Christ. This call also implies your sisterhood, not in the sense of sisters in a cloistered monastery or in a convent, but you are certainly companions.

Your secular institute has been called a **Company** since its origins. You are companions but at the same time you are also sisters. For you, to be together and to walk together means to live a communal style, but I mean a communal style that has particular characteristics, a style that has specific forms and processes and therefore does not take place in common life, in a convent, in an institution. It means that you are together, yes, but walking, and walking, yes, but together.

Synodality

One form of witness to which you should feel called today within the world, but also for the Church and in regard to the Church, is prophecy, is the witness of **synodality**. The Church of our time feels a great need for a synodal style: to rediscover its vocation to walk together, not only to congregate in a specific place, for example, in these three days of formation that you are sharing here in Sicily in Mascalucia, coming from different parts of Italy and even beyond.

Being a synod means gathering in a specific place to discuss important, vital things together, but synodality has a before and an after and is not confined into the period of a particular, intense experience: ~~It~~ "It was wonderful!"

The experience spreads. It comes first from that experience and goes beyond that experience, prolonged afterward too. In this sense the before and the after of a synodal experience are more important than the

experience itself. Up to a certain point, convening, coming together, is already very important. –Before” involves being in reciprocal relationship, telephoning, planning, projecting, choosing a date, agreeing on that date, choosing a goal, agreeing on it. Doesn’t it also mean staying connected, in relationship, conversing? Doesn’t it mean collaborating, working together, experiencing while together and afterward?

–After” involves getting back on the road in many different directions, but with a single intention, with shared intentions, with a full future constructed together, designed together. So it is an experience of walking together, of moving together. In short, it involves giving the dynamic aspect of meeting one another a priority over the static experience of staying together.

In my opinion, this means something very particular for people who live a vocation like yours; it involves staying together, encountering or being encountered. For you, the secular institute constitutes the ambit where you regroup, where you discuss, where you are formed in the school of the Gospel and study, the meaning of your vocation, as you are doing in these days, without limiting yourselves to simply living together under the same roof.

Welcome and service

The sisters of Bethany form an image that I’m fond of and which I recall when I speak to the Ursulines, that is when I speak to you of the Company of Saint Angela Merici.

Why am I fond of this image? Because it was often mentioned in letters from a bishop of my diocese in the first half of the twentieth century. He was, I would say, the most important ecclesial personality, the

most representative of my diocese, who was called Monsignor Intreccialgli, and who later became archbishop of Monreale.



In 1911-1912 he supported Marianna Amico Roxas in the effort, the commitment to bring in, to introduce the Company of Saint Angela Merici here in Sicily in Palermo and, right near me, in San Cataldo, in Caltanissetta, and immediately afterwards also here, in Catania in San Giovanni La Punta, in Syracuse and so on.

One of the personalities involved in transplanting it here from northern Italy (Brescia, Lombardy), recovering it from its sixteenth-century origins, was Monsignor Intreccialagli. He wrote, "You have to prefer the part of Mary without neglecting the part of Martha. The two sisters tell us that brotherhood/sisterhood is above all friendship with Jesus. The vocation to brotherhood/sisterhood means being called to friendship with the Lord Jesus, even before entering into a social system, even before entering into community frameworks.

According to the Gospel story, friendship with Jesus is **hospitality, welcoming** Jesus, who was already a "troublesome" person two thousand years ago. In his Palestine, when he approached one city, someone was sent out ask him to go away: "Please take another route, leave us alone."

That's how it happens, because what he does is extraordinary, out of the ordinary, it displaces people, it forces them out of their ordinary situations, out of their posts and positions, it forces them, as we said before, to start again from scratch. A thousand head of cattle are all reset to zero in a ravine, at the bottom of the sea; they have to start from scratch; it is clear that he is an uncomfortable character.

Secondly, it is **service**, because the two sisters put themselves at his service in that house in Bethany, not only Martha but also Mary. Their service is in the biblical sense, in the biblical manner. Samuel, the young prophet of the Old Testament says, "*Speak, your servant is listening.*" What does the servant do in the Bible? He does nothing of his own. First of all he listens to God who speaks, God who talks to him. The servant also appears in the New Testament with the handmaid of the Lord par excellence, Mary of Nazareth: "*Let it be done unto me according to your word.*"

That is how the sister Mary really serves: listening to the teacher who speaks, and obeys him. The condition, the attitude of the faithful servant is that she listens, that is, obeys, and for this reason

hers is the better part that must be preferred, without however neglecting Martha's part. Martha's part is also an important service, a material service, a physical service, even though this concrete service remains simply activism if it stays at that level. If so, activity remains a useless effort.

In the company of Jesus

The experience of the **two disciples of Emmaus** is also based on listening. The two disciples immediately appear as **companions** of Jesus.

The brotherhood/sisterhood was a real company and so began to take on a certain dynamism that soon became a mission.



The two Emmaus disciples would become evangelizers with a mandate to bring back the Easter proclamation. To be brothers/sisters and therefore disciples of Jesus means to be his companions. Their main experience of companionship was at the end, at the climax of their time with Jesus, that is, the sharing of the eucharistic bread, the Paschal memory of Jesus. Finally, they remembered more than facts: they now understood the meaning of the facts that took place in Jerusalem. They had not understood them well; they had misrepresented them. That is why they had been disappointed and discouraged. But listening again to the interpretation of those facts from the lips of the Risen One, they came to share this sustenance and this strengthening food that is the Easter memory.

They were companions of Jesus also because they shared the road with him, and all that the road represents and symbolizes, all that the road implies and involves. The road of those times, also our roads. Coming to this meeting, here and there I saw flowers and gravestones at the edges of the roads and I thought: the roads were always dangerous, risky in those times perhaps even more than today. Even though there was not the high speed of our days, no cars, the overwhelming traffic, many other things were no less deadly.

The road has its fears: Stay with us because now it's evening and walking those roads at night means getting robbed, or getting your throat cut by a gang of thieves, or being put in jail unjustly by the patrols of Roman soldiers. There was a curfew and then one was mistaken as a Zealot, a revolutionary plotting a nighttime attack against Roman soldiers.

Above all, being a companion of Jesus means sharing the journey of return once again, that is, conversion. It means experiencing conversion together with him, and carrying the Paschal proclamation to Jerusalem, the city of the Paschal events.

They had not recognized the city of the Paschal events as the city of life, but had experienced it as the city of their leader's death, as the city of mortal danger to get away from, because being in Jerusalem was dangerous. Instead, from that supper in Emmaus onward they had to return to Jerusalem to proclaim: *"We have seen the Lord, he is truly risen."* We have seen him; this is the Good News, and this is the happy announcement. This was the first great experience of mission. From brotherhood/sisterhood with Jesus and in Jesus come the strength, courage and enthusiasm of the mission. Two thousand years ago and today, today differently from two thousand years ago, but no less than two thousand years ago.

Mission

Jesus not only calls his disciples; he also sends them. Saint Paul considers himself simultaneously an apostle and a disciple, according to this logic and according to this **movement of attraction to Jesus but also the movement of going forth from Jesus**.

It is a movement of convergence towards Jesus, above all **centripetal**, where the center draws in everything around it. The disciples are drawn in this sense by the central figure of their teacher.



Then there is a **centrifugal** movement, where the person of Jesus himself is the starting point. I am an Apostle by vocation: chosen yes, called yes, but to go forth and proclaim the Gospel.

Companionship...

Another Gospel passage lends itself very well to our reflection in this regard – Luke Chapter 10. Jesus first chooses another seventy-two disciples and then sends them out. How? He sends them two by two. What does this mean? That **the dimension of companionship is fundamental**. It is also constitutive in the mission; one does not go on mission as a free-lancer.

We go two by two, as companions among ourselves, so as not to remain alone, to keep each other company and to support each other, to help one another, to see better, because four eyes always see better than two, to work better if there is a need, because four arms are more sturdy and more vigorous. But they are sent two by two essentially because their company is not simply closed between them.

The disciples are sent on a mission in twos not only because they keep each other company and support each other, but also and above all because the Lord himself is in their midst. Being together they can be a place to receive him; they can finally benefit from one of the main promises of their teacher: *"Where two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*

So Jesus' promise in Matthew 18 can be fulfilled if two people ask, agree, put their hearts together and ask the Father for something in my name, he will certainly grant it. You are together in company, because only in company is it possible to enjoy, to benefit from Jesus' important promise: *"I am in the midst of them."* The teacher of Nazareth sends out his disciples, making them all Apostles, senders, missionaries. He sends them to every place and every city, telling them to enter the houses.

The secular mission

He did not send them into the desert or to a mountaintop or into caves as hermits. **He sent them into the cities to enter the houses**. As you can see, it is a mission that already has connotations that today we would say are typically lay. Paying attention to those to whom no one has ever given due attention, already this taking care, literally "taking charge": he put [the victim of robbers] on his

shoulders, put him on his horse, and incurred the costs of lodging, medications, and so on.

Jesus was secular not only in terms of Jewish religious customs. He was secular also in terms of Greek intellectual convictions, because at that time the Greeks had a great sense of taking care of... of whom?

Of yourself, take care of yourself, be concerned about yourself.

Instead of saying, take care of yourself, Jesus says: take care of them, feed them, carry them on your shoulders.

This new awareness of ourselves, of the value of ourselves, is important, not merely for our own sake but for others. Of course our "I" has value, of course we must safeguard it, but not for self-sufficiency, for self-referentiality. Today's mission is also placed in a cultural and historical situation that is certainly no longer that of two thousand years ago. Is this method still valid in today's historical, social and cultural situation? Today we live, as Pope Francis often insists, in a change of epoch. Pope Francis says that we do not live only in the epoch of change, but even in a change of epoch.

The most problematic sign, the clue, of this change of epoch consists in a kind of human metamorphosis, that is, in a change in our being and in our feeling of being human. Fifty years ago our grandparents, our fathers, our mothers, still felt like human beings, differently from how we feel today. They lived their humanity differently from how we are accustomed to living it. Today we are in an individual and collective crisis. This crisis of identity, both individual and collective, does not simply mean that we no longer know who we really are, who we must be, who we can be, it does not just mean that we are no longer rooted in our personal identity.

Think, for example, of certain very important issues that are open today in the global discussion. It happens not only here in Italy, but in Europe, and in North America above all: the so-called issue of gender, gender change. One is born male, yet in growing up has the impression of feeling female or vice versa. Or someone says: Maybe you are not female; you are male inside, in your mentality, and the

person believes it because of not having really discovered a fixed identity, and goes into crisis.

We are in an identity crisis not because our identity shrinks in some cases, but because, in other cases, we overestimate it, we make our identity grow out of all proportion, until of course it overpowers others, irreparably in cases of violence. We make our ego grow too much and we steal space from others, we steal space for our own ego that is in relationship with the ego of others, we steal space for ourselves. This is the identity crisis.

Behold me!

I'm thinking about the lesson of St. Paul. Already Saint Paul understood the crux for Jesus' disciples: no longer I, but he in me. I think of the patriarchs, the biblical prophets who said "*Behold me*," as well as the virgin of Nazareth who said to the angel of the annunciation, "*Behold me*."



What does "behold me" mean? It means the humble ability to turn one's name into the grammatical objective form. The nominative, in the grammar of the ancient languages Latin and Greek and the modern language of German, is the form that expresses the subject, the centrality of the subject. Each of us wants to express ourselves as subject and says "I."

Instead, the Bible does not say "I am ready." When one says "I am ready," there is something to discern well. For example, Jeremiah does not say I, and Moses also says: Why do you have to send me? Isaiah more courageously says "*behold me*," send me, that is, I am at the disposal of the Lord: "I place myself in your hands, behold me."

Only One can say "*I am*" and it is God, all others fall into the grammatical objective form: "*Behold me*," placing ourselves at the disposal of the Lord, putting ourselves in God's hand so that he can in some way make use of us, make us valuable, give us value.

In this epoch-making situation, a song – a real poem – seems emblematic. The song, *"The Word I,"* has always given me a lot to think about. In 2003 it was written and interpreted by an Italian singer-songwriter, Giorgio Gaber, now deceased. *"It is an idea that gradually makes its way into children" "sweet babble like an echo, a push to try the first steps toward an intimate certainty of themselves."*

You see that it is important, it indicates the children are becoming aware, building the foundations of their own identities, their I ." The child says this I : *"Over time the word I takes on a more precise tone. Sometimes it risks being annoying but it is also the sign of a childish logic, it is a recurring sin but still pardonable."* Children say I/me, but if it continues beyond childhood and one always means I, I, it indicates that we remain in that immature identity, not yet the full adult identity.

The full identity is to get to say, behold me, available for service. *"I, I, I is also the vice of the adolescent, yet if it does not get erased by age, in adults it strangely becomes more alarming and grows. The word "I" is a strange cry that tries in vain to hide the fear of being a nobody. It is an exaggerated and somewhat unhealthy need and calls up the poignant image of Narcissus."* Narcissus is that figure of Greek mythology who was so full of himself that he fell in love with his reflection everywhere. The result was that when he saw himself reflected in the bottom of a well he fell into it, drowned and died. *"I, I, I, I and again I. I'm vain, presumptuous, exhibitionist, conceited, boastful. I'm proud, megalomaniac, boastful, greedy and intrusive, disgusting swaggering, etc. This sweet innocent monosyllable is fatal when it runs rampant in the logic of the Western world. Perhaps it is the ultimate original sin."* This singer-songwriter openly declared himself an unbeliever but speaks of original sin as proof of the fact that sacred writing is the great code of our Western culture and even those who deny faith in God live it inside, are rooted in it. Truly, in the logic of the Western world, human beings now choose to repeat the ancient sin by putting themselves back in the place of God, what the singer-songwriter calls the last original sin, so that the human connotations are erased. We are not a self-portrait, we are images of the One who made us. If we wear the uniform of the

"I," we forget that we are the images of another, we think we are self-portraits. People who put themselves in the place of God do not gain a better place, but rather lose their own place and therefore lose their true identity.

In this regard Romano Guardini wrote an essay entitled "Accepting Oneself." He was an Italian priest-theologian but always lived in Germany in the first half of the 20th century. *"Rather than just being oneself, accepting oneself with open hands, one accepts oneself as coming from the Lord."*

Another poet, another singer-songwriter, the medieval Tuscan Cecco Angiolieri had said the same thing. You all certainly remember this *"If I were a fire."* If I were fire I would burn the world. If I were the king I would take all the beautiful women and would leave the ugly ones to others. If I were a father and had died, I would go first to my father and my mother to get my inheritance, etc..

The placing of self above all authority in the place of God induces the man to misunderstand the fundamental relationships with his father, his mother, and the women, and to break with everyone and everything, with other people, with his parents, with the whole world.

Today the mission is found primarily in this context. We have to deal with this type of human material, shrunk, curved, hunched over into itself, looking only at the self, and what about everyone else? Even our super civility of rights is set up according to this logic. Our rights only produce more rights that are contrary to other people's rights. I have the right not to have children therefore to have an abortion; but I must also have the right to have children, to be father or mother, to be, to possess, to have children. So I can also build them in test tubes, in laboratories, I can buy them for myself.

Light in the darkness

The mission takes place in a time that some call "eclipse of God," that is, God is no longer seen. Kant, a German philosopher of the late eighteenth century, said that God is so far away for



us that we lose sight of him. We realize that somewhere there is a sea always full of moist mists, perhaps in the mists of the North Sea. Kant lived in Prussia, so he was looking over the North Sea toward the Arctic. Faraway Greenland was known to be there, but it was immersed in the mists and no one saw it. There is an island in the mist, but it doesn't matter if you go there and doesn't matter if you have contact with that island. It's irrelevant; it's better not to be concerned about it and not to think about it. After Kant there were many others at the beginning of the 20th century, at the end of the 19th century.

Another German philosopher, Nietzsche, said that we have killed God, wiping the sun from our blackboard. In fact, he took a blackboard with him and drew the sun with the rays, then with a sponge he erased it and said: Here's how we killed him, and what did we get out of it? A blackboard, that is, a powerful night over us. We are alone in the night; that is what the eclipse of God means, the eclipse of the silence of God. Not only do we no longer see God, but we also no longer feel Him. We think we can no longer hear Him.

Think, for example, of the tragic experience of Jews in concentration camps. The Jews are the people of God. Many of them still had great trust in the Lord, yet many of them became atheists. Elie Wiesel, who died recently, wrote a short book about his experience of imprisonment at Auschwitz, entitled "Night." The night is the time of God's silence. One time they hanged a Jewish boy in Auschwitz and let him hang for many hours. A fellow prisoner said to Wiesel: You who are a philosopher and theologian, where is God? Tell me where God is, why is God silent, why is he not responding to our cry for help? But God is there hanging from the gallows, because God is that child.

This is the story of Jesus, and the disciple's mission is to resemble the teacher: "Go and do likewise." Like whom? Who did the right thing? Who has been put in whose place?

In this time of crisis, Jesus' brothers and sisters and disciples are called, even though it is a dark time, are called to see ourselves clearly. Soon we will say we are called to discernment. And then again to see within ourselves, that is, to understand what we are willing to do in the face of a world like this, and then to see beyond, to nourish the hope of a change in this same world.



The apostle Thomas wanted to see clearly, he wanted to put his hand on the pierced side of the master and not only because he was incredulous. He did it because he wanted to make contact with the situation, to see

clearly. Jesus himself invited him to see clearly, that is, to make contact with his wounds.

There is a beautiful picture of Caravaggio where Jesus grasps the hand of Thomas, which is drawing close to put a finger inside the wound on his side. It is not clear whether Jesus is cautioning against the intrusiveness of Thomas, blocking Thomas's wrist with his hand, or if he is guiding him, almost forcing Thomas to make contact with his wounded humanity. This appears more clearly in a mosaic portraying the same evangelical scene, in the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem. These mosaics, blackened by the pilgrims' candles, were only recently brought to light. I saw them and I understood that Jesus is taking the pulse. Jesus takes his wrist to make him do something. In a different mosaic, Peter is sinking in the middle of the water and Jesus saves him, taking him not by the hand, but by the wrist...

To see clearly and to see inside ourselves is Peter's attitude. And how do you see inside Peter? Pope Francis would say, with special glasses that are the glasses of shame, of tears. He began to cry: the tears that usually blur our sight, in that case became like lenses applied to our pupils, like magnifying glasses that allow us to see not outside ourselves, but within: our smallness, our human-ness, our neediness. And then, to see beyond oneself, that is the attitude of the great disciple of Jesus, the visionary, the seer par excellence, John to whom the Apocalypse is attributed. He is the one who sees beyond, the one who sees beyond appearances. If appearances are dramatic and tragic, like the victory of the serpent or the ancient dragon, in reality, beyond that one can see something new, the victory of the Lord.

In movement

In the end, what is the principal, fundamental, central core of our mission as disciples of Jesus today? I would say that it is movement, an energy swinging from pole to pole, that develops from one point to another. From one point to the other and vice versa, to and from.

The first movement is to get inside the other, it is to get inside the other to share the other person's condition, the other person's situation, to put our feet into the other person's shoes if they have them. Even if they have shoes, the shoes may not be the same size or form. How does one wear that type of uncomfortable, indeed painful shoes?

Getting inside the other means approaching, getting close to situations that we find in the cities where we live, in the houses we are sent to enter. Making ourselves present in the houses means in the places where others live in our own time, in our cities.

We cannot remain apart, we are like the yeast scattered within a large mass of dough to make it rise. We are like salt put inside a large mass of dough to give it flavor. This is what we are, and this is what is meant by the city, the houses, the situations of daily life, and by getting inside the other.

On the other hand, the other symmetrical movement is swinging back, **to bring the other in**. Bringing the other inside, this is the core of our mission, to go to where the other is, but also take the other inside of us: to share his/her situation, even if it is uncomfortable. To make the other person a part of our situation, which is perhaps more comfortable. In any case, the situation of those who know the Lord, of those who have shared with the Lord the experience of brotherhood/sisterhood, means making them savor and experience that great grace that is communion with the Lord. This means bringing the other in.

Discernment

To do all this requires the great effort of discernment. To get inside the other and to bring the other into us requires discernment, as Pope Francis insistently advised the Italian Church in November 2015, on the occasion of the fifth national ecclesial conference in Florence. To the delegates of the Italian churches who had gathered, Pope Francis gave precisely this first task: discernment. Also addressing young

people in the synod dedicated to them in 2018, he asked for a commitment to discernment, and likewise in speaking to consecrated persons, both religious and secular.

In "Gaudete et Exsultate" he set out the commitment to discernment, as simultaneously a **personal and a communal task**. Why is it simultaneously a personal and a communal task? Because it is a spirit-driven exercise, a spiritual exercise, in fact called spiritual discernment. However, that term applies to everything, even to material things, to what we call the ~~ph~~ysical" dimension of our being based in history. We are not sweetbreads, we are incarnate spirits, said Karl Rahner, a great theologian of the last century. This means that this personal and communal spirit requires us to make this sorting out, this discernment, to make this evaluation, to ponder the things in our lives that constitute our personal and communal life. The Spirit is in each of us already from our Baptism, but is also the soul that sustains the ~~we~~" that we belong to, the ecclesial community, and in our case, the secular institute of which we are members.

The Holy Spirit is in each of us and in all of us, meaning at work in us. This work of discernment is at the same time personal and communal. Of course discernment necessarily involves speaking with the Lord, the Spirit who is in us, and necessarily involves speaking among one another, because that same spirit that is in us is in our secular Institute, in our community, in our diocese, according to the levels where we live our discipleship. The workbench is ~~us~~" or the community, the group. Another great 20th-century Swiss theologian, also German-speaking, was Hans Urs von Balthasar. He spoke in this sense of an objective mysticism. Mysticism should not be subjective, like ecstasies, visions, intuitions. There is also an objective mysticism that is properly ecclesial, communitarian, where my intuitions must face the intuition of the other, and each of us becomes a verification of the other. The Holy Spirit is the measure of this verification, and I recognize the will of the Lord in the other, because I know that the Holy Spirit is in the other person, and the other person recognizes the will of the Lord in me, knowing that the Holy Spirit is also in me.

Where we meet then, that is the objective measure on which to agree, that is the direction to take together. If you want discernment, no

matter how spiritual an operation, no matter how Spirit-filled an exercise, it is still a lay reality, because it is a democratic, communitarian, interpersonal fact. Each of us is a person not only individually, but also in relationship with someone else and open to someone else, so that there is this exchange.

Our mission is really to go two by two or more than two, but having among us or agreeing between us to invoke the presence of the Lord. The situations can be many and even very different, different from each other and for those who live in France or in the Congo or somewhere I don't know. They are different for those who live in Cuneo or Trent compared to those who live in San Giovanni la Punta or San Cataldo, Palermo, Piazza Armerina, etc.

This means that the situations are different, but the method must be shared. The shape of water always changes, because water has this virtue of adapting to the shape of its container, but the substance of water remains constant. The form changes, but the water, even though it is a source of life, a necessary element for the life of all living beings, must be itself. I imagine that you will have the way to discuss this topic. Here is just some food for thought that can then be taken up within your individual companies.



Echoes and Images of the 2019 International Conference

The house of the Passionist Fathers of Mascalucia (Catania) in Sicily, from July 5 to 10, was the venue for the 2019 international conference of the Company of Saint Ursula.

They were days of formation and conversation, but above all of exchange of human and spiritual relationships with many sisters from Italy, Canada, France, Malta, Slovakia, England, the USA....

different

languages and traditions, but united together by Jesus Christ, our only Lover.

Mass was celebrated at the home of Venerable Lucia, followed by a choral concert led by Doctor Angela Patti, Lucia's niece and a member of the Company.



Our day of tourism took us up one desolate flank of Mount Etna.



We ate lunch in a mountainside restaurant in Etna Park.



Finally, we visited Taormina, an ancient town overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. It



happened to be the feast day of Taormina's patron and first bishop, St. Pancras.



***United together:
Encounters, Content, Emotions, Joys...
Experienced and Shared***



In Little Steps...

These words (title of the musical about Marianna Amico Roxas) seem to me to summarize well the atmosphere of the days we spent together at the international conference in Mascalucia (CT). They will provide responses especially

to the challenges / stimuli received from the various speeches.

Our President started the program with some questions to be taken up personally and in the Company. (See this report and the others in this same magazine.)

Bishop Fragnelli of Trapani said that vocation is never a possession, but a journey that unfolds throughout life, in a context of struggle and trials in which, however, we are certain that the Lord does not abandon us.

We had the great opportunity to pray at the tomb and to visit the places of our sister the Venerable Lucia Mangano, a woman in love with Jesus crucified, to whom she offered herself, especially for the sanctification of priests.

Prof. Marinella Sciuto helped us to immerse ourselves in our identity as women by speaking about “Vocation: Women in the Church and in Society Today.”

Don Massimo Naro helped us to understand how vocation, implying conversion, leads us to know ourselves and the Lord in truth; vocation is becoming what is in God's plan for us.

Vocation calls us to the radical experience of sisterhood in two stages: being with Jesus and walking with him (like the sisters of Bethany and the disciples of Emmaus). Discipleship means following him, and that leads us to listen, to welcome the other, whoever that may

be. From our sisterhood comes the mission. Jesus calls and sends the disciples two by two (in company, to help one another and to see and work better).

Strengthened by the exhortation of Saint Angela: "*Keep to the old way and live a new life*"... let us go forward together ***in small, possible and precise steps*** on the path of sisterhood and holiness!

Paola Cameroni



For me it was very moving...

to participate in the international conference in Sicily.

In this wonderful, marvelous experience, I met many sisters from various parts of the world. Getting to know them filled my heart with joy.

We shared intense and particular moments. I am very happy that St. Angela Merici has honored us in bringing us together for these days of formation and sharing.

Vita Maria (Marsala) Company of Palermo

I matched names and faces...

I lived unforgettable days, where I finally associated names with faces, prayed listening to different languages, united together, and shared human and spiritual experiences.



All the various presentations and the musical "In Little Steps," which recounted the life of the Venerable Marianna Amico Roxas, promoter of the charism of St. Angela in Sicily, were interesting. I felt the greatest emotion both in visiting the places where the Venerable Lucia Mangano lived among the children and the poor and in praying before her tomb, and also in participating in the concert directed by the teacher A. Patti, a longtime Ursuline, niece of the Venerable Lucia.

I thank the President and the Council and all those who have undertaken to organize these wonderful days of training and recreation in our land of Sicily. An affectionate greeting to all those present, and a worldwide embrace to those absent. See you at the next conference.

Antonella , Company of Agrigento

My first time at the international conference...

I wish to share my joy in participating for the first time in the International Conference, organized by the Company of St. Ursula, just one month after my admission to the Company, a great experience of grace.



Even though we came from many different countries, we breathed family air and together, in an atmosphere of friendship, we were able to share our ideas and experiences.

In addition to the presentations, I also enjoyed the musical presentation about the Venerable Marianna Amico Roxas, the visit to the places of the Venerable Lucia Mangano and the walks on Mount Etna and in Taormina.

Thank you for the welcome and commitment of all those who organized these days of conference.

Mariella (Ravanusa) Company of Agrigento

Opening ourselves to new horizons...

Again this year I had the opportunity to participate in the international conference organized by the Federation, an annual event that brings together Companies from around the world. Thanks to the Lover of us all for having inspired Saint Angela Merici to found the Company of Saint Ursula.

Through the various relationships and moments we experienced together, we felt the beauty of sisterhood.



We are called to welcome God, who daily enters into the history of each one of us, inviting each consecrated person to leave her own enclosure and open herself to new horizons.

Giuseppina (Company of Modena-Bologna)



A marvelous and happy Company...

The conference of the Daughters of St. Angela held in Sicily allowed me to experience five truly beautiful days in sisterly communion. I am happy to have had this experience, but above all to be part of this numerous,

wonderful and happy Merician Company.

Sara (Company of Caltagirone)

Reunited... mothers, daughters, and sisters...

Once again, the Company of St. Ursula celebrated its international conference in collaboration, joy and sisterhood. These days have seen the gathering of mothers, daughters and sisters from various countries.

The various speakers made us reflect on important topics. I heard the testimonies written about two venerable women: Lucia Mangano and Marianna Amico Roxas; I understood even more the beauty of being consecrated in the world.

During the beautiful days together, we had the opportunity to see the extraordinary nature of the volcano Mt. Etna and to observe the ingenuity of the Greek theatre of Taormina. The various experiences, emotions and sharings will help me on the spiritual journey within my Company.



Liliana (Company of Agrigento)

A conference with every detail well-prepared



We were treated to a very warm welcome from our sisters in Sicily and it soon became clear how much work had been put into planning such a splendid, balanced programme for us to enjoy, with every detail considered.

We were presented with a pack to guide us on our journey: brochures, books and gifts to remember the time we spent together on this beautiful island.

So a huge thank you to all our sisters in Sicily, particularly Enza and Aurora for everything you gave us. I for one will never forget this time together. Thank you!

At our first evening meal, it was wonderful to meet up with so many of our sisters from around the world.... Warm greetings shared and time to catch up with news since our meeting last year.

On the first day I was asked to read at morning prayer, which made me feel involved immediately, not just a spectator.

After breakfast our President Valeria Broll gave her opening address by invoking blessings from Sicily's two Venerable daughters, Lucia Mangano (1883-1947) and Marianna Amico Roxas (1896-1946), both our sisters in the Company of St Ursula. They too lived their lives in the world, in the Church and in the Company, in the service of others.

Valeria then went on to talk about the title of the Conference, –Called by Faith to a Holy Life” (Tim 1:9), recalling our role in living these words: to live our mission in the Church and the world.

She called us to study secular consecration according to the charism of St. Angela and to grow in awareness of our own identity.

She prompted us to undertake formation and spirituality and to ‘foster growth in sisterly communion through meetings and shared experiences.

Moreover, we were urged to revisit our vocation, our call, our mission, our sisterhood our being women and being women consecrated in the Church, living as true spouses of the Most High taking this back to our Companies and Groups'. It was a truly inspiring address, lifting our hearts to a joyful response to the call of God in our daily lives, for which we are very grateful. Thank you so much, Valeria.

Later we visited the beautiful Chapel of the Shrine of Our Lady the Sorrowful Virgin for Mass, which was very poignant for me, as the son of my sister in St. Angela in our group in England was being ordained to the priesthood at exactly the same moment in our Cathedral at home. My thoughts, prayers, and Mass intentions were for them on their very special day.



The theme of the speaker of the day, the Most Rev. Bishop Pietro Fragnelli, was “Vocation: Grace and Liberty”.

In the evening we were treated to a musical biography, “~~In~~ Little Steps” by Michele Albano. This was based on the life of Marianna Amico Roxas, who brought the Company to San Cataldo, Sicily, in 1912. The cast joined us at our table for supper afterwards, which was delightful.

Following morning praise and breakfast on Sunday, Professor Marinella Sciuto presented a talk on “Vocation: Women in the Church and Society today”.

After lunch we departed for San Giovanni La Punta to visit the sites of Venerable Lucia Mangano. We were shown around her home and bedroom, whilst our Sicilian sisters told us the story of her life. Later our Eucharistic celebration was held outside her chapel in a very Italian‘ courtyard.

In the same setting we were treated to a most enjoyable concert by the choir of Angela Patti, whilst at the same time came the aroma of pizza cooking from a house nearby and fireworks somewhere adding to

the atmosphere, sense of well-being and peace with the world. An excellent end to a wonderful day.

On Monday, Father Massimo Naro gave an interesting presentation on “Vocation: Mission, Brotherhood / Sisterhood in the Light of the Gospel”.



That evening our sisters offered amusing presentations for the gathering. You would think that would not be such an easy task given the language differences. However, it was great fun and left us all in high spirits. Following this was a sharing of hugs, smiles and slaps on the back — no words needed.

The final day we took a trip up Mount Etna, which was wonderful and a little scary at the same time, with the awesome power of God’s creation. The day ended with a splendid lunch on the side of the mountain followed by a visit to Taormina.

To conclude, a huge thanks to all who in any way contributed to this very successful get-together.

I had the very best time, with a strong sense of being with my family, my people, belonging closely together in Jesus and St. Angela.

Marie Worden, England





*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* (Last Counsel, 1)

The President reminds us:

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- **Visit and use our website:**
www.istitutosecolareangelamerici.org ;
 - **Visit the Cmis website (www.cmis-int.org)**
 - **Visit the Ciis website (www.ciisitalia.it)**
 - **For the Italian sisters it could be good to subscribe to the magazine “INCONTRO”** (annual subscription for 25€ for mailing within Italy; 30€ abroad; postal code c.c.p. n. 55834717 addressed to C.I.I.S. Conferenza Italiana Istituti Secolari)
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Privacy: How to adapt?

On May 25, 2018, the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) took effect, that is, the European regulation n. 679 of 2016 regarding treatment, circulation, and protection of personal data. It involves a European Union law and, as such, is directly applicable and does not need to be adopted by any norms at the national level.

The Federation is asking members and all readers to take a look at the information about the treatment of personal data, which can be found in Italian on the following pages, and to return a signed copy to consent. The text of the consent can also be downloaded from the Federation's website: www.istitutosecolareangelamerici.org.

The following document, acknowledged by signature, can be sent
by means of email to: valeriabroll@gmail.com
or by means of registered mail to the following address:
Broll Valeria loc. Gheghe, 2 38050 S. Orsola Terme-Trento - Italia

INFORMATION ABOUT TREATMENT OF PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

The personal data of the user are used by the SECULAR INSTITUTE OF SAINT ANGELA MERICI FEDERATION, which is the owner responsible for the treatment of it, in respect to the principles of protection of personal data established by Regulation GDPR 2016/679 and according to national law.

WAYS AND PURPOSES OF THE TREATMENT OF THE DATA

- Information that is given will be treated with the support of the following means:
On paper

With the following purpose: sending of communications of courtesy and/or promotional/informative material

In particular, for the specified purpose the data of the user will be treated ONLY with the specific acceptance of consent:

- *Sending of communications and/or informative material*

☐ accept ☐ not accept

LEGAL FOUNDATION

- *The legal foundation on which the treatment of common data is based, according to Art. 6 of the Regulation GDPR, is:*

- *Consent:*

The society treats the discretionary data of the user on the basis of consent, whether through explicit approval of the present privacy policy and in relation to the ways and purposes described.

CATEGORIES OF RECIPIENTS

- *Thos in custody of data remaining for the communications necessary to fulfill legal and contractual obligations, all the data gathered beyond what is specific to the following categories of recipients:*

- *Typographic and postal services;*

Furthermore, in the management of one's data, the data may come to the awareness of those in the following categories of persons authorized and/or responsible within and outside, designated for registrations, and of those to whom specific written instructions about the treatment of data are furnished:

TRANSFER OF PERSONAL DATA AMONG THIRD COUNTRIES

No transfer expected

PERIOD OF RETENTION

The period of retention of the data is: The data will be treated for whatever time is necessary for the carrying out of the current commercial relationship and for ten years after the acquisition of the data itself.

RIGHTS OF THE PERSON INVOLVED

- *In the sense of the European Regulation 670/2016 (GDPR) and according to national law, the person involved can, according to the ways and limits anticipated by the norms, exercise the following rights:*

- to request confirmation of the existence of personal data that they may look at (right of access of the persona involved – Art. 15 of Regulation 679/2016);
 - to know the source;
 - to receive understandable communications;
 - to have information about the rationale, the ways, and the purpose of the treatment;
 - to request updating, correction, addition, cancellation, change to anonymous form, blockage of data that have been treated illegally, compression therein of data no longer necessary to follow through on the purpose for which it was gathered (right of correction and cancellation – Arts. 16 and 17 of Regulation 679/2016);
 - right to limit and/or oppose the treatment of the data that they may see (Art. 18 of Regulation 679/2016);
 - right to revoke;
 - right to the portability of the data (Art. 20 of Regulation 679/2016);
 - In the case of treatment based on consent, the right to receive one's own data that one had previously furnished to the responsible person, in a form that is formatted and legible by a computer and in a form commonly used by electronic system;
 - right to present a claim to the supervisory Authority (right of access by the person involved – Art. 15 of Regulation 679/2016);
 - The owner responsible for the treatment of one's personal data is the SECULAR INSTITUTE OF SAINT ANGELA MERICI FEDERATION FEDERAZIONE Association, p.iva 09007730173, c.f. 09007730173
 - Email: fed.comp_2016@libero.it
- Broll Valeria, c.f. BRLVLR52S68G452K**
loc. Gheghe, 2 38050 S. Orsola Terme-Trento - Italia
- Email: valeriabroll@gmail.com
 - Telefono: 3381369530

The undersigned, identified below, declares that she has received complete information about the meaning of Art. 13 of the European Union Regulation 2016/679 and according to national law, and expresses her consent to the treatment and the communication of her personal data with specific regard to the particulars of the limitations in this treatment herein described, for the purpose and the duration detailed in this information.

Date: _____

Personal name & Family name – signature:
