

## THE FOUNDING OF THE COMPANY OF ST. URSULA, BETWEEN HISTORY AND THE PRESENT

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First of all, in these calamitous times, I would like to wish a happy anniversary to the great family of the secular and religious Ursulines, celebrating the 485th anniversary together.

The topic that has been assigned to me, "The Founding of the Company of St. Ursula: Between History and the Present," is extremely fascinating but at the same time so vast that it can be taken as a paradigm of the more general problems that have besieged women over the centuries. This fact derives from its being a "middle way," a "third state," and therefore a bridge between earth and heaven, between two opposing needs: between the needs of the world, of the society where one lives and works, and what one reaches for in becoming a spouse of the Son of God.

It is an extraordinary story because, since its inception, the Company of St. Ursula has been a sign of scandal, outside its historical time because it was founded when the spaces of social action for women were already closing. The fact that it took root was possible only because of the reputation for holiness and the charismatic spirit of the founder, Angela Merici (1474/76-1540). But it is also the story of strong, adaptable women, able to act and make an impact by adapting to the societies in which they have lived, even as they lived in strict fidelity to the Merician message, scrupulously preserved. Like an underground river, that message has periodically resurfaced over the centuries.

Considering the limited time available for this complex history, we will consider the founding core of the values that have determined Ursuline identity over the centuries, trusting that this sip from the well of charism can provide useful elements to interpret and operate in today's complex reality.

It all began on November 25, 1535, the feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria, when Angela Merici and her companions founded the Company of St. Ursula. We have little information about this foundational event, so we do not know exactly where or how it took place; only art has immortalized the atmosphere of mystical exaltation that surrounded this moment.





Let us begin with the famous painting by Romanino that celebrates the foundation, exalting two characteristic aspects of the newborn Company<sup>1</sup>: the **eschatological** one: the celebration of espousal to Christ, here symbolized by the mystical marriage of St. Catherine; the **programmatic** symbolized by St. Ursula, who seems to give the banner to the elderly Angela, almost pushing her toward the new way, the way of both consecration and martyrdom. The allusion to martyrdom appears with the crown of St. Catherine, placed between the blades on the wheel of her martyrdom.

<sup>1</sup>Girolamo Romanino (1484-87-1560). *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, with Saint Lawrence, Saint Ursula, and Saint Angela Merici*. Brooks Memorial Gallery of Memphis. The work summarizes all the Merician symbolism and constitutes a sort of “manifesto” of the Company of Saint Ursula. Saint Catherine, kneeling at the center, receives the wedding ring from the Child Jesus, seated on Mary’s lap. On the left, in a sort of shadow, illuminated only from a distant, fading light source, is Saint Lawrence. He is a clear allusion to the vicar general who had approved the Rule in place of Cardinal Francesco Cornaro, who was almost always absent from the Diocese of Brescia. On the right, slightly in the background, are Saint Angela dressed as a Tertiary Franciscan and Saint Ursula holding the banner, seeming to point out to Angela the new way to undertake.





The other painting, which we see here in the seventeenth-century version kept in the lower church of the Sanctuary of St. Angela in Brescia, conveys to us the Company's self-perception, representing itself as in a renewed female Pentecost with Angela sitting in the center. She displays the Rule to the virgins, while Holy Spirit descends on this new community. This painting gives iconographic form to the words of the faithful secretary Gabriele Cozzano, who presented the first Ursulines as the first fruits of the Holy Spirit, and as many sparks in the darkness of the world. Among them Angela was like a sun that gave light to all the others. She was like a fire, a conflagration of love that set them alight. She was like a throne for God, which instructed them; indeed, the Son of God sat in her and did everything with her.





To broaden our vision to another symbolic moment that identifies the Ursuline family, let us turn to the vision of the mystical ladder that foreshadowed the young Angela's destiny. We immediately realize that we are in the presence of a unique moment in the history of female spirituality.



In one study, Angela Merici's Vision at Brudazzo, An Iconographic Study (International Center of Merician Studies - [www.angelamerici.it](http://www.angelamerici.it) ), Mother Colette



Lignon, former Mother General of the Ursulines of the Roman Union, discussing a picture of Angela's vision found in the Chapel of St. Michael of the former Ursuline convent of Tours (17th century), in the form of two engravings from the German region, shows how already in the 18th century Angela's ladder was compared to Jacob's 2.

This world, then, knows how to use admirably the symbolic power of artistic communication to transmit aspects of Merician charism that historically identify Ursuline pride and particular identity. Let's summarize them briefly before delving into Merician writings.

**With the juxtaposition** of Angela's vision with Jacob's ladder, the foundation of the Company of Saint Ursula is read as a new covenant, no longer between God and his People, but between God and Woman. **With the celebration** of mystic espousal with Christ, an eschatological destiny is exalted, without hiding the difficulties of every Ursuline's daily life, with the reminder that the final destiny may come between the wheels of martyrdom. Finally, and this is no small thing, the Holy Spirit descends **on this new path of consecration** as in a new Pentecost for women. Forgive me if I digress, but it occurs to me spontaneously to think that we are in the presence of such a high vision of the dignity of being feminine that it surpasses even the most radical feminism.

Let us now see how these charismatic aspects are well defined in the Merician writings. The entire first part of the Prologue of the Rule is a masterpiece of enthusiasm and eloquence in enunciating the specific characteristics of the new Merician way. It opens with the description of the greatness of the gift received with the Company of St. Ursula becoming spouses of the Son of God, spouses of the Most High – and closes with the reward in heaven, where they will be glorious queens. A very modern feature is the constant emphasis on the individual role and on that singular gift received which immediately attributes to these women a new and admirable dignity as they are chosen to be true and chaste spouses of the Son of God.

Already in the first paragraph, Ursuline spirituality and social relationships are being characterized in this way, with surprising modernity, as a dialectical synthesis of two separate dimensions with equal dignity: **the first is markedly individual** (God has granted you individually the grace of setting you apart from the darkness of this

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<sup>2</sup> The original engravings, now in the General Archive of the Ursulines of the Roman Union (AGUUR). They are signed by German engravers, one by Rugendas, the other by Göz and Klauber.



miserable world); **the second is collective**, that is, uniting you together to serve his divine Majesty. In this duality resides the nature of that singular gift that marks Ursuline spirituality and social structure and that overturns social hierarchies eschatologically in the heavens. Therefore, the individual's choice expressed in the choice to consecrate one's existence to God is not enough; to be true spouses of the Son of God and glorious queens in heaven, it is indispensable that she be inserted in the community path outlined by the Rule. For the founder and her group, the Rule was not a simple way of perfection, but **the way of perfection par excellence** desired and inspired by Jesus Christ himself, who imposed on the reluctant Angela the foundation of the "company of spouses of Jesus," as they would later describe themselves in the Ritual.

By now close to death, Angela would write in the Last Legacy: Hold this for certain: that this Rule has been planted directly by his holy hand, and he [Jesus Christ] will never abandon this Company as long as the world lasts.



Cozzano is even more explicit in the Epistles: "God inspired and at the same time constrained our Mother foundress to plant and found this sacred rule of life in her own name.... And although the Company had been inspired in her from an early age, ...she never wanted to begin it until it was commanded by Jesus Christ, until he cried out to her in her heart, and until he pushed and forced her to begin and found it." And a little further on, asserting her authorship: "It was written by my own hand, and the whole composition was mine. But the meaning came from the Holy Spirit, dictated by the Foundress."

So the beginning of the ideal upward path outlined by Angela is the "call" to the new and particular way of perfection in the world (chosen to be true and virginal spouses of the Son of God). The high "nobility" of this state, which existed in the Early Church but was forgotten for many centuries, must be understood in its intrinsic value in order to be followed. This explains the Prologue's heartfelt appeal to "**recognize**" what is already prefigured as a new state: first of all to recognize what such a thing implies, and what a new and astonishing dignity it is. This recognition guides the free choice to remain faithful to the state of consecration one has undertaken, seeking the ways and means necessary to persevere to the end, remaining faithful to the way outlined by the Rule.

Now, in the case of the Company of St. Ursula, the Rule did not prescribe, nor could it prescribe, the making of any vow, but provided simple indicators of a path that necessarily remained individual. That is why the Merician writings strongly emphasize spiritual effort on a path that necessarily remained individual, rather than on forcing anything.

Thus exhortation is the tone most frequently used, as is evident in one of the key aspects, Obedience, which is expressed in seven well-known points: first to the divine commandments, then to the Church, then to spiritual authorities (bishop, spiritual father, governors of the Company), then to natural authorities (father, mother, and other household superiors), then to civil authorities, to the dictates of one's own conscience following the inspirations that the Holy Spirit continually sends, and finally to God and to every creature for the love of God.

For poverty: Finally we exhort each one to embrace poverty, not only effective poverty of temporal things, but above all true poverty of spirit.



In the same way, perseverance in the virginal state must not be based on a bond contracted by a vow, but by free and continuous interior choice. Each one should want to preserve sacred virginity, not making a vow on account of any human persuasion, but voluntarily making to God the sacrifice of her own heart. Free choice, certainly to be reaffirmed continuously because it is not bound by solemn vows, though it is also perpetual, amounts to the willingness to face martyrdom, like the first Christian martyrs. Further, each one should be willing to die rather than ever consent to stain and profane such a sacred jewel.

Thus, the Company is defining itself in relation to the primary goal it intends to pursue: to bring these chosen virgins to nuptial union with Christ, strengthening their virtues so that they may please Jesus Christ, their Spouse. This is the unique, great goal that justifies the Company; the charitable, educational, and apostolic activities are ways of individual perfection, not the Company's goals. So, if the goal is nuptial union, it will be love that will shape every internal relationship, and the foundational concept for the structures of the Company's government motherhood. Angela linked the governance to transcendence, saying it comes from Christ Himself: it was he who chose her to be the mother, living and dead, of this noble Company.

This is the source of what has been defined as the pedagogy of love: "Be gentle and compassionate to your dear daughters," she recommends in the Second Precept, for the more you esteem them, the more you will love them, the more you will care for and watch over them.

The solicitude of maternal love became the norm, guiding and inspiring the relationships in this new family, which in this phase could only be spiritual, since the members still depended materially on their natural families. Thus the institutional form was characterized by a different approach to the individual, based on a new pedagogy, attentive to psychological understanding, accompanying voluntary choice. This is why there was also talk of a new social model inspired by the Early Church, with a strong emphasis on the solidarity that had to be established among the sisters. Addressing the colonelle (the superiors of the quadrants into which the Company was divided), Angela invited them to be solicitous and vigilant to know the spiritual and temporal needs of the dear daughters entrusted to them (Fourth Counsel). This concept is essential: the Ursulines were entrusted to the Company only in the sense that it must guide them towards the common goal. Faithful to her Christian humanism, Angela did not want the



institution to overwhelm the individual, but left her daughters in constant possession of free will.

If the purpose of the Company is to form and accompany Christ's spouses by fortifying them, the ways in which it works are those of an active life in the world at the active service of the Church, a total and absolute point of reference, "Keep to the ancient way and custom of the Church, established and confirmed by so many saints under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And live a new life." The profound meaning of this heartfelt appeal, and live a new life, is a constant journey of interior renewal, in a contemplation of the divine that is poured out in the service of renewing the Church and society.



We now come to the significance of the Company's dedication to St. Ursula. Incorporating some characteristic elements of the cult of St. Breton at the end of the fifteenth century, Angela and her group declared the orientation of their values: the "new virgins" of St. Ursula, pilot of a renewed ecclesia that sails in the stormy sea of corruption and Lutheran division, constituted the vanguard of a Company willing to bear witness to the Gospel even to "martyrdom," brought about through a consecrated life at work in the world.



We like to think of Angela, stopping in Venice on her return from the Holy Land, thoughtfully contemplating the canvases dedicated to the saint's life and martyrdom that Vittore Carpaccio had painted between 1490 and 1495 for the Scuola di Sant'Orsola in Venice. In the eyes of her contemporaries she was also beginning to assume the prophetic values then associated with the cult of St. Ursula.

In iconography Ursula is generally on a ship as a pilot, with a salvific meaning. In legend and iconography the ecclesiological component is prominent, with bishops and cardinals portrayed under her cloak, and often the mast replaced by the crucifix, signifying the active role of woman in the renewal of the Church.

This juxtaposition of the new virgins with the original virgin martyrs had already been emphasized in Moretto's paintings, but it is strongly taken up and relaunched explicitly in the altarpiece of the oratory of St. Ursula in Chiari.



This important painting summarizes the entire universe of Ursuline values. The upper part is dedicated to the celebration of the spouse with Christ through the representation of the mystical marriage of St. Catherine of Alexandria, with little angels who, connecting the heavenly upper register to the human lower register, crown both St. Ursula's virgins, holding the red banner of the blood of martyrdom (in heaven we will be queens) and "new virgins" grouped behind Angela, who holds the white banner symbolizing purity.

And it is precisely this painting, taken up and replicated in multiple forms and in multiple places where the Ursulines have spread, that brings us back to the initial point: the activist value of the contemplative life in the world practiced in the Company. This is Angela's heroic martyrdom. This is the martyrdom she asks of her Company: to keep faith with its own values, with its own choices even in dark moments, not passively but actively.

In Angela's time heroic martyrdom consisted of challenging prevailing ideas, conventions and prejudices, even in ecclesiastical circles, opening a new and revolutionary way of consecration. As her detractors would reproach her after her death, this was a way that had not been attempted even by the great religious founders like St. Benedict, St. Clare, or St. Francis. Perhaps today's form of martyrdom means operating in a society that has taken profit as its core value, which requires reducing human beings to consumers. Its conceptual horizon is the benefits of technology. Today perhaps the greatest obstacle we have to overcome is not so much social ostracism. Perhaps it is to challenge the widespread indifference about everything that has human destiny (not only supernatural) at heart. In this work, may your secular educational wisdom also help you.



## IN THESE PERILOUS AND PESTILENTIAL TIMES

CARLA OSELLA

Brescia, 25. November 1535 – 2020  
485eme anniversaire de la Fondation

Today we celebrate 485 years since the Merician foundation, a long story of fidelity built day after day by Angela's daughters of yesterday and today.

Each one of us, in all parts of the world, has contributed to build this story. We are remembering this Ursuline anniversary at the same time we are experiencing the second phase of the coronavirus, also called the new plague, which has thrown the world into fear.

There is a phrase of St. Angela that could be suitable for the times we are living through: "In these perilous and pestilential times" (Seventh Counsel).

In her time war was distressing all of Europe, which was being ripped apart by religious and political conflicts. The Church was in a moral crisis, which contributed to make religion a set of practices closer to superstition than to faith. In Rome the Borgias ruled and in Florence the Medici. Bishoprics were coveted on the basis of monies that could be collected there. The Church was experiencing great difficulty also because of Martin Luther's protest.

In this period of serious distress, Angela suggested to her daughters what to do: "You will find no other recourse than to take refuge at the feet of Jesus Christ." This beautiful expression, "to take refuge," means to live in a place where nothing can penetrate. It makes us think of bomb shelters, a housing solution to avoid the contamination of radiation, evil, death. Taking refuge to be safe – this expression is being used a great deal in recent months – to be safe, but let us add: "With Jesus Christ."

We can read Angela's words in comparison with Psalm 27:  
The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom should I fear?  
The LORD is my life's refuge;



of whom should I be afraid?

Being in the shelter means living in a different dimension, both internally (safe with God) and externally (obliged to wear a mask and to observe what is required of us, which is really an act of love toward others). And still feeling in our hearts what Moses said to the people as they crossed the Red Sea: "Do not fear! Stand your ground and you will see the victory the Lord will win for you today," and "The Lord will fight for you; you have only to keep still" (Ex. 14:13-14).

Therefore, strength and security come through faith, not alone, but with Him.

We know that it is not easy to be followers of Jesus and therefore Merician women, but it is necessary to be so in the places of our family life, work and service: never lower your sights, so that the common good may increase in us and around us. Today the true identity of the Ursuline, secular or religious, is prophecy, transformation of the "here and now."

On this theme Pope emeritus Benedict XVI has pointed out some elements: "Every true prophecy comes from an intimate communion with God; only the light of His face can give the illumination which makes it possible to discern true from false and to show people the right way."

Saint Angela asks each one of us, in the name of Jesus, to walk the Merician road that she walked first, to have him as our only treasure and to abandon ourselves to the Holy Spirit (above all, to obey the counsels and inspirations that he continually sends into our hearts), who makes us see the new that is germinating in the Church today and invites us to take risks on roads not yet travelled.

It is important to have a prophetic awareness of wisdom, which leads us to create ways for our lives to be transparent and render "honor to Jesus Christ."



She asks us to live as true and virginal spouses of the Son of God and repeats, "Do not lose heart" (Fifth Counsel 39). Around us we see people who live in fear, because of both illness and economic insecurity, and often we do not have enough courage to overcome the pain and we are convinced that we will not make it. This increases fragility, and we must be present in it.

And we, daughters of a great mystic like our foundress, how should we act? Learn to read the signs of the times through the lens of wisdom, and see God's "new thing" that is being offered to us: "Read this period with the eyes of faith, see what the Lord wants to tell us. He calls through the events of history and the experience of the world and of humanity" (From the Message of the Bishops of Campania).

We have a clear role: to be on the side of God and our brothers and sisters in accord with the parable of the Good Samaritan: "He passed nearby, saw him and had compassion."

Angela attracted everyone with her steadfast faith; therefore the invitation is to be women of faith, able to sow hope, to generate hope!

We can do this only if we live it in small daily gestures. We "spouses of the Son of God" are called to leave traces of God in lost and afflicted human hearts. To succeed, we must be mystics with eyes wide open, totally given to the action that God asks us to carry out: to be present in the history of today!

And Angela invites us to "place their hope and love in God alone" (Fifth Counsel).

Looking at Jesus' works and his words, which have had great social and political influence over the centuries, his goal was to bring about the Kingdom of God through justice, peace, truth, his great love for all until death: this was his great revolution.



We are called to be true and virginal spouses of the Son of God in fidelity to him, to his Word, and to the support of our brothers and sisters in daily life. A medieval saying goes:

"The virtuous walk,  
the wise run,  
lovers fly"  
and spouses can do nothing but fly together, FOREVER!



## November 25, 2020 - Homily of the Bishop of Brescia

MONS. PIERANTONIO TREMOLADA

### 485th anniversary of the foundation of the Company of St. Ursula

We celebrate this Eucharist in remembrance of an event of great importance not only for the various families of the spiritual daughters of Saint Angela Merici, but for the entire Church and, in particular, for the Church of Brescia, which venerates Saint Angela Merici as its co-patroness.

On November 25, 1535, feast of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Saint Angela Merici founded the Company of Saint Ursula. Let us try, then, to turn to the Word of God that we have heard. Let us try to do so beginning with the celebration of this anniversary and let us be enlightened and instructed by this teaching.

The passage from the Book of Revelation that we heard in the first reading presents us with an evocative vision. It describes the assembly of the redeemed, who are the victors: "I also saw a sea of crystal mixed with fire. Those who had overcome the beast, his image and the number that signified his name, stood on the sea of crystal." These victors, who stand as a sign of authority and triumph, also have divine lyres and sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, the song that was raised to God at the crossing of the sea and the deliverance, and then the song of the Lamb. This song, however, is new: "Great and wondrous are your works, O Lord, God Almighty. Righteous and true are your ways, O Ruler of the Nations." It is the song of the redeemed, the victors.

The redeemed of the earth stand on a sea of crystal. It is a grand scenario, the ultimate one, reminding us of what will happen at the end, when we will witness the final manifestation of the glory of the risen Christ. However, the link with history remains: what will happen at the end must recall what has happened during the history of these individual persons, but also of these persons taken all together. They are the redeemed of the various generations, of the various epochs. They are those who have borne witness with a life that has shown how it is possible to overcome everything that tends to compromise it, to contaminate it, to make it lose the transparency of grace.

The passage from Luke's Gospel speaks of this same story. The story is presented with its dramatic events and, above all, with its persecutions. Believers are persecuted and suffer. It is indeed the history of the Church, which in the various epochs has had to suffer violence on the part of those who did not submit to the one who would challenge



their way of life in the name of the glorious Christ. This Gospel passage also emphasizes the importance of witness. Persecution is an opportunity to bear witness and to remain persevering: "By your perseverance you will save your life." We are therefore called to live in history, each one in our own era, with this task, which then also becomes the meaning of our whole life: to bear witness to the Gospel and to show how the Gospel is the leaven of the life of humanity, capable of redeeming it from every power that corrupts it and transforming it into a song of praise to the Lord of glory.

Here, then, it is important to return to our anniversary. We are in a very precise epoch of history, the year 1535, on a precise day, November 25, and a precise feast day, Saint Catherine of Alexandria. On this day, on this feast day, Saint Angela carried out a work that would mark history and that acquired the form of witness. She founded the Company of St. Ursula, which would give shape to a life of consecration no longer in cloisters, but in the world. A true revolution in the way of understanding female consecration.

She founded a Company. The term companionship is a beautiful one, since it alludes to a double presence: that of God – the company of God – and that of the persons among them, that is, the sisters, that is, a sisterhood which, however, did not necessarily include a common residence, as was the case for communities of consecrated life up to that time. Each would have had her own life path. One felt oneself to be a sister, one had to feel like one, but not necessarily sharing the same house. This Company would be given a Rule, regulating a life that is totally directed towards the service of the Church and the world in the name of Christ. It is a testimony of life, a way of proclaiming the Gospel through a style of existence that is defined by the Rule, the Rule of the Company. The secret of all this, from what we can glean from Saint Angela's writings, is espousal to Christ, that is, as she herself said, the primacy of living Love, love above all for Christ the Spouse.

As has rightly been written, "Perfection for Saint Angela is not the perfection of moral virtues, even though the virtues are necessary to achieve this perfection. Perfection consists in union with Christ, in being his spouse."

A form of mysterious and intimate commitment, which then becomes espousal. A powerful mystical experience, and yet nuptial love then becomes the highest expression of a fully human love, which opens itself to all. A free, intense, incarnate, passionate love.



Spousal love is accompanied by motherhood. In fact, this charism that is kindled allows the witness of faith to take on the form of a unique form of maternity, completely new, which would not end even with bodily death, said St. Angela herself. Angela spoke of maternity towards her spiritual daughters, but first of all the maternity of these same daughters, together with her, towards all those people, especially young girls, whom she met in the service she carried out in the name of the Lord in the world. The style of this motherhood is gentleness and sweetness:

Willingly strive to lead them with love and with a mild and kindly hand, and not imperiously, not harshly, but in everything, willingly be gentle. Pay attention to Jesus Christ who says: 'learn from me, he says, that I am gentle and meek of heart.' And above all, be on your guard not to want to get anything done by force, because God has given free will to everyone, and wants to force no one. I do not say, however, that it will not be necessary occasionally to use reproaches and severity, at the place and time, according to the importance, condition and need of the persons, but we must be moved solely by charity and by the sole zeal for souls.

Hers is also an action of redemption and promotion of the condition of women at that time and at the same time an action of renewal of society, precisely through the regenerating witness of the charity offered by women. In this, too, she opened up a new path. This required, together with a truly prophetic intuition, a great deal of courage.

In a speech he gave to the daughters of St. Angela in Rome on August 27, 1966, St. Paul VI stressed the importance of this experience in the perspective of sanctification: "In this way you sanctify yourselves, but in this way you also sanctify others." This is a statement that outlines a missionary perspective and brings out another characteristic of the charism of St. Angela and her daughters: apostolate. "The Company of St. Angela," says St. Paul VI, "is not closed in on itself. It was conceived as a launch, as we say today, as a push, as a commitment to the world around us. You were born for an apostolate, an apostolate exercised without well determined works, entirely new for that time, very much entrusted to the creativity of each in sisterhood with the others." "A Church which goes forth," says Pope Francis. All this is in harmony with this apostolate that distinguishes the charism: espousal, maternity, apostolate. There is an inheritance, then, that St. Angela hands on to you above all, her spiritual daughters, but also to our Church of Brescia, which loves her very specially, and to the entire universal Church. She is handing on a mystical experience of Christ's love, a spiritual falling-in-



love, which should distinguish every soul and to which St. Angela's daughters are called to give clear witness. May they help us in this! May they help us to live in love with Christ the Lord!

She also bequeathed to us, as a legacy, a heart animated by a desire for good for all, by the missionary impulse that led her to care for people by being among them, at their side, accompanying them, sharing with them, listening to them. Getting close so as to reach out to them erases all distance to make the charity of Christ felt. It also teaches us to be in the world without being of the world, therefore, as salt, as leaven, as light that overcomes darkness. She also teaches us to give special attention to the weakest and recommends that we take seriously the priority of education. "We are convinced," St. Paul VI also says in that speech (he always used the first person plural as he was aware of the distinction between his person and the figure of the Pope), "that the Company of St. Angela, if it knows how to respond truly to one of its native, inherent vocations, is most modern and very contemporary." I was amazed by this clear and strong statement, which I also share.

To you, dear Daughters of St. Angela, to you, dear Ursuline families in the world, and to us as Church, falls the task of confirming these words of St. Paul VI. It would be nice to understand in what sense and in what way this charism is truly relevant for our girls and our young women, in view of a form of consecration which the Church surely needs. It would be nice to understand what form the great charism that St. Angela Merici aroused in the Church takes today and to transform it into a proposal for new generations. This is a task that we may have to take on. May the Spirit of God help us to do it for the good of God's Church!

