



# URSULINE EDUCATION





25 November 2011  
Feast of St Catherine of Alexandria  
Foundation of the Company of St Ursula

Dear Sisters and Lay Collaborators in the work of Ursuline Education,

It is with deep joy that I introduce these new source documents to all of you who collaborate in the work of education in our international Institute.

Inspired by St. Angela Merici, our Foundress, these papers come from twenty or more countries. They reveal how diverse are the expressions of St. Angela's wisdom and how vibrant this wisdom is in its internationality.

St. Angela herself did not found schools, but her vision has inspired education over four centuries, for women and girls for whom education was often simply not an option. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this inspiration touches the lives of many young women and men in many different countries and cultures.

May you, our new generation of educators, take up the torch handed on to you, and continue to *cultivate the vine* entrusted to your care.

I thank most sincerely those who have participated in the project by writing and translating the articles illustrating facets of Ursuline education. I thank, too, the Education Committee and those General Councillors who have tirelessly worked to collate the articles into a coherent unity.

May these source documents be the occasion of an openness to the spirit of St. Angela and to the depths inherent in our Ursuline educational traditions.

Cecilia Wang osu  
Prioress General

## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
Angela, Yes! but why Ursuline?.....	6
Angela: Part I.....	8
Handing on the Torch: Angela's History.....	13
Angela's Relationship with God and with the Company.....	17
Angela's Keywords for Ursuline Educators.....	22
Angela.....	28
Aims of Ursuline Education - Yesterday.....	31
Daughters of Angela Merici.....	39
Four Standpoints of the Merician Educator.....	56
Ursuline Education in the Spirit of St. Angela.....	67



## Introduction

Angela Merici’s spirit is alive and well today in Ursuline education. Over 30 countries of the Ursulines of the Roman Union have schools and colleges, educational institutions, which are alive with values of *Serviam* (I will serve), Gospel justice, respect for the individual, the development of the whole person, and a growing global awareness for all of God’s creation.

In 2009, during the Enlarged General Council, a meeting of the General Council of the Ursulines of the Roman Union (the international Leadership Team) with the Provincials (the Regional leaders), the proposal was made that a “series of papers be published to form a source document for all those presently engaged in Ursuline Education....” Many years ago, in 1946, a book written by M. Marie de St. Jean Martin, *The Ursuline Method of Education*, inspired generations of educators. The creation of a new document for “...the future formation of those working in Ursuline schools and colleges” was felt to be necessary. The 2009 proposal was enthusiastically approved and its organization moved forward.

A small international editorial committee was established by the General Council, consisting of Ursulines and a lay collaborator. In this committee the four regions of the Roman Union of Ursulines are represented: Africa, the Americas, Asia/Pacific and Europe. The members of this committee are:

Sr. Lois Castillon osu (USA), representing the Americas

Mr. Jacques Ducamp (France), representing Europe

Sr. Ellen Mary Mylod osu (Taiwan), representing Asia/Pacific

Sr. Timothy Pinner osu (South Africa), representing Africa.

The committee members gathered in 2010 and 2011 in Rome for their meetings. They proposed the SYMBOL of the TREE, with its roots, trunk, and branches, for presenting articles from all the regions, written by colleagues representing our Ursuline schools and colleges in different parts of the world.

The ROOTS, a source of life, will include articles on Angela's spirituality and life;  
and aspects of Ursuline education and history.

The TRUNK, drawing life from the roots, will offer articles  
which focus on core values and on profiles of Ursuline educators and students.

The BRANCHES will present articles which express the lived realities  
of the core values in various schools and colleges worldwide.

This project moves forward in stages. The first stage becomes available on the website of the Ursulines of the Roman Union, beginning November 25, 2011, the anniversary

of the foundation of the Company of St. Ursula by Angela Merici in 1535. It is being offered to all collaborators of the Ursulines of the Roman Union, with gratitude for the educators who live out and transmit the spirit of St. Angela in our Ursuline schools and colleges worldwide. The address of the website of the Ursulines of the Roman Union is [www.ursulines-ur.org](http://www.ursulines-ur.org).







### **Angela, Yes! but why Ursuline?**

Angela Merici founded her Company of Saint Ursula in 1535 and some wonder why Angela chose St. Ursula as its patroness. Angela, herself, tells us nothing specific on this point. To disentangle the mild confusion some experience about why Angela chose to place her Company under the patronage of Saint Ursula we may, perhaps, in the first place, go to that medieval best-seller: *The Golden Legend (Legenda Aurea)* of Jacobus da Voragine, completed around the year 1260. It comprised stories of the principal feasts of the Church and many lives of saints of whom Saint Ursula and her martyred virgins was one. The book was immensely popular right up into the years of the Renaissance and undoubtedly would have formed part of the reading that Giovanni Merici did for his family and household during the long evenings in their Desenzano farmhouse. Angela's imagination might well have been fired by the legend of the lovely virgins martyred by the Huns so many hundreds of years earlier.

Later, in Brescia, when she was living in the house of Agostino Gallo opposite the Church of San Clemente, she would pray there daily near the painting by Alessandro Bonvicino (also known as Il Moretto) in which Ursula is depicted as tenderly protecting a

bevy of young girls under her cloak. In 1524, while traveling through Venice, the frescos of Carpaccio illustrating the whole story of the saint she had known since childhood would have captivated her. We know that the walls of the Oratory – now destroyed – in which the first Company met and prayed were decorated with frescos of the saints among whom were Ursula and her virgin companions. For Angela, Ursula was a powerful symbol of virginity carried to the heights of martyrdom in faithfulness to Jesus Christ to whom the virgins would dedicate their whole self and life. Such dedication was of the utmost importance if they were to be faithful to a consecrated life in the Brescian society of her day. So it was that, after years of reflection, she wrote in her *Rule* Ch. IX words arising from the depths of experience and wisdom: *Each one should also preserve sacred virginity, not making the vow on account of any human persuasion but voluntarily, making to God the sacrifice of her own heart....Moreover, each one should be prepared to die rather than ever consent to stain or profane such a sacred jewel* (Rule, IX, 1, 2, 23). The example of Ursula would be lived out in the lives of Angela Merici's followers.

Ellen Mary Mylod osu

Taiwan





### **Angela: Part I.**

Angela –

Blessed are the poor in spirit:

A woman of prayer and contemplation.

A woman who relied totally on her God.

You trusted;

You believed God would never abandon you,

That God would always provide for your needs wonderfully.

You acted;

Seeking justice for all –

Yours is the Kingdom of God.

Angela –

Blessed are the gentle:

A woman of gentleness and respect.

You reached out, you encouraged.

You never used force,  
You always invited –  
You have the earth as your inheritance.

Angela –

Blessed are those that mourn:

A woman of compassion.

You saw the brokenness and suffering of those around you,

You felt their pain and sorrow.

You sought to heal and make whole.

You have been comforted.

Angela –

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice:

A woman who lived with ‘eyes wide open’ –

You were attentive to the needs of people,

Sensitive to the injustice of your world.

You listened, you responded,

You liberated.

You have been filled.

Angela –

Blessed are the merciful:

A woman of forgiveness and mercy –

You recognized the weaknesses within yourself.

You offered God's forgiveness for failings and hurts.

You saw God's face in all.

You have received mercy.

Angela – Blessed are the pure in heart:

A woman of passionate faith, of vision;

A woman at one with Jesus her love, her only treasure.

You listened, you waited, you trusted,

You responded.

You have seen God.

Angela –

Blessed are the peacemakers:

A woman of peace.

Your words, your actions

Brought peace and reconciliation –

To the broken and divided you sought to bring

Harmony and unity.

You are a child of God.

## Angela: Part II

Daughters of Angela – Dream your dreams of peace,  
Dream your dreams of justice.

For the world needs your dreams, your visions,  
Your seeds of hope, sown in faith.

But come now, Daughters of Angela –  
Do something!  
Get moving!  
Make your dreams come alive,  
Turn your visions into reality!

Sing your songs in harmony with others,  
To the tune of the Spirit.  
Paint your pictures with colours of love and hope,  
Dance your dances with steps of peace and joy;  
And share your bread, made from the wheat provided by Angela,  
As you walk the journey alongside fellow travelers.

Be confident in your discernments;  
Believe  
Do not doubt

Have firm faith

Risk new things to make visible the Kingdom of God,

In the light of compassion, justice and hope.

And stick with it! –

Faithfully and joyfully.

Remember always

To get on your knees,

Asking, searching, knocking.

For there lies your Way, your Truth and your Life.

Be ready

When the Spirit's flame within you

Bursts forth into a blazing fire

Setting alight and renewing

Creation all around you.

Keep open the space deep within that invites and loves

And allow God to continue to bring forth

**BIG SURPRISES.**

Lee Veriga osu

Australia



### **Handing on the Torch: Angela's History**

In modern surveys of the Renaissance world, Angela Merici's name appears alongside those of Leonardo de Vinci, Vasco de Gama, Christopher Columbus, Ignatius Loyola, Michelangelo Buonarotti, Raphael Santi, Nicolaus Copernicus, Ferdinand Magellan, and Martin Luther.<sup>1</sup> Angela Merici founded a "company of women" in Brescia, Italy, known today throughout the world as the Ursulines. While the Ursuline name is known around the globe, Angela Merici is far less familiar to current students of theology and spirituality. Angela's life and her vision — her pilgrimages, her spiritual discoveries, her pedagogy — place her not just chronologically with the men who charted unknown seas to discover new worlds, but also with those who challenged the Church, and those who stretched the imagination through the arts and science. Angela's vision and accomplishments, like theirs, have survived four centuries and have had a significant influence on the future.

---

<sup>1</sup> Grun, Bernard. *The Timetables of History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 212-241.

Specifically, to understand Angela Merici's contribution to spirituality, we must look at the period in which she lived, her vision of service and piety described in her *Writings*, and the role this vision continues to play in 21st century.

Angela (1474 –1540) was born in a period of history framed by Columbus' discovery of the New World in 1492 and the formation of a new Church at the Council of Trent in 1545. The discussions of the Council, along with the dramatic maritime discoveries around the globe, brought to the forefront radical questions concerning man's knowledge of the world and man's place in nature. The powerful new voice of humanism arose and would effect art, science, politics, the Church, and spirituality: *This humanism favours the complete opening out of man, with his back turned on God and his face turned towards the creature..*<sup>2</sup> Even Church leadership would succumb to the prevalent notion that man's will and control superseded "the spiritual welfare" of the Christian community.<sup>3</sup>

Women in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries were not given much freedom for choosing their role in society. A woman was made to submit to the wishes of others: her parents; her spouse; or an abbess. More often, a woman was not given the freedom to choose her own lifestyle. Women who were called to a vowed life dedicated to God were limited to a life behind convent walls. Angela Merici made the choice to consecrate her life to God, but did not feel herself called to live in a cloister, isolated from God's people whom she wished to serve. Her life was guided by a vision she had of a heavenly procession of young women and angels surrounded by a great light. In this vision, Angela is told of God's plan for her to invite other

---

<sup>2</sup> Rio, Marie-Benedicte, *Elements of Ursuline History and Spirituality*, trans. Sr. Mary Benedict Davies, OSU (unpublished document, Rome: Roman Union of the Order of St. Ursula, Via Nomentana 236-I-00162, 1992-1993), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Bernier, Paul. *Ministry in the Church* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996), 150.



young women to join her in devoting their lives to God's work.<sup>4</sup> In 1535, a group of women who regularly gathered with Angela for prayer and guidance committed themselves to what Angela called the Company of St. Ursula. When the Company became a religious order in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Ursulines adopted the Rule of St Augustine which pays close attention to prayer, harmony of community life, and a life of poverty.<sup>5</sup>

Angela was not interested in the popular humanist view of the time that would have her emphasize her own power over God's will.<sup>6</sup> The Ursuline vision of ministry focused on action by women who wished to dedicate their lives, minds, gifts, and hearts to God, but would not be bound behind a monastery wall. Her companions would live in the world, not wearing the typical habit of religious women, but moving about the community in everyday clothes, serving the poor and bringing about the changes necessary for a better world.<sup>7</sup> With the freedom to move about the community responding to the needs of the people, her companions would share Christ' love as servants to those in their own homes and workplaces.<sup>8</sup>

In her *Writings* — the Rule, the Counsels, and the Testament — Angela left directions which would later be used by the *first order established for the education of young girls*.<sup>9</sup> Her directives show an amazing insight into educational psychology well before it was *invented*.<sup>10</sup> What a marvelous example St. Angela Merici has been for young women over the last four centuries. Ursulines work around the globe as missionaries, teachers, and in many diverse

---

<sup>4</sup> Rio, 25.

<sup>5</sup> Healey, Charles J., S.J. *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction to the Heritage* (New York: St. Pauls, 199);

<sup>6</sup> Sardello, Sardello, Judy, *The Writings of Saint Angela*, (unpublished document), Rules: Ch. 6, and throughout the writings Angela directs them to act with respect and in harmony. Rules: Ch. 1: Preface, Ch. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Sardello, Rule: Ch. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Sardello, Counsels: First Counsel.

<sup>9</sup> Healey, 273.

<sup>10</sup> Sardello, Counsels: Second Counsel.

areas of ministry today. The Ursuline tradition is governed by the motto: *Serviam* (“I Will Serve”).

The *Writings* of St. Angela—the Rules, Counsels, and Testament—are an excellent guide for anyone wishing to follow a Christian spirituality that calls them to serve others.

Deborah Meister

USA

#### WORKS CITED

Bernier, Paul. *Ministry in the Church: A Historical and Pastoral Approach*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996.

Grun, Bernard. *The Timetables of History*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.

Healey, Charles J., S.J. *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction to the Heritage*. New York: St. Paul's, 1999.

Rio, Marie-Benedicte, OSU. *Elements of Ursuline: History and Spirituality*. Translated by Sr. Mary Benedict Davies, OSU, unpublished document. Rome: Roman Union of the Order of St. Ursula, Via Nomentana 236-I-00162, 1992-1993.

Sardello, Judy. *The Writings of St. Angela: A Parallel Study*. Compiled for the Ursuline Associates, unpublished document for the Coordinating Committee of the Central Province.



### **Angela's Relationship with God and with the Company**

Angela Merici, born in the fifteenth century in northern Italy, grew up in a faith-filled farming family. From an early age she experienced a desire to dedicate her life to God, but it would take her many years and many experiences to understand that her call was to begin a new kind of religious community different from the established monasteries around her. In her 60s, she began a company of virgins who would pray, be exemplary Christians and give every aspect of their lives to God while remaining “in the world” and not cloistered behind convent walls. In other words, she “handed on the torch” to a group of women who would agree to live a life similar to hers. She asked nothing of them which she had not asked of herself. In her Sixth Counsel, she said, *What you want them to do, do it yourselves first*. They would not marry, would do whatever it was their lot in life to do and would meet frequently for prayer, to receive encouragement and guidance from each other and from older women, wise in the faith and ways of religion, and to be challenged to do and be more for others.

Angela was attracted to St. Francis' way of simplicity and poverty. It seems she hardly owned anything — she lived in other people's spare rooms or spare rooms attached to churches. She had wealthy patrons who would have given her anything and everything, but

no doubt she directed their generosity toward the even more poverty-stricken and truly destitute, just as Francis of Assisi would have done. She was sought out for advice, counsel and direction by the influential of her day. She reconciled bitter enemies through her gentle arbitration. She left her spirituality for the ages in words she dictated to her loyal secretary since she herself was not able to write. Everyone is privy to her spirituality and God-relationship through the richly textured documents she left behind, containing sentences which stagger the mind, the heart — one's whole soul. Meditation on the pith of one of her statements could occupy a soul's prayer for days on end. In her literary legacy, she gives nourishing nuggets of truth and inspiration about

- ❖ Jesus, her one and only treasure (Fifth Counsel);
- ❖ courage, strength and lively faith;
- ❖ troubles and anxieties;
- ❖ prayer, providence, patience;
- ❖ gentleness, compassion, kindness;
- ❖ harmony, unity, friendship;
- ❖ obedience, discernment, prudence;
- ❖ integrity, gratitude, joy.

There is, of course, more. She poured out her heart into these writings with an urgency and yet an immediacy as if speaking directly and only to each reader, individually. Angela knew the intimacy of relationships as she knew and loved the Trinity, that most profound and creative love relationship. She wanted company. She longed for daughters and sisters in the spiritual dimension who would listen, learn and live out the same all-consuming response to the God who had filled her life to overflowing. She did not want followers for or

of herself; she wanted followers of God, followers whom she could advise and lead into a tried and true way of espousing gospel values, of “Christing” their lives, of discerning God in every aspect of living. She was more of a “John the Baptist type”, pointing toward Christ, sending those fascinated by God to Jesus. She remained only a sign-post along the route to the divine. She gathered some tested souls in her “lady governors” of her future daughters and imparted to these ladies her every religious strategy and spiritual ploy. When they were spirit-skilled and proven prudent, she called the younger, tender women who felt God tugging at their hearts and lives, inviting them to a different way and life, to come together, *insieme*. Together they journeyed for the few years left to Angela on earth, giving birth to a grand experiment of allowing God to lead them into a new life.

Angela is sometimes depicted in art as a pilgrim, carrying a pilgrim’s walking staff with her kerchief of meager necessities attached. She was a pilgrim, literally, journeying from Brescia to faraway places: to the Holy Land (where she became temporarily and ironically blind, of all things!) and to Monte Varallo in Italy, a sort of medieval Catholic “Disneyland” where dioramas of Christ’s life depicted major events thereof for the pious who could not get to Palestine in person. But actually, Angela was always a pilgrim, always on a journey with and toward God, always treading Sacred Ground, finding that each and every place is a Holy Land because Christ is there.

She was unstoppable, seeking out a different way to honor and serve God, beginning a community of women who would live and be for others and for God in an unheard of, original way.

Her daughters did not think of themselves as extraordinary or brave or super-Christians. They recognized a call and a need: in their integrity and generosity, they

responded. They only wanted to please God by attending to the needs of God's people as women of the Church.

Everyone is on pilgrimage to God. Each one who is associated with Angela and her heritage can expect to be guided and challenged by Angela and other spiritual ancestors' characteristic traits:

- ❖ recognizing sacred ground, wherever one stands;
- ❖ hearing God's call to answer a need of this present time with one's talents, skills and gifts;
- ❖ tapping into the blessings one has of courage, steadfastness, and hope in God for the sake of others.

The evils which cry out to heaven for justice in the present day are evident:

- ❖ human trafficking,
- ❖ the plight of immigrants who are everywhere unwelcome,
- ❖ wars tearing at the hearts and lives of so many nations,
- ❖ abuse of our mother Earth and her resources.

*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* defines "pilgrimage" as "the course of life on earth." Angela and her company took up their pilgrims' staffs, boldly and biblically, "to do justice, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8) That is the expectation and commitment of all who continue in their footsteps.

Angela knew she had begun something extraordinary by its sheer ordinariness — plain, ordinary young women who would dress simply, do everyday tasks with extraordinary love and conscientiousness, influence others by their spiritual riches, keep seeking God in prayer together and in solitude. They would not do this apart from the world, but as members

of the world with their hearts bent and spent on loving those in the world who needed God desperately.

She gave them no specific ministry to do. They were not gathered to be educators or school teachers. Angela did not give them a job or task to accomplish besides that of holiness as they made their way through the twists and turns of day-to-day existence. That is all she foresaw. And that was enough for her and her Sisters.

Sue Anne Cole osu

USA





### **Angela's Keywords for Ursuline Educators**

In our fast-paced, technological world, acronyms, slogans, keywords are increasingly popular as aids to the overburdened memory. Every page of the newspaper or Internet news is peppered with them: UN, UNESCO, APEC, globalization, Just do it! Netizens, I'm lovin' it ... the list is endless. Angela, too, knew the value of keywords in her society so very like our own. Some words are frequently repeated in her *Writings* so it may be advantageous to tap into the current trend and isolate a few of the principal ones to highlight concepts which, for her, were fundamental. They will serve as guidelines for administrators and faculty in an Ursuline school as they served for Angela's first *colonelle* and *matrone* (or Lady-Governors) in their care of those she entrusted to them.

#### **GENTLENESS: PIACEVOLEZZA**

*Piacevolezza* is one example. Translated as *gentleness*, it appears in the Second Counsel to the *colonelle* and in the Third Legacy to the *matrone*. As we read these two chapters it is easy to discern the importance Angela attributed to this concept. The Second Counsel opens with the words *be gentle and compassionate*, not what we always feel like being towards recalcitrant students! *For you will achieve more she continues with kindness*

*and gentleness than with harshness and sharp rebukes* although we sometimes need strong faith to believe it will be so. Angela does leave space for *cases of necessity* when severity will be needed but only *at the right place and time and according to the persons*. It implies sensitivity, discernment and emotional control on the part of the educator who needs to assess the extent to which each individual can accept advice or reprimand at that particular moment.

Further thinking about this *gentleness* shows that the Third Legacy is apposite for administrators at every level who will *in everything, willingly be gentle*. Christ, as we know, defined himself by gentleness: *Learn of me for I am gentle and humble of heart* yet we know from reading the Gospel that Jesus could be tough. In five places, the Third Legacy advocates the highest ideal of gentleness, to act according to the action of God towards what He created. For the *matrone* as for the *colonelle* also, there is room to be tough; it may be *necessary occasionally to use reproaches and severity, at the place and time, according to the importance, condition and need of the persons*. How beneficial it would be for administration and faculty to get together from time to time to make practical applications – reactions to requests from students, how to amend behavior, how to deal with them without humiliating them. The ideal is lofty but that is what Angela would have done.

### **TOGETHERNESS: INSIEME**

A second keyword is *insieme*, translated as *together* or *togetherness*. It appears some ten times in Angela's *Writings*, twice in the Rule, once in the Counsels but up to seven times in the Testament. It is especially leaders who are urged to encourage *togetherness* in the Company, therefore too in our schools.

Angela spells out clearly at the beginning of the Rule her vision of *togetherness*. The sisters were to be united in a common good of vision, mission, objectives and of loving

service of God. She implores the *colonelle* in the Last Counsel to *live in harmony, united together in one heart and one will*. Equating the *colonelle* with home room teachers or class teachers, could be an opportunity for unity within the school and to inspire confidence in those for whom they are responsible. In the Tenth and Last Legacies, however, the point is really made clear. *And there will be no other sign that you are in the grace of the Lord than that you love one another and are united together*. (Tenth Legacy, 10) This means mutual sharing and understanding at every level of an institution, help, support, and encouragement, never criticism of a faculty member to students or speaking negatively of others. The effect on students is incalculable when they have awareness of a sense of solidarity throughout a school or a college: faculty and administration sharing awareness of a common goal. Angela knew the importance of unity at the “top” and urged the *matrone* to *be united together* among themselves. These chapters of Angela deserve our close study and reflection about how to develop and promote this *togetherness* in the context of where we live and work.

### **HOPE: SPERANZA**

Let’s move on to a third keyword which shows up the vibrancy of Angela’s approach to life and its challenges. *Speranza* – hope – appears more times than can be mentioned. It is especially in the Fifth Counsel that she develops her understanding of this cardinal virtue: *...they should place their hope and love in God alone and not in any living person*. (Fifth Counsel, 22) God is faithful, therefore their hope can be set on the firm foundation of God’s Providence: *...let them hold this as most certain: that they will never be abandoned in their needs. God will provide for them wonderfully. They must not lose hope*. (Fifth Counsel, 31-32) She urges her followers to believe and hope: *Have a lively faith and hope* (Last Counsel, 26). The Prologue to the Counsels also inspires with words often quoted.

*Act, move, believe, strive, hope, cry out to him with all your heart for without doubt you will see marvelous things* (Counsels, Prologue, 17-18) The modern American version is even more stirring: *Have faith, take risks, get down on your knees and pray – and be ready for big surprises* Angela's hope in God's loving care knows no boundaries. She passionately encourages us to go beyond our borders into the limitless faith and hope she has in the love of God.

### **ABOVE ALL: SOPRA TUTTO**

And what about the significance of these two small words: *sopra tutto – above all*, our fourth keyword. They appear four times in Angela's *Writings*: twice in the Rule for the virgin members of the Company, once in the Counsels for the *colonelle* and once in the Testament for the *matrone*. Why would these two small words be highlighted as keywords of Angela? Because, they preface what she really wants her followers to notice, to pay attention to. The first time *above all* appears it is truly revolutionary. *And above all: to obey the counsels and inspirations which the Holy Spirit unceasingly sends into our hearts*. What confidence Angela has in the integrity and discernment of such relatively inexperienced women, the first woman foundress to believe in women for women. She continues: *he whose voice we shall hear all the more clearly as we have our conscience more purified and clean*. (Rule VIII, 14-15) It is not insignificant that Cardinal Borromeo took out these words when he revised the Rule for Ursuline Sisters in his diocese of Milan and replaced them with: *Obey the interior inspirations, which, with the judgment and approval of the spiritual Father, they will come to know come from the Holy Spirit*. This was not Angela's attitude with regard to those who would enter the Company. She trusted in them. They did not need a third party to discern for them. Educators taking up her torch can also have profound trust in the guidance and power

of the Spirit in their work for those who need them.

*Sopra tutto, above all* appears again in the Rule where she urges her followers to keep their hearts pure, *clear of any evil thought, of any shadow of envy and ill-will, of any discord and evil suspicion.* (Rule IX, 7-9) Her words speak for themselves.

A third time *Sopra tutto* appears is in her Fifth Counsel to the colonelle where she reiterates the constant theme: *Above all, let them be humble and gentle* (piacevole) (Fifth Counsel, 17). It sets before the members of the Company the characteristic quality of service as shown in the example of Christ during his life on earth.

It is however in the Prologue to the Testament that we hear her appeal: *sopra tutto*, with the most profound intensity of feeling. She knows she will soon be leaving the *matrone*. On the one hand, she trusts in their ability to lead the Company when she is no longer with them. On the other, she is aware that she must encourage them to follow all the advice and instructions she is leaving them. She uses the strongest words that come from her heart: *But above all, I ask and entreat you all, by the Passion and Blood of Jesus Christ shed for love of us, to willingly put into practice with every solicitude these few reminders.* (Testament, Prologue, 25-26) They are a kind of echo of the words of Moses to the Israelites giving them instruction about the construction of the tabernacle: *Be faithful to the vision that was shown you on the mountain.* (Exodus 25: 40) We are truly doing God's work, faithful to the vision shown us by God through Angela.

### **LEAD A NEW LIFE: FATI VITA NOVA**

The final suggested keyword is *fati vita nova - Lead/Live a new life*. It appears in the Seventh Counsel and is very often linked with the Last Legacy: *If according to times and circumstances, the need arises to make new rules or do something differently, do it prudently*

*and with good advice.* (Last Legacy, 2) *Live a new life* comes after her advice: *For it is better to follow what is certain, without danger, than what is uncertain, with danger.* (Seventh Counsel, 21-22) There is clear recognition that the future must be faced courageously yet with prudence and total confidence that the Spirit of God is with us. Angela herself points out in the Prologue to the Rule how she had created a way of life new in every way. Change is life-giving as long as it is not change for the sake of change. If we do not change we will die. *Lead a new life* is an inspiring keyword for those to whom the Torch of the Future is being handed.

Keywords, however, are only inspiring in so far as they are meaningful in a lived context. When applied to the context of an Ursuline school, relationships among faculty and students and students among themselves (*piacevolezza: gentleness*), relationships among administrators and faculty at every level (*insieme: togetherness*) will without doubt create a new, dynamic life (*fati vita nova: Lead a new life*). *Speranza: hope* will fire our hearts with courage to undertake the progress which will raise our schools and colleges to new levels of spiritual and human values of integrity and professionalism. *Sopra tutto: Above all - JUST DO IT!*

Ellen Mary Mylod osu

Taiwan

Sr Ellen Mary wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the input culled from Sr. Ignatius Stone's lively, interesting and helpful *Angela's Alphabet*.



## Angela

Standing on a cultural threshold

She waited.

Waited

immersed in community

quietly nurturing relationships

opening minds

touching hearts

healing hurts

advising people of power.

A reconciler working from within

straining to hear the call from her God

for her future, their future, our future.



Waiting to see the prophetic need,  
to bring to birth the prophetic voice quietly.

Rome spoke.

A wake up call!

With quiet dissent she trusted  
that wisdom's time had come...  
delay no longer...

With haste to Brescia,  
gathered young girls, women  
eager hearts and hands of God.

And a company was born,  
born at a threshold,  
a transition moment...  
a company without cloister  
a community without walls.

Such birthing etched in our hearts  
to live in the unfolding present,  
to question not maintain the status quo.

Women's work

for women hear and feel

the heartbeat of our times

and in the heart beat

the longing of the community

and of its God for life.

Such is our work

Like Angela, courage and quiet dissent our way?

Leone Pallisier osu

Australia



### **Aims of Ursuline Education - Yesterday**

The theme *Aims of Ursuline Education yesterday* can include many realities. It focuses on the goals that the Ursulines have given themselves in their educational work. I want to present the basis of this activity. *Yesterday*, in the history of the Ursulines, signifies almost 500 years! It is difficult for us to see the aims which have developed over five centuries. But there is a second aspect to remember; that this ideal has never changed. What St. Angela Merici, our Foundress, gave us at the beginning of her foundation, the Ursulines have not changed except in the implementation of this ideal according to time and circumstances.

To understand this better, first a little the history<sup>1</sup>. In 1535, St. Angela Merici founded the Company of Saint Ursula in Brescia. The first Ursulines were women who wanted to give their lives to God and serve the Church. Their way of life was very original at that time because they did not choose religious life, but they remained in the world, in their families. It was the same Rule, the private vows of virginity and obedience to their superiors that united them. Their sole mission was to witness to the priority of God in their lives. That is why

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Urszula Borkowska osu, Wstęp,: Aniela Merici, Pisma, Regula, Rady, testament, Lublin 1992, pp. 3-29.

personal union with Christ, their Bridegroom, the development of the spiritual life and the witness of faith were most important in the life of the Ursulines. St. Angela addressed a special call to the matrons: *Strive ...that you are moved to this care and government solely by the sole love of God and the sole zeal for the salvation of souls. Because all your works and actions as governors, being thus rooted in this twofold charity, can bear nothing but good and salutary fruits.* (First Legacy, 2-4). It is the love of God and the love of men and women - created and saved by God - which is the main reason for all the activity of the Ursulines.

In 1566, St. Charles Borromeo, the archbishop of Milan, founded the first Company of Saint Ursula in Milan. He knew the Rule of St. Angela, but he gave his own rule to the Ursulines of Milan. The most important change he introduced into his Rule was to give the Ursuline the mission of teaching Christian doctrine. He also recommended to create Companies of Saint Ursula throughout his archdiocese. At the end of the sixteenth century, all the Ursulines in northern Italy were teaching catechism to form Christians in a more conscious and deeper faith. The Ursulines in France were founded in order to teach Christian doctrine.

However, the French Ursulines began to transform their Companies into monasteries with their own Constitutions. First, in 1612, it was the Ursulines of Paris, then others. Despite this new situation, they kept the mission of education because they were able to establish schools for girls in their convents. In this way they continued the mission of educating young people. Religious education was a very important aspect of this mission. Centuries passed and there were many changes in Ursuline schools. Yet one thing remained unchanged: the concern for a good education for children and young people in these schools.

Over the centuries Ursulines have taken advantage of the instructions that St. Angela

Merici left them in her Counsels and her Testament. One can find much of these *Writings* in early Ursuline Constitutions, in the chapters concerning work with youth<sup>2</sup>. Mother Angela's view of the other was very special; it came from her faith and her very deep union with Christ<sup>3</sup>. She pondered the mysteries of God and she knew how to perceive the great dignity that God has given to each person. For Angela, each person is created in the image and likeness of God and is called to participate in the inner life of God, that is to say, each person is called to disinterested love and God never withdraws that vocation: *Where sin increased, grace abounded* (Rom 5:20) and *the ransom has been paid in the precious blood of Christ* (1Pet 1:18-19) *so that everyone who believes may have eternal life* (Jn 3:15). This anthropology rooted in faith became the basis of education for generations of Ursulines and their collaborators. The Ursulines have tried to be faithful to the spirit of their Foundress. That is why they have based their mission of education on a deep respect and solicitude for each person so that each one may live in the dignity to which they are called by God. This resulted in concrete attitudes that Angela demanded from the early formators of Ursuline sisters, concrete attitudes that are written permanently in the tradition of Ursuline education: sincerity and understanding, a firmness which makes demands, a good knowledge of each student and an individual approach, an all-round formation (human, intellectual and spiritual) to help each person to develop fully, according to God's plan. It is the consciousness that a person has the life of God within, and that, by this, he is bound to God by a mysterious union, which dictates his behaviour. Such an attitude requires of the Ursulines great wisdom,

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.43-45 See *O prowadzeniu i nauczaniu uczennic i pensjonarek*, dans: *Reguła Świętego Augustyna i Konstytucje Zakonnice Świętej Urszuli Instytutu Burdygalskiego* (cz. I, rozdz. XXIX), Poznań 1871, pp. 90-96 ou *Pour la Direction et l'Instruction des petites filles écolières et pensionnaires*, dans : *Règle de notre Père saint Augustin et Constitutions de religieuses de sainte Ursule* (1<sup>er</sup> partie, ch. XXIX), Louvain 1832, pp. 62-66.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Iwona Naglik osu ABC wychowania urszulańskiego. Wskazania św. Anieli Merici, Kraków 2009.

discernment and a profound spiritual life in order to educate the young by constantly asking: what does God want for them?

In 1900 a number of monasteries of Ursulines joined together to create the Roman Union of the Order of St. Ursula<sup>4</sup>. The Ursulines began to organize various meetings including local and international educational meetings. They tried to define the educational ideals of the Ursulines. Mother Marie de Saint Jean Martin, Prioress General from 1926 to 1959, played a very important role in building a coherent system of Ursuline education<sup>5</sup>. She wrote many circulars concerning education in Ursuline schools. She encouraged the sisters to hold educational meetings and she herself often participated. She also wrote the book *Ursuline Method of Education*<sup>6</sup> in which she presented the whole tradition of Ursuline education; she described its basic values and methods of working with young people of her time. You can see how her conception was consistent with the spirit of Saint Angela. She writes, for example:

- *Education is a formative process in which both the educator and the pupil participate.*<sup>7</sup> *The work to be accomplished is nothing less than cooperation with Almighty God in the unfolding of His creative and sanctifying action.*<sup>8</sup> God is the principal educator and it takes deep faith and maturity in the educator to accept it: *Although an apostolate must be the gift of one's self, it is primarily the gift of God.*<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Marie-Andrée Jégou osu, Marija Jasna Kogoj osu, Roman Union Ursulines, Journey Towards Unity. 1900-1926, Rome 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Marie-Vianney Boschet osu, *In memoriam. M. Marie de Saint-Jean Martin, 3rd Prioress General of the RU Ursulines 1926-1959 (1876-1965)*, Rome 1965.

<sup>6</sup> Marie De Saint-Jean Martin osu, *Ursuline Method of Education*, New Jersey 1946.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8

- *Education....consists in forming them to an integral Catholic life, that is, to the knowledge, love, and service of God, through the harmonious development of the natural and supernatural faculties.”*<sup>10</sup>

So what do we ask of the educator?

– To educate is to develop children in the direction of their faculties, such as God made them.

Therefore, to know every child is the first task of the Ursuline educator<sup>11</sup>.

– Education is a service and it requires of the teacher selflessness, commitment and dedication<sup>12</sup>.

– The teacher must know how to build individual relationships with the students to accompany them<sup>13</sup>.

The relationship with the student is based on authority. *The authority which the educator exercises is a participation in the authority of God. It calls for an attitude of respect - it is a participation in God's authority which recognises a dependence on God and respect for the other*<sup>14</sup>.

– First, the educator must sanctify herself, to improve and be a good example to educate others<sup>15</sup>.

- *The purpose of education is to produce women of faith and of reason*<sup>16</sup>, *to prepare for the Church and for society complete Catholic women.*<sup>17</sup>

(Today the situation of women has changed in society and Ursuline schools are also open to

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 9

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 11

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. ix

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 10

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 27

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 36

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 58

boys. Generally, it is a question of educating mature Christians, who will build their personal, social and family life based on their faith.)

Such an understanding of education recognizes three levels of training of the student<sup>18</sup>:

1. Personal formation:

- intellectual formation: wise human beings, educated and who think independently,
- the formation of the will: an improvement of self, of one's character, the choice of values and an upright life,
- the formation of the heart: that is, formation for love - a shaping for generosity, for a spirit of sacrifice, sensitivity, self-giving,
- religious education: personal prayer, participation in the sacraments, religious knowledge.

2. Family formation:

The family atmosphere in Ursuline schools was a typical feature of Ursuline education.

- on one hand, it showed itself in personal and friendly contacts with students, their guidance, participation in their daily lives and in contacts kept with former students.
- on the other hand, the model of family education took the form of collective education: children were educated in groups and educators collaborated closely with parents.

3. Social and apostolic formation:

respect for others, honesty, commitment to life in society, apostolic activity at different levels - acts of charity, parish life, prayer groups etc.

Such was the vision of Ursuline education presented by Mother Marie de Saint-Jean Martin.

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-103



In this area we can think of one specific aspect of social education practiced specially by the Polish Ursulines. It is to do with the patriotic aspect of social education in Poland<sup>19</sup>. This was important because of the history of the country. First, in the nineteenth century, under the invaders, then twenty years of independence to rebuild the state, then the Nazi occupation and finally the period of communism. For Polish Ursulines it was always an important task to uphold the Polish character of their schools, to educate young people in love and service of their country. For this reason they entered the Roman Union only in 1936<sup>20</sup>. But they also worked to build a coherent system of Ursuline education, especially in the period 1919 -1939 and then, after the Second World War, until the closing of their schools (between 1949 and 1962)<sup>21</sup>. They also organized educational conferences and discussed the ideals of Ursuline education. The same spirituality and the same Ursuline tradition bore the same fruits as those of the Roman Union: to form honest people, believers committed in the life of the Church and the life of society.

This ideal is presented very simply and clearly by the symbols of the badge *Serviam*.<sup>22</sup>

- The field of stars is a symbol of the ideals towards which we must walk; the constellation of stars presents the Little Bear alluding to the name of St. Ursula. *Ursus* - the bear is a symbol of courage, loyalty to Christ and belonging to the Ursuline family. The polar star of the Little Bear is a symbol of the goal, the stable point which traces the path towards the ideal.

---

<sup>19</sup> See Beatrix Banaś osu, *Początki Zakonu św. Urszuli w Polsce (1857-1871)*, dans „*Nasza Przeszłość*” 1957, tome 6, pp. 127-168 ; Beatrix Banaś OSU, *Dzieje Urszulanek w Polsce*, tome 2, Lublin 2000, pp. 219-266.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-169

<sup>21</sup> APUUR, *Zjady pedagogiczne 1924-1962*; Beata Barthel de Weydenthal, *Nasza myśl pedagogiczna w ciągu 20-lecia od 1920 do 1940*, Rybnik 1951, mps /APUUR M 619/.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Marie de Saint-Jean Martin osu, *Distribution of badges to our pupils*, in *Review of the Roman Ursuline Union 1931*, pp.227-229; APUUR [b.s.], *Wieczornica urszulańska*, dans *Materiały do pogadanek z uczennicami*, Poznań 1954.

- The Cross is the base, a foundation on which to base one's life. It is a symbol of the Catholic faith to which we must witness each day by our life.

- *Serviam* signifies service. It is a sign of collaboration with the grace of God and of Christian commitment. *Serviam* signifies service of God, of Church, of country, family and society. *Serviam* is a profession of faith in practice.

Today, this ideal of Ursuline education remains current. It should be remembered constantly in order to continue the mission of our predecessors and to implement the charism of Saint Angela. And knowing the history and tradition of the Ursuline education we will find ways and means to help us realize today the ideal clearly defined by past centuries and still to be renewed according to circumstances.

Iwona Naglik osu

Poland



## **Daughters of Angela Merici**

**From 1540 (death of Angela) to 1900 (foundation of the Roman Union)**

### **Ursuline educators**

#### **Ursulines: creative heirs of Angela Merici**

The history of the Ursulines and their educational tradition is marked by stages, by events and decisions that reflect a great adaptability, a constant openness to innovation, and that in dialogue with different cultures depending on where they exercised their mission. In this, they followed the recommendation of Angela: *If, according to times and circumstances, the need arises to make new rules or do something differently, do it prudently and with good advice.* (Last Legacy 2)

Many were pioneers in the missionary adventure and also in the educational and pedagogical adventure: spirit of initiative, courage, perseverance nourished by faith and hope ever renewed in the contemplation of Christ and strengthened by common action and will (*insieme*); radical fidelity to the point of martyrdom, during the French Revolution, and also in the twentieth century: expulsions from France in 1905, the Second World War, the

totalitarian regimes of Central Europe, Latin America, China ...; initiatives and creativity also to face up to the most dangerous situations and start again discovering other horizons and other mission fields.

**The Council of Trent, held in several sessions, began shortly after the death of Angela (1545-1563)**

The steps adopted by the Council delineate the characteristics **of a renewed church**: the intention to reform on the part of the episcopate; war declared on abuses; action taken to create a better educated clergy; **efforts to foster religious instruction of the faithful**; etc... Much enthusiasm! Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, put all his energy into implementing the Council and promoting the teaching of Christian Doctrine to the lower clergy, who were often ignorant, and to the faithful, especially the poor, women and girls.

Angela did not give any particular field of ministry to her daughters, *but let our words, actions and behaviour always be for the instruction and edification of those who have dealings with us* (Rule IX, 21). However, towards 1560, the virgins of the Company of St. Ursula were approached by the Church to teach Christian Doctrine to women and girls. They responded to this mission with enthusiasm, receptiveness and creativity; it is clear that it was “natural” for them: they were ready to share in a recognised educational process for the women and girls of their time what they had received from Angela “mother and sister”, formator of her own sisters and daughters.

During the period that interests us here, the educational skills and expertise of the Ursulines unfolded in different ways. What mission were they called to by the Church and by society? To whom did they address themselves? How do they organize their works of education? What were their principles? What subjects did they teach? What pedagogical and

educational training did the Ursulines receive? We will try to answer these questions by providing examples or references which can only be partial in relation to the length of the period under observation and to the geographical diversity. We will pause at one of the most emblematic figures of this period, Mary of the Incarnation, before seeing how, in 1900, this educational tradition was recognised and known to the four corners of the world.

### **What mission were they called to by the Church and society?**

**In France, it was precisely to the mission of Christian Doctrine;** in Avignon the clergy sought to establish small communities of young women who wanted to devote their lives to serving God and the Church. Hearing of the Italian “companies” of Brescia, Milan ... they asked for texts to “regulate” the life and work of these groups.

In Isle sur la Sorgue, near Avignon, François de Bermond, founder and formator of the first groups of Angela’s daughters in France, began, with her companions, to instruct girls. They followed what might be called the “methods”, known as “Christian Doctrine” to *guide the girls along the right path, teaching them the things necessary for their salvation, not only with words but much more with actions.* (Chapter 31 Rule of Tournon 1597)

This teaching, at first catechetical, moved very quickly towards the needs of these girls from the common people for the fundamentals necessary (reading, writing, arithmetic) for a woman to gain access to the Gospel, to the teaching of the Church, to justice, dignity and the responsibility of wife and mother in the family and in society.

**In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century,** following the directives of the Church, the daughters of Angela adopted a new structure of life: the monastery. The first was canonically erected in 1612: the Ursulines would live the radical nature of monastic life along with the service of “**the instruction of girls**”, a service which was even the subject of a fourth vow in the

monastery of Paris and its branch houses.

**The 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the monasteries multiplying ...** Bishops and mayors appealed to the Ursulines to instruct the girls of their diocese or their city. As soon as they arrived in a city, the founders set up a centre for children, sometimes in very precarious conditions, postponing the organisation of their own living accommodation.

**The term “instruction”** is used in the broad sense: in fact the Ursulines were concerned to give a unified education. Ursuline life itself rested on a progressive unification of the person in action, contemplation and community life. They sought to foster this interior unity in their pupils. Christian instruction, the formation of character and culture of the intellect were not separated. The child must develop in all dimensions; the pupil must be permitted to grow into a unified person. It is not a question of a multiplicity of knowledge. The objective was not to form future religious as in the existing monastic schools, but to train Christian wives and mothers to have a positive influence on the family, social and ecclesial environment.<sup>1</sup>

**To whom did they address themselves? How did they organise their work of education?**

From the beginning, in the mission of “Christian Doctrine”, they were asked, according to the directions of the Council of Trent, to instruct girls and women in order to give them access to the principles of Christian life, the content of the Creed, Catechism on the Sacraments ... so they brought them together for that. Then the structures took shape: a place reserved for these meetings, a decision for the members of the growing Companies to live together in order to be involved in this mission. So we speak of “congregated” Ursulines.

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the monasteries, instruction was given to girls of all

---

<sup>1</sup> after Marie Andrée Jégou, *Le “projet éducatif” des Ursulines* ISP, 1987, pp.30-31

conditions thanks to two structures: the boarding school (where the number of pupils would vary, depending on the location, from about ten to nearly 100) and free classes for the day pupils (sometimes up to 300, divided between the morning and the afternoon).

**Boarders** came from wealthy backgrounds (middle class or noble). The teaching of the Ursulines was free (thanks to the nuns' dowries and gifts they received) but the families had to pay for their board. Children between 6 and 15 years were admitted to the boarding school. They lived within the enclosure of the monastery, but in accommodation separate from the community. They lived there for perhaps two years or more as the boarding school might be restricted to certain periods of adolescence. Most were admitted at 12 or 14 years of age and could remain until the age of 18. During their time in boarding school, they did not see their parents except in the parlour or on occasional outings, but always they returned to the boarding school to sleep.

The boarders were put into separate classes according to their age and ability (not more than 19 or 20 in a class). Each class had a special place for study, exercises and practical work, and an oratory. Meals were taken at tables by classes and it was in the refectory, at the same table, where they learnt to write. From time to time they put up some pupils to higher classes because of their age or ability. The transition from one class to another depended on the level and maturity of the student and could be done at any time of the year.

**Day pupils** had no contact with boarders or with the religious, unless their teachers had special permission concerning the enclosure. Anyone could be admitted. However, there were two requirements: that the parents were able and willing to send their daughter every day at the prescribed times and wanted her to be taught devotion. For these girls, there were

four to five hours of class per day, with leave on holidays and afternoons on Saturdays and the eve of holidays and three weeks vacation in the autumn. In the morning, reading and writing: groups of about ten would follow one another at the writing tables arranged in a part of the classroom (30 minutes per day). The afternoons began with catechism and then reading. Absences were recorded and controlled: absence without good reason meant punishment and if the absence was repeated, the place would be given to another girl. At a time when poor girls could be forced to work to help their families, this insistence shows the importance the Ursulines attached to the education of children to prepare them for the future and their family and social tasks. In addition, the day pupils were encouraged to explain, in their turn, to their parents, brothers and sisters, what they learnt in class, especially in regard to the Christian life.

**Sunday parlours were established in some communities**, where soldiers, families, servants, women of the nobility or the bourgeoisie were received. This was a time and place for instruction of those who turned to the Ursulines, asking advice of every kind and deepening in this way their Christian life. Here we find an echo of what Angela Merici was for the people in Brescia!

Whoever the public was, three objectives were pursued: development of the grace of baptism, education of the person, instruction and preparation for the role of individuals in society.

**What were their pedagogical principles? What subjects did they teach?**

- “Christian doctrine” at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century used a pedagogy that could be called **active**, teaching by **testimony**; by memorizing questions and answers and also by singing; a concern to **adapt** to the audience and to take the person where they are in order to advance in the discovery of God and the living of the Gospel; the desire



also **to involve parents, families**, in this teaching.

- Next, the monasteries wrote *Règlements*, *Directories*, *Customaries*, sometimes included in the *Constitutions* (the canonical text recognised by the Church), which shows that their educational mission was a part of their religious commitment.

We can pick out some points which would be at the source of a rich educational tradition, echoes of the *Counsels* of St. Angela, implicit rather than explicit.

- The formation of the whole person: body, mind and will.
- The communal dimension, for the teachers as for students: class, team of teachers or supervisors, mutual assistance between adults, between students, contact with families, class newspapers.
- Activities to help understanding and memory; exercises in thought and reasoning; reformulating the knowledge acquired; giving an explanation of it to classmates.
- Putting personal expression, creativity and responsibility into real life situations.
- The use of time: a regular schedule; alternating work/relaxation, learning/use of knowledge; respecting the stages of growth and the acquisition of knowledge.
- Respect for each one, for her condition and preparation for her future tasks.
- The importance of joy, of celebration and of festivity.

These texts enter into the detail of the tasks of each religious according to her “employment”: headmistress, prefect of studies, mistress of division, supervisor ... The Ursulines exercised a genuine **spiritual motherhood**, emphasizing strictness, discernment and genuine affection: *Convert the child to God by love.*<sup>2</sup> Here we find formation for **responsibility and freedom**, an **openness to culture** and for the **learning of family and**

---

<sup>2</sup> cf. G. Gueudré, Catherine Ranquet *Mystique et éducatrice*, Lyon

**household tasks.** The nuns were invited to maintain a relaxed atmosphere *to keep them happy and content*. On holidays, *special days*, the schedule was altered to the delight of all.

In some monasteries thoughtful care was taken of the younger boarders (hairdressing, heating the bed ...). Fountains were placed in the corridors for washing hands. The good manners and the development of the young girls and adolescents were attended to, including the lacing of corsets.

The teaching of Christian doctrine and its consequences for daily life was always the first objective of instruction. Everything was ordered (science, craft, reflection) towards spiritual growth and charity. In Lyons, among other subjects, etymology was recommended to help in the understanding of the Scriptures and the truths of the Faith.

Subjects became diversified beyond basic instruction. In the *Règlements* other subjects than reading, writing and arithmetic appear: spelling, grammar, sewing, crafts all aiming at work well done (some monasteries had famous embroidery and tapestry workshops!); home management (laundry, homecraft...), apprenticeship, basic law, history, geography, literature, geometry, science. The Ursulines kept themselves well-informed about scientific discoveries and their pupils profited. A library was available to the religious; in several places in the 19th century, they opened libraries for pupils, according to age, and even for their families.

**Some examples of approaches described in the *Règlements*:**

- To make effort agreeable to the child, it is necessary to vary their occupations. There was a prescribed time schedule for various activities (use of the hourglass) which should not be exceeded. Within these specified times there were changes in approach: there were two ways to give a lesson. The teachers also had recourse to stories and

familiar comparisons to facilitate understanding and memorising, pictures or time charts (synchronism), maps and instruments.

- Reading, writing and arithmetic were taught progressively. In France, reading was twice a day: once in Latin and once in French. Pupils repeated after the teacher as often as necessary. They only moved on to the next text when the whole group had mastered the difficulties of the reading. In the lower classes, the passages were shorter and were repeated several times at once. The teacher would be able to go back to some of the pupils during the day to have them read at leisure. Later, the more advanced could read the manuscripts, learn the abbreviations...
- The teaching of writing follows a progression in the letters: “o” first and then “i, a, u, m, n”, then the same letter “repeated”. They did not change until they formed the first letters correctly. Once all the letters had been formed, they passed to the same letters “joined up”. Then they passed to words without letters “repeated” (three lines of each kind), then to words with letters “repeated” and then to a sentence. They also learnt “Roman and barbarian” numbers. When the pupils knew how to write, they could learn to spell: as dictation, word by word, then a line from a book so that the pupils could correct their own work. The next day, repetition of the same line on another paper and so on till there are no mistakes.
- When they could read and write, they started arithmetic. In this way the reasoning was exercised on small problems: *it must be exercised early in order to think coherently and to reason on ordinary subjects that may be of use.*
- In the catechism, the teacher sometimes asked questions to see if the children understood. She exercised them here more than elsewhere to connect proposals, to

compare, to deduce, to analyse and synthesize and thus acquire an *esprit de finesse*.

They would always ensure that they understood well what they had learned.

### **What training was there for the nuns?**

As we have already said, the *Règlements, Directories and Customaries* gave specific directives on objectives, attitudes and content. Humility and patience come up often in the exhortations.

This pedagogy was based on the constant presence of the nuns with the children. Each group of pupils was entrusted to two teachers (each in turn) who had the care of the class and of the study: one teacher for reading and arithmetic and one for practical work. It required teamwork under the authority of the headmistress who was in charge of contact with the families, health care (menus, heating, infirmary) and good organisation of the schedule and the regulations.

The superior in many monasteries, insisted on training for the educators and had at heart the progress of the community which she led with strictness and attentiveness. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, marked by royal splendour, geographical discoveries and the encounter of different cultures, the spiritual life was often linked to mystical experience. The Ursulines were not the least to benefit from exceptional spiritual graces would nourish their apostolic zeal.

In Austria-Hungary and elsewhere, **teachers' training colleges** were coming into being to train religious. The teacher, to be credible in the eyes of society and to be effective for the pupils, had to be subjected to rigorous and ongoing training. Laws, requirements for qualifications appear, to which the Ursulines submitted themselves with a professional awareness. They wanted their place in the educational system, a place that depended on real

skills and much creativity. The methods used were suitable for every era. They were constantly under question in order to be improved, better adapted to the needs of people and the environment. Conferences, holiday sessions were organized.

The monastery of Blois in France, encouraged by its chaplain, Father Richaudeau, launched an exchange of circulars among the monasteries in which there were a succession of stories of rich and varied educational experiences: a sharing between Ursuline schools in which *the experience of each can become the heritage of all*. In 1898, the Community of Aix en Provence began to publish a review *L'Echo de Sainte Ursule*. The contents of this review demonstrate a practical pedagogy applied to a wide variety of subjects: intellectual and practical, spiritual and scientific, encouraging creativity, interiority, intellectual curiosity, culture. Competitions were organised between boarding schools.

Circulars, reviews ... to browse these pages is very instructive: one can find the specific objectives of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: to encourage the woman and the young Christian girl in her spiritual life, in her desire to be instructed, to learn, develop her intelligence in all areas, including the arts and the sciences, to be interested in the life of the world, in the evolution of the human and experimental sciences, to be informed about the life and teaching of the Church ... There is an attention to the person, to the woman in all her dimensions, an attention well situated in its contemporary context.

### **The influence of this educational tradition**

*If the Ursulines were not the first women missionaries of the New World, they were, without question, the first religious educators who crossed the Atlantic to teach the mysteries*

*of the faith to the unbelievers.*<sup>3</sup>

*Marie of the Incarnation remains the great model of the Ursuline who is a nun cloistered and missionary at the same time. She was the pioneer of the movement which, little by little, during two centuries ...was going to take her Sisters to the very extremities of the inhabited earth.*<sup>4</sup>

**Mystic, educator and missionary, Mary of the Incarnation Guyart**, Ursuline of Tours, sometimes called *Mother of the Canadian Church* or *the Teresa of the New World*, in two autobiographical relations and correspondence, told of her mystical journey and what might be called her Canadian epic!

If the young woman of Tours, a widow and mother, having already taken her first steps in the mystical life, chose to embrace the Ursuline religious life in 1631, it was because they were *established to help souls.*<sup>5</sup> In 1639, she left for New France: *I no longer thought of any country except Canada and excursions were most commonly made to the land of the Hurons in order to accompany the missionaries working there.*<sup>6</sup>

At Tours, as well as in Canada, she put into practice her zeal to help souls; she was the educator of those who were successively entrusted to her.

**A young widow, responsible for the workers** in the company of her brother-in-law in Tours, she was not afraid to mingle with them and looked after them with great tact, turning them from evil, urging them to good or giving them the opportunity to relax. *When they were at table, it was where they committed a lot of sins; and to stop them, I would eat*

---

<sup>3</sup> Mother M. de Ch. Gueudré *Les monastères des Ursulines sous l'Ancien Régime* Chap. VI p.277

<sup>4</sup> cf. M. Aron, *The Ursulines*, translated by M Angela Griffin osu, p 171

<sup>5</sup> *The Autobiography of Venerable Marie of the Incarnation*, osu, translated by John J Sullivan SJ, Loyola University Press, Chicago 1964, p.69

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.99

*with them. I was there alone with twelve or fifteen men to whom, according to the occasion, I spoke of God or when they were not willing, I said something indifferent to amuse them, preferring to captivate me in all this rather than see them offend God.*<sup>7</sup>

**As an Ursuline**, she was entrusted with the responsibility of teaching the novices: *It was my duty to teach the novices Christian doctrine so as to fit them for the works of the Institute. In doing this I was aided by the great zeal God had given me, along with the facility in expressing myself regarding the mysteries of our holy faith ... I got the reputation of never speaking except in sentences which were passages of Holy Scripture. Without my thinking about it, these served the purpose of an answer to the questions which anyone might address to me.*<sup>8</sup>

**Missionary in Canada, she continued to follow closely all matters relating to her son Claude.** She maintained a regular correspondence with him and wanted to accompany him, support him or reprimand him in his often difficult human and spiritual journey. Letter 49 gives us an example: *It is time for you to know yourself, you are old enough for that. You have got powerful support up to now, now push yourself. It would be a shame for you, a well built young man not to have courage. Get out of your cowardice, my dear son, and remember you get nothing in this world without trouble.* Many other people in France would continue to receive spiritual guidance through her letters (novices in France, members of her family, ...)

**Evangeliser.** On their arrival at Quebec, cramped quarters were made available to the

---

<sup>7</sup> cf. Autobiographical relation, chap.18 of 1633

<sup>8</sup> The Autobiography of Venerable Marie of the Incarnation, osu, translated by John J Sullivan SJ, Loyola University Press, Chicago 1964, p.92-94

Ursulines: *The two rooms open to every wind shelter the religious and boarders whose number is growing rapidly. There should be a place to receive the women and girls who crowd at the cloister to receive instruction!*<sup>9</sup>

Families of settlers and also families of the “various Indian nations” were the object of their solicitude. In Letter 53, she recounted a dialogue with a neophyte savage whom she called to order and who replied *I am very sorry to have vexed Him who made all!* She wrote: *Having reprimanded him I consoled him on the resolution he had taken.*

Educator of Indian girls, she loved them with a motherly heart and described them with tenderness: *Marie Negabamat becomes everyday more accomplished; ... she knows well the Mysteries of the Faith. The greatest pleasure one could give her is to explain these truths by pictures.* (Letter 41)

In order to talk with everybody, she learnt the languages of the various “Indian nations”. On her arrival in Quebec, she had learnt Montagnais and Algonquin; in 1650, she set about studying the Huron language to catechise the Huron refugees (cf. Letter 129); later on she would study Iroquois and compose a dictionary and a catechism in that language; she would also write a French-Algonquin and Algonquin-French dictionary. *I admit it is a thorny joy to learn a language so different from ours and yet they laugh at me when I say it is difficult because they say if the trouble was so great I would not be so fluent. Believe the will to speak it goes a long way. I would like to see my heart in my tongue to tell these dear converts what it feels of the love of God and of Jesus, our Good Master.* (Letter 53)

These short quotations reflect the zeal of Mary to announce the Word of God and to

---

<sup>9</sup> M. Ch Gueudré, *Les monastères des Ursulines sous l'Ancien Régime*, p. 179



help souls. For this, she took into account the individual circumstances of each one, trying to get close to the people (by language, gestures, actions), and to combine firmness and tenderness. Her experience as an educator was an integral part of her spiritual experience ... she always discerned the presence and interests of the Bridegroom at the heart of all her encounters. We cannot forget that the genesis of her mystical experience lay in a dream she had at seven years of age and which took place precisely in the courtyard of a school, a sign that this is a familiar place for her which she will remember all her life because there she received the first loving visit of “her divine Spouse”.

**Like Mary of the Incarnation and her companions, the Ursulines would respond boldly and generously to the call to other nations** more or less far, more or less dangerous: Italy, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Poland, New France, Canada, Martinique, Louisiana ..., Greece, England. In contemporary Belgium and in Brazil, the Constitutions were used by the bishops for new foundations ... The educational Merician wisdom spread successfully until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when there were about 350 monasteries just in the Kingdom of France! In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, missionary expansion spread from Europe: Belgium (with Abbé Lambertz, founder of the Congregation of Tildonk), the Netherlands, England ... Africa, Bengal, the Dutch East Indies, Ohio, British Guiana, South Africa, Australia, Montana, saw the arrival of the Ursulines.

When, in 1899, the monasteries and bishops were offered a general Union of Ursulines, 70 houses scattered from the Carpathian Mountains to the Rockies and to the Andes responded to the call. The delegates, in 1900, recognised the differences and the developments which had come from a common source, but 63 of them adhered to the Union, a sign that, beyond the adaptations, histories, lifestyles due to the different places where the

monasteries were, they remained open to the desire for communion in the spiritual life and in the mission.

### **Concluding remarks:**

This article is not exhaustive; it had to be confined to examples of persons and situations, not to generalize unfairly. Diversity and dialogue with cultures, peoples and different histories are marks of the Ursuline tradition. What we can say is that, whatever the means employed and whatever the structures put in place, the spirit of St. Angela was always present and travelled through history at the service of the education of women and people in general, their progress, their access to freedom and responsibility; this was thanks to communities deeply rooted in their life of union with Christ and ready to engage all their gifts and creativity to make grow the human and the divine in each of those entrusted to them. Today, we continue, everywhere, to write this history, to enrich the educational tradition which we realise retains its relevance to our contemporaries. We are grateful to those generations of Ursulines who opened the way and who brought us closer to Angela. We believe that, all together they can and want to *help us and do us good in every way* (St. Angela, Counsels, Prologue, 25) with *the Lover of us all* (Fifth Counsel, 38)

Brigitte Monnier osu

France

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Ste Angèle Merici et l'Ordre des Ursulines* par une religieuse du même Ordre, Paris, de Gigord, 1922

ARON Marguerite, *The Ursulines*, translated by Mother M Angela Griffin osu, Declan X McMullen, New Jersey, 1946

GUEUDRE M. Marie de Chantal, *Les monastères d'Ursulines sous l'Ancien Régime*, Saint Paul 1960

CI MONDESERT and H. de LUBAC, *The Roman Union of the Order of St Ursula*, Lyon, Lecuyer, 1958  
cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> part: Short History of the Order up to the Roman Union

RIO Marie Bénédicte, *Elements of Ursuline History and Spirituality*, translated by Sr Mary Benedict Davies osu, Rome 1989-1990

*Règlements, coutumiers, directoires* (édités aux 17, 18 et 19èmes siècles) des divers monastères

G. GUEUDRE, *Catherine RANQUET, Mystique et éducatrice*, Grasset, 1951

Philippe ANNAERT, *Les collèges au féminin, les ursulines aux 17è et 18è siècles*, Collection Vie consacrée, 1992

M-A. JEGOU, *Les Ursulines du Faubourg St Jacques*, Paris, PUF, 1981

M-A JEGOU, *Le « projet éducatif » des Ursulines* ISP, 1987

Anne BERTOUT *Les Ursulines de Paris sous l'Ancien Régime*

*The Autobiography of Venerable Marie of the Incarnation osu*, translated by John J Sullivan SJ, Loyola University Press, Chicago 1964

*Marie of the Incarnation 1599-1672, Correspondence*, translated by Sr M St Dominic Kelly osu (from the French Edition by Dom Guy OURY 1971) 2000

M Abel Gaveau, *Vie de la Mère Sainte Claire BOUTROS du monastère de Blois*, 1881

Revue *Echo de Ste Ursule*, 1898-1910

*Review of the Roman Ursuline Union* 1910

Mother Marie de St. Jean MARTIN, *Ursuline Method of Education*, New Jersey, 1946



### **Four Standpoints of the Merician Educator**

By her life and her *Writings* Angela gives us advice and a presence which are still nowadays relevant to our task as educators. Let us go to her school in order to live out this mission in the service of the people we accompany on the path of human, social and spiritual growth.

#### **What Angela says about AUTHORITY.**

This word does not exist in her *Writings* but she shows us, at one and the same time, its source, its reference, its dignity and the circumstances in which it is exercised.

**Angela reminds us that authority is received from God, the true shepherd and servant.** It is God's initiative: *he wanted to use you as his means for your greater good.* (First Counsel, 5) This is a service and a way of life, *the charge laid upon you.* (Counsels, Prologue, 4) Therefore it is important to remain in relationship with the one who sends us. *How much, therefore, must you pray God to enlighten you, and direct you, and teach you what you have to do for love of him in this task.* (Counsels, Prologue, 7)

The one who has received a share of authority is first of all under the authority of God.

The authority received is part of one's spiritual experience, of one's relationship with God.

**Education is a spiritual experience.**

Angela says to the sisters responsible for formation and accompaniment: *to guard them and watch over them as most vigilant shepherds and good servants.* (Counsels, Prologue, 6)

**A mission which refers to the “shepherd” of the Gospel and to the gift of Wisdom.**

To note: it is not the young who should be “prudent”, but the educators! *To be true and loving mothers of so noble a family* (Testament, Prologue 11) is the **new dignity** of the Ursuline Formator: *You have to thank God most greatly that he has deigned to see to it that you are among those he wants to spend themselves in governing and safeguarding such a treasure, his own.* (Counsels, Prologue, 12) *And there cannot be another more worthy than to be guardians of the spouses of the Most High.* (Counsels, Prologue, 8) It is the daughters who open the blessed life to the mothers!

**The Second Precept indicates to us the state of mind and the occasions for exercising authority:** *Be gentle and compassionate towards your dear daughters. And strive to act solely out of the sole love of God and out of the sole zeal for souls when you admonish and advise them, or exhort them to some good and dissuade them from some evil.* (Second Counsel, 1-2)

Gentleness and compassion in relationships and actions since charity is their only source: love of God, decentring of ourselves and zeal for souls, that is, actions in the interest of persons and their growth according to the will of the love of God for them.

Four very concrete situations, four verbs used by Angela: what meaning do they have for us today?

- **Admonish:** the duty to intervene... and in order to do this, you must have seen. Therefore there is the need to **be present and to see** (vigilance). Angela explains that it is not in order to *judge the heart and the innermost secret thoughts of any creature*, but to *prune this vine which has been entrusted to you* (Eighth Counsel, 4, 8). When we decide to intervene, Angela invites us to do so *at the right place and time, and according to the persons.....be now gentle and now severe, and little or much as there is need* (Second Counsel, 5,7).
- **Advise:** on this point we cannot be truly effective, that is, understood and consistent with the reality of the other, if we do not know the person entrusted to us. *You will be careful and vigilant to know and understand the behaviour of your daughters, and to be aware of their spiritual and temporal needs* (Fourth Counsel, 1). *Have engraved on your mind and heart all your dear daughters, one by one.* (Second Legacy, 1).
- **Encourage the good:** the educator is a guide who *suggests, invites* who comes to meet the other, who walks with the individual in growth. In her Fourth Counsel, Angela wrote: *Tell them ... visit them ... let them go forward willingly, let them not lose hope!* Speaking in order to encourage, suggesting, emphasizing a certain quality, encouraging them to participate ... giving a suitable responsibility ... pinpointing a success in any field ... So that the person knows she is appreciated, esteemed, considered capable of good!
- **Turn away from evil:** a shepherd defends his flock against danger ... he warns, he leads along safe roads ... is careful for himself and those entrusted to him: in terms of physical security, but also in terms of the moral and social environment ... Sometimes, depending on age and circumstances, dialogue is needed to explain and raise

awareness of danger, other times it is simply necessary to forbid ... with **force and determination**. In the Seventh Counsel (19-20) on heretics and persons of ill repute, Angela says: *Consider each one as good, but be prudent for your own good.*

All these attitudes and verbs - admonish, advise, encourage, turn away - have for their basis a **relationship to a person**, the gift of **communicating** with people, in order to accompany them **with a word and a strong presence**.

Finally, this relationship of authority suited to the person and to the situation involves a process of adaptation which Angela recommends to people in responsibility: *If, according to times and circumstances, the need arises to make new rules or do something differently, do it prudently and with good advice* (Last Legacy, 2). Merician fidelity to the Rule, *to the ancient way and custom of the Church, established and confirmed by so many Saints under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit* (Seventh Counsel, 22) does not prevent creativity, the opening of new paths, the opening of new missions; it is Hope in action at the heart of the responsibility and of the mission, it is the *New Life* constantly in motion, listening to Him who *teaches us what we should do for love of him* (Counsels, Prologue, 7).

### **PATIENCE before the mystery of the person: Eighth Counsel**

The Eighth Counsel will be a constant reference for Ursulines over the centuries: attention and consideration for each and every person as a creature loved by God. **Hope** ready for patience ... because “nothing is impossible with God”. Let us read it carefully ...

Verse 2 ... *they are all God's creatures. And you do not know what he wants to make of them.* Love has a basic cause: the divine origin of the person and God's plan for her. The educator should constantly bear this in mind and heart when she speaks or deals with her daughters. This goes far beyond the human perspective of her action. The horizon of her

responsibility is beyond her. *You do not know.*

Verse 3 *For how do you know, you, that those who seem to you to be the least and lowest are not to become the most generous and most pleasing to his Majesty?* Appearances and impressions are not enough to awaken true love and they can be misleading, Angela invites us to banish from our mind any judgment, any “label”; our clear look at the present must always leave the door open to the divine possibility in every creature.

Verse 4 *And then, who can judge the hearts and the innermost secret thoughts of any creature?* There is an element of mystery that only God knows in each of us. No one can access it and cannot therefore judge definitively: there is a **space of freedom** opened by this mystery, freedom for the individual, freedom for God's action.

Verse 5 *And so, hold them all in your love and bear with them all equally, for it is not up to you to judge the handmaids of God: he well knows what he wants to make of them.*

The only proper attitude is love, **love that is desired ... an act of will** *hold them*: this will require an effort of the whole being, a frequent questioning, a lack of understanding and even sometimes suffering ... Any preference is to be rejected. It would not be appropriate, it would side step the mission received. They are servants *of* God: he alone knows the riches he has put in each of them, the call he addressed to each, the patience he has in his heart for each. Educators should never act in the place of God. Charity always goes with humility for Angela, that is, is in its proper place (to love) without diverting into a pseudo power of judgement which does not belong to us. Remain in the truth of the relationship: charity, humility and truth.

Verse 6 *Who (as the Scripture says) can turn stones into children of heaven.*

(cf. Matt 3:9 and Luke 3:8) God is supremely free in his gifts. Our judgment has no control



over his freedom and his love.

Verse 7 *As for you, do your duty, correcting them with love and charity, if you see them fall into some fault through human frailty.* Angela banishes judgment, but recommends educational and sisterly correction. Love and charity motivate her, true love knows how to correct the one who is learning to be herself in all her dignity. It is a duty to intervene when a mistake occurs. The fault is observable, but, beyond that, we must **discern the fragility** which hides behind the act, beyond the appearance. The fault could cause a quick judgement, discretionary punishment; but when it is a case of human frailty it should involve a loving correction, appropriate, aiming at making the person stronger in the face of temptation, more sound for the future.

Verse 8 *and thus you will not cease to prune this vine entrusted to you.* Correct in order to make more solid, this is the pruning of the vine. *Every branch that bears fruit, my Father prunes, that it may bear more fruit.* (John 15.2) *Prune constantly:* thankless work, repetitive, which does not seek immediate consolation. Angela's realism!

Verse 9 *And after that, leave it to God; he will do marvellous things in his own time and when it pleases him.* Angela's immense hope! Everything is possible in God. Another person may disappoint me today, but God cannot disappoint me, he can only amaze me by doing more than I dare to imagine. Our judgment, our projects would risk limiting the plan of the immense love of God. Leave him to carry it out! *In his own time*, ... hope and patience ... so important in education, throughout the formation process! He will do marvellous things. *You will see marvellous things.* (Counsels, Prologue 18) *Mirabilia Dei:* They are the works of Salvation, of God. Angela insists firmly *to leave it to God*, but only *after...* when we have done our part, pruning with love and charity. Collaboration of the person with God in

spiritual and human accompaniment. *When it pleases him*: it is God's time, when it pleases him, his joy, the moment of the fullness of life.

### **The MIRROR and the example, moving forward together: Sixth Counsel**

Do young people have to do as we do, do they have to imitate adults and follow them? Spontaneously, we say that the educator must be a model for those whom he educates. Angela, in the Sixth Counsel, gives an original nuance to this: *Live and behave in such a way that your daughters may see in you a model ... and willingly do, as they do, every act of integrity* (Sixth Counsel 1, 7). *And where the daughters are, there also will be the mothers.* (Last Legacy, 16)

The notion of *model* that Angela also uses in other places is tempered here by the evocation of spiritual motherhood: it is a question of filial likeness and tradition, of *begetting* and not identical reproduction. Angela introduces the image of a mirror which shows the reverse perspective ...: When the young look at us, they must **see themselves** ... What does this mean? Obviously not that we should behave like them, adopt their language, or make ourselves carry out all that goes on in their heads!

It means something else: the condition of our success lies in the fact that when developing young people, look at us, they can discover what she really is; we have, often without our knowledge, the **power to reveal the other to herself. Angela asks us to be aware of it.**

She says *How will you....counsel them, and urge them to any virtue which you do not first possess, or at least, do not begin to practise yourselves, together with them?* (Sixth Counsel, 3-5) We're not perfect, far from it! - We recognize the realism of Angela - Then let us **begin to practise** with them ... Do not wait to be models to educate; if we have received a

delegation of authority, a mission of education, it is not because we are perfect, but because we ourselves are willing to grow in humanity with those entrusted to us ... with, it is true, a little more experience and especially awareness of both our limits and our call to goodness and to love. Angela explains that this mirror has to work especially in the *behaviour and other ordinary and not so ordinary actions....* Our mission includes personal demands but is also a place of personal growth, *you have more need to serve them than they have to be served by you ...* (First Counsel 3). Education is not one way ... It is a relationship; there is a reciprocity because we too are people on the way ... As St. Augustine said: *For you, I am your Bishop and, with you, I am a Christian.* We could say: For you, I am an educator and, with you, I am a person who becomes more and more a person.

### **Finally COLLEGIALLY: Seventh Legacy**

What we would nowadays call “the Merician style of governance” has a specific and original character. The Merician organisational diagram has nothing pyramid like about it, not even is it concentric, it is a constant “back and forth” between those in responsibility - authority is shared; it does not detract anything from its strength but it gives an ecclesial character ... dare we say “Trinitarian”? ... To discover this *insieme* lived out in the service of individuals and communities we will read here the 7<sup>th</sup> Legacy which describes one of the aspects of this collegiality, the monthly meeting.

Verse 1 *Seventh: make sure that you all meet with the leaders twice, or at least once a month.* All (all the lady governors) with the colonelle. There is collegiality between the lady governors and the colonelle. Angela fixes the **frequency**: maintain a rhythm of at least once a month. It is demanding! Regularity is as important as frequency. It is persons who are at stake, this frequency avoids aggravating critical situations; interventions and decisions are closer to

the events that have led to them. The government follows life and forseees it as well. In education, what are the places and times where we can put together our opinions, our skills, our experiences and share our views? ... Then Angela explained the agenda of this council meeting.

Verse 2 *and thus confer together* Each has her responsibility, her role to play. It is not a matter of reporting but of exchanging information and opinions on the situation: *share your views*. There is **mutual consultation**.

Verse 3 *and make a careful examination of the government*. The goal is to faithfully fulfill the mission. The exchange will lead to a **thorough examination**, and to decisions in reference to the Rule and to the Counsels given by Angela for the good of the individuals and the community.

Verse 4 *And especially of what the leaders will report to you about the behaviour of your dear daughters*, ... The leaders have a double role: to visit their sisters and keep the matrons informed about the daily life of the virgins. The subject of the exchanges will be mainly the observations made during visits to the virgins of the Company; Angela said specifically *the behaviour of your dear daughters*. She situates the matrons in their maternal role toward each one (cf Prologue to the Testament). The behaviour, what the colonelle were able to see, is the testimony given by the virgins in their milieu, e.g. **what they do, say, how they behave**. Is there harmony, coherence between their dignity as spouses of the Son of God and their behaviour?

Verse 5 and 6 *and about their necessities and needs, both spiritual and material*. If there is a discrepancy, they will not stop at seeing the problem, but will try **to find the causes**: the colonelle will describe the circumstances of their sisters, they will specify the

needs they see, both spiritual and material.

Verse 7 *And provide for everything as the Holy Spirit inspires you.* Decisions will be taken after this dialogue and a consideration of situation: the necessary steps to meet the needs of each. There is therefore in this meeting a place for exchange, for mutual questioning and also **a place for prayerful listening** before deciding. *Obey the counsels and inspirations which the Holy Spirit unceasingly sends into our hearts* (Rule VIII, 8), listening to Jesus Christ ... *who will enlighten and teach you what you have to do* (Last Legacy, 5). The means taken therefore will be in line with what the Spirit says. The lady-governors do not have the power to decide as they have in their household, but they are the instruments of the Spirit and act together (not each one according to her own conviction) and with the colonelle, in the service of the Company.

**This last aspect of collegiality seems to be the heart and the secret of the Merician educational process.** In a community where each has received a share of authority, the individual has a specific mission and exercises full authority only **if she promotes by her attitude and actions** the authority of the other. The authority will only be effective if it is exercised in harmony with others. Conflict of authority discredits the authority. In the Church we recognize the true faithful as those willing to give up their prestige, their reputation, the spreading of their own thoughts for the sake of the authority recognised as the place of God's presence. *Pray... that God does not abandon his Church, but reform it as he pleases* (Seventh Counsel, 24).

And we Merician educators, who receive a share of authority, as teachers, formators, catechists, families, different staff in contact with young people, our duties are diverse. From whom do we receive our authority? What hope inhabits us and nourishes our patience? What

do we reveal to others about themselves through our regard and our attitudes? How do we live this *insieme*, how do we enable the exchange of views and discernment? How do we respond to our vocation in the Church, that is by taking up our mission in a Body where exists unity of plan and diversity of functions?

Our uniqueness and our particular grace pass through this spiritual and human experience of Angela's to which she invites us; we do not have a monopoly but Angela promises us her presence, her prayer, her support to live them every day. She is more alive than she was when she lived on earth and she wants and is able to help us in every way (Cf Counsels, Prologue, 23-25). Let us entrust to her these students, these young people who are walking with us! She continues to be there among us so that together we make progress in humanity for the joy of God!

Brigitte Monnier osu

France



## **Ursuline Education in the Spirit of St. Angela**

### **Introduction**

There are Ursuline schools throughout the world. I have visited many of them, particularly in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, where my specific ministry took place, and where I once networked with over sixty schools which connect with the Ursulines. That was my primary responsibility as the Director of the Ursuline Educational Services (UES): to serve as a catalyst for our schools in North America. Later I will share about the way UES tries to network with schools. Before this work, I served as a teacher, a principal, a school president, and as an Ursuline community and province leader. A few years ago a new dimension entered my world of Ursuline education. I was being asked to visit other countries to share with students, teachers, co-workers, and administrators in our Ursuline schools. There is a global sense and a desire for interdependence. I have visited England, Austria, Taiwan, South Africa, Canada, and France. What are my discoveries? Let me share some of them with you.

### **The Mission of Ursuline Education**

There is a saying among Ursulines. "The sun never sets on an Ursuline mission." If

we reflect on the word "mission" in its root meaning - being sent forth, being in mission, sharing the Gospel, going forward in faith - then Ursuline missions are around the world. When I walk into an Ursuline school, I often see the "Mission Statement" somewhere visible. Perhaps in the lobby or foyer of the school it is framed and hanging on the wall. Perhaps as I enter the Administrator's office, I notice it on her desk. Certainly every publication sent out officially from the school has its mission statement printed somewhere.

Here is one mission statement from an Ursuline school in the United States: *Faithful to the mission of the Ursuline Sisters..., our Ursuline Campus Schools seek to educate the whole person to live more fully in relationship with God and others.* Another statement includes these emphases: *In a community environment built on standards of academic excellence and respect for the uniqueness of each person, Ursuline educates students for Christian living and leadership in a global society, nurtures the development of the whole person and her potential, and cultivates within its students a spirit of lifelong service through its motto of 'Serviam,' 'I will serve'.* Places in North America, South America, Western and Eastern Europe, Asia, Australia, the Caribbean, and Africa have Ursuline school missions that echo these mission statements. The Ursuline schools also reflect the heritage of St. Angela Merici and internationality.

### **Angela Merici, a Woman for all Seasons and all Places**

We may ask the question, "What is our heritage of Ursuline Education?" How can we capture the dynamism of the Italian woman of the sixteenth century who was both an innovator and rooted in her traditions?

I offer several sayings of Angela which reflect this rich heritage she gave us. My favorite one is this: *cultivate the vine entrusted to you.* Angela encourages us to cultivate



what has been given to us in mission. The individual's worth was important to Angela. She wanted each person to be the best she could be. Angela acknowledged the weaknesses but she accented the gifts each person has. She wants each of us to call forth the talents and personal integrity we have ourselves, and those we see in one another.

The balance of head and heart came together for Angela Merici as she tells us, her followers: *have them engraved on your heart*. The environment surrounding the person and the family background are part of getting to know and love the person. One of the great gifts of Angela Merici for her Company of St. Ursula (the Ursulines), was having Jesus Christ as her one and only treasure. Let Jesus be your first refuge, she declared. We know she lived out these words. The Christ of the Gospel was the center of her prayer. When Angela quietly went about helping those in need, we know her inspiration was Jesus Christ. She saw Christ in each one, hard though that may have been at times. When she tried to bring about peace and reconciliation among people in a war-torn Italy she recommended them to God.

Angela's heritage included a spirit of love and unity. She told us to long for unity of heart, to work for it, to have *one heart and one will* in pleasing God. Then we would be like a mighty fortress, a stronghold. For Angela that symbol was special, since her city of Brescia, Italy, was often besieged by warring groups from neighboring towns. She wanted all to come together, one mind and one heart.

There is an innovative sentence Angela Merici gave her followers and which gives us a clue about her willingness to look forward and plan for the future. *If, according to times and circumstances, the need arises to make new rules or do something differently, do it prudently and with good advice.* (Last Legacy, 2) How marvelous to have her spirit of flexibility, her collegial framework and her spirit of openness and adaptability.

## **Angela Merici and a Pedagogy of Education**

Angela Merici herself did not leave us a method or pedagogy of education. What she left us was an enduring Gospel attitude, a pastoral sense of each person's worth, and a desire for teamwork in the good works we do as we spread the "good news" of Jesus Christ. The Company of St. Ursula grew from a small tree of a couple of dozen followers, to a tree of hundreds and now thousands of companions. From northern Italy, to France and Germany, to the Americas and to Asia and Africa, they branched out.

The work of education became the focus in many cities and towns, as the Ursulines responded to the cries of Bishops to begin and staff schools. They became renowned as "teachers par excellence". Lay collaborators joined in these efforts and the laurel tree grew and developed, planting seeds everywhere. When Ursuline education moved into the twentieth century, theorists asked, "What are some characteristics of Ursuline education?" A number of authors wrote on this topic. I would like to share from two of them. One book was written during the World War II years by a French Ursuline. The second book was written recently by a layman from Australia. Both of these books are scholarly and they both share a love for St. Angela's spirit and what Ursuline education is all about.

In the first book titled, *Ursuline Method of Education*, (1946) Marie de St. Jean Martin, OSU, attempted to answer the question, "What are some characteristics of Ursuline education?" From the start, she establishes a developmental stance. *The educator's task is to watch and to direct that which God has put into a soul. Everything was placed there for a purpose; all God's gifts are worthy of development.*<sup>1</sup>

The author touches on the reality of being an educator when she states, *the personal*

---

<sup>1</sup> M Marie de Saint Jean Martin osu, *Ursuline Method of Education*, New Jersey, 1946 p.7-8

*subject of education is the child.*<sup>2</sup> The greatest talent of an educator, according to her, is to free the child for action, for personal effort and growth. Although she was a woman immersed in her French heritage, this author was often ahead of her time. Marie de St. Jean Martin has a sense of the period of adolescence which echoes psychologists of today. *The period of adolescence is characterized by a transformation which is not only organic, but also psychological, intellectual, and moral.*<sup>3</sup>

In her own language, she offers what Brazilian educator Paulo Freire would call a "problem posing pedagogy" for the educator to use with the adolescents. What is a problem in their own experience? How can we work together to solve it, and grow from it? In a section of *Ursuline Method of Education* called *Traditional Education of the Ursulines*, the author grounds our educational philosophy in an image which lives on in our day and time, that of the family. She puts special emphasis upon the formation of the heart, and on promoting social justice and charity in all our surroundings.

Her enthusiasm for social and service dimensions of Ursuline education is awesome, when we think of the historical limits at that time. She writes: *The constant preoccupation of a religious educator should be to prepare for the Church and for society women who are thoroughly Catholic. She should therefore, give the children a truly formative instruction, an education of the heart and of the will,...*<sup>4</sup>

Marie de St. Jean Martin suggests that the present needs of the Church - keep in mind she was writing this during World War II - center on our efforts to re-Christianize society. We can give the children *an enlightened religious instruction from which they will draw*

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.28

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.45

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.104

*powerful, personal convictions, a sense of duty, and a generous apostolic spirit.*<sup>5</sup> Today we might say that service needs to permeate the world. The humanistic touch is there, along with faith-formation. It is the self-actualization of the child which is the greatest priority in our method of education, according to Marie de St. Jean Martin. In her words, *by a full and harmonious development of all that constitutes her wealth, her strength, and her beauty, each child, under our direction, works out the magnificent plan of God.*<sup>6</sup>

In 1994, Peter Maurice Waters, an Australian educator, published a book called *The Ursuline Achievement: A Philosophy of Education for Women*. The subtitle is *St. Angela Merici: the Ursulines and Catholic Education*. In this scholarly work, the author concentrates on the nature of Ursuline education which he describes up to the time of the suppression of the religious orders during the French Revolution. Although the book is limited in its intent, I suggest that it offers a new sense of the scope of Ursuline education for us. It offers common ground for the Ursuline educational values which seem to permeate all centuries.

This author, as did our previous one, credits the child-focus as important in Ursuline education. He writes: *For Angela Merici, too, the child-nature must be studied and understood. Rather than being indulged, the child should be loved and cared for in order that careful instruction may be well received and moral formation easily accepted.* Peter Maurice Waters has spent time with St. Angela and her writings. *Angela Merici's writings have been examined for their pedagogical content, revealing a philosophy of formation that is personal, psychologically attuned to the individual, providing for individual differences, having a commitment to equity, and promoting self-discipline through encouragement rather than*

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.277

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.7

*compulsion.*<sup>7</sup>

With insight and thorough research, Waters details the development of Ursuline education in France. The French method of education that was written for the schools was known as the *Règlements* and became a handbook for the Ursuline schools. It is interesting to note its main characteristics of Ursuline Education cited by Waters: *The characteristically maternal approach and promotion of a family spirit, the presentation of regulations that are animated by charity and 'douceur,' the sense of protectiveness of the best interests of the pupils, the insistence on discretion in punishment, and recommendations for motivation, encouragement of recognition and reward, all combine to produce a style of educating that is Ursuline.*<sup>8</sup>

As Waters brings his book to a close, he recalls that marvelous gift Angela Merici bequeathed to us - creative adaptation according to times and circumstances. Even after centuries of upheaval, the tradition of Ursuline education continues strong as it re-emerges *...in fidelity to the principle of adaptation enunciated by Angela Merici herself, (it) continues to be a model for those who would see the education of young women in the broadest sense as a formation of the total person to excellence, taking place in an environment of integrity, of humanity, and of Christian conviction.*<sup>9</sup>

### **Networking Ursuline Education Today**

Re-weaving the fabric of Ursuline education for our times, we have built on the strength of our charism and the heritage of Angela. With the support of the Ursuline congregations in North America – 19 existed in 1990 – with over fifty Ursuline schools and

---

<sup>7</sup> Peter Maurice Waters, *The Ursuline Achievement: A Philosophy of Education for Women*, 1994, p.55

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.84

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.109

colleges interested in collaboration, UES (Ursuline Educational Services) began in the fall of 1992 with its own office and a fulltime Executive Director.

During its early years, the Director visited the schools and spoke about the mission of the then called NAUES (now UES): *North American Ursuline Educational Services is a collaborative effort of Ursuline congregations to carry their educational tradition into this century. In the spirit of Saint Angela Merici, the organization fosters education based on Gospel values. It promotes the preservation and development of the Ursuline charism and mission in Ursuline-sponsored schools and other educational settings.* (original NAUES Mission Statement)

During the 1994-95 year, at the request of a number of administrators, the first "Administrators' Dialogue" was convened in March of 1995 in New Orleans, Louisiana. During that historic meeting, the topic of core values in Ursuline education came up. The discussion led to the development of key core values believed to be part of the fabric of Ursuline education. Various words and phrases were brainstormed by the group gathered in New Orleans. Eight core values emerged and are still used by some of the Ursuline schools. These eight core values are: excellence in education, emphasis on the whole person, community, social consciousness and service, spirituality, heritage of Angela Merici, creative attitude towards change, and leadership development of women.

Other UES activities which have developed over the years include the following:

Administrators' Dialogue held every other year

Ursuline Education Conference held every other year (even number years)

Annual Student Leadership Conference for Young Women of Ursuline secondary schools

Newsletter, "Laurel Links" sent three times yearly

Annual Student Service Recognition Program

Resource Center for Ursuline Educational multi media materials

Networking services.

### **Global Aspects of Ursuline Education**

As UES continues to network with about 50 Ursuline schools and colleges in North America, it serves 40,000 young women and men in the creative spirit of St. Angela, foundress of the Ursulines. With the increased use of technology our schools are now entering into a global sense of being Ursuline educators. Bonding among students is taking place through email and texting. The 2003 Student Leadership Conference which took place in Wilmington, Delaware at the end of June became an international experience for the fifty student leaders because there were students from St. Ursula High School in Hachinohe, Japan, who joined us for the event.

One UES Administrators' Dialogue which took place in Louisville, Kentucky, at the Ursuline Campus Schools in November, 2003, proved to offer another international dynamic to the fifty-five gathered together. Four countries were represented: Germany, Canada, Taiwan, and the United States. There was an enrichment and exchange of understanding Ursuline education which delegates took away with them when they returned to their own Ursuline educational settings. One delegate wrote: *We took back many good ideas that were shared at our get-togethers....going to these conferences with other Ursulines 'just makes you feel good'. I know that is not the sole purpose of coming together but it is a most welcome outcome that flows from dialoguing with professionals that are so genuine and so committed.*

When I was teaching a class of students in the London area, at St. Ursula's School in

Greenwich, one of the students proclaimed at the end of a skit honoring St. Ursula: *We are Ursulines alive today. St. Ursula lives on in us.* These young women had caught the spirit, the charism of St. Angela Merici. They were willing to live in the light of our heritage. Through our lay co-workers, and our graduates, and our students, we are cultivating the vine entrusted to us. Our links will grow as we plant new seeds of networking throughout our world. Many students in an all-girls' setting call themselves a "sisterhood" because of their sisterly sense of companionship.

These years my primary ministry is that of Director of Mission and Heritage at Ursuline Academy in Dallas, Texas. This challenges me to create new ways to bring Angela Merici's life and love for Christ and others alive for the 815 young women (ages 14-18) and the 100 plus faculty and staff. I love the work. I love the students' openness to God and to prayer. Even with a hundred other ways that our world calls them to be scattered, their efforts focus on being the best faith-filled persons they can be.

As we move forward in our twenty-first century, with all of its opportunities and challenges, we do so in St. Angela's spirit of innovation, service, and faith. We are her peaceful presence in a divided world. We are her hands as we collaborate in our mission-enriched Ursuline institutions. We join hands and ask our God to inspire us anew in all that we do.

Lois Castillon osu  
USA