Elements of Franciscan Spirituality in the Life and Writings of Angela Merici

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Introduction

ngela Merici, whom Ursuline religious throughout the world regard as their foundress, lived in northern Italy during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Her gift to the Church is unique in that she began in Brescia the Company of St. Ursula, a group of women dedicated to virginity who would remain in their own homes and live their life of consecration in this setting. Although she prescribed no specific ministry to her sisters, she empowered them to "live a new life" in the midst of all the turmoil of the Reformation and to bring this ministry of spiritual empowerment to all whom they would encounter. Since Angela's own spiritual journey began as a member of the Third Order of St. Francis, the evidence of this Franciscan influence is visible in both her life and her writings. Among the elements of Franciscan spirituality which can be discerned in Angela's legacy are an emphasis on peacemaking, finding a creative way to renew the Church, the evangelical foundation of her Rule, its Christocentric focus, use of tenderness and familial imagery in describing the relationships among the members of the Company, stress on leading by

¹The inspiration for this article came from a course in Franciscan Spirituality taught by Margaret E. Guider, OSF, at Weston School of Theology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the Fall Semester of 1993. It was she who guided my initial studies of early Franciscan documents and who encouraged me to seek publication of my final paper for her course. It is to Professor Guider that this essay is gratefully dedicated.

example and with great respect for individual differences, loyalty to the Church, appreciation for the natural world and of the importance of joy, and awareness of the humanity of Jesus Christ, particularly in his Sacred Passion.

Life of Angela Merici: Franciscan Connections

Although many details of her life are not known with historical certitude, the best source of recent scholarship currently available is Angela Merici: Contribution towards a Biography by Luciana Mariani, Elisa Tarolli, and Marie Seynaeve, originally published in Italian, now obtainable in English translation.² In spite of the paucity of accurate historical records about Angela's life, the fact that she was a member of the Third Order of St. Francis is one of the "most documented biographical pieces of information" about her.

One of the first biographers of Angela was the Capuchin, Mattia Bellintani (1535-1611). Originally from Salo, Bellintani was provincial, general assessor, general commissioner of France and Switzerland, and general visitor for Bohemia. Two different biographies of his have been found, the Vita della B. Angela da Desenzano, now in the Biblioteca Queriniana of Brescia, and also copied into the Atti del Processo, the Process Acts of Beatification and Canonization of Angela Merici in the Vatican Secret Archives, and the Vita della B. Angela fondatrice della Compagnia delle vergini di S. Orsola, published in the Monumenta Historiae Capuccinorum, vol.VI, Historia Capuccina. In this work, Bellintani had originally defended

²Original Italian edition: Milan, Italy: Editrice Ancora Milano, 1986. English translation by M. Ignatius Stone: Milan, Italy: Editrice Ancora Milano, 1989. Hereafter, the English translation of this source will be referred to as Mariani et al.

³Ibid, 117.

⁴Ibid, 44-45.

⁵Ibid, 45. The document is classified as ms.B.VI.30.

⁶Tbid. These Process Acts at the Vatican Secret Archives, S.C. Rituum, are classified as 340-341. Bellintani's complete *Vita* is in 341, ff.893r-920v. A mutilated copy of Bellintani's original was copied in 340, ff.572r-594r.

⁷Ibid, 46. This source for Bellintani's second biography is *Monumenta Historica Ordinis Capuccinorum*, vol.VI, Matthias a Salo` OFM Cap., *Historia Capuccina* (Romae: In lucem edita a Pl Melchiore a Pobladura, OFM Cap., 1946), 77-

the inclusion of Angela's biography in a preface explaining that she had been a member of the Third Order of St. Francis, a preface which was later omitted, with two prefaces by the priest Octavio Gondi substituted for it in the edited manuscript found in the Biblioteca Queriniana.* The fact that Bellintani spent some time in Brescia before 1552 and returned periodically, as well as his origins in Salò and the time he spent in ministry there, give additional credibility to his works. Although his was by no means historical biography according to contemporary standards, Bellintani's *Vitae* have the advantage of his probable contact with people who had known Angela personally, or at least with stories told of her while memories were still fresh."

Another Franciscan connection to the cult of Angela Merici was through the Capuchin, Father Francesco Andreis, also known as Francesco da Desenzano, who with full authorization of his religious superior, worked on the cause of her beatification. Having been appointed by the Ursulines of Brescia in 1755 as special Procurator of the Process, he managed the aspects of the beatification process conducted in Desenzano from November 1757 through January, 1758. It was this same Capuchin who was entrusted with taking the official transcript of the Process, the original record having been deposited into the Episcopal Archives of Brescia, to Rome and delivering it to the Sacred Congregation of Rites. It

Although details of her early life are especially sketchy, it is believed that Angela was born about 1474 in the town of Desenzano on the southwest bank of Lake Garda. There is a plaque on the buttress of the castle of Desenzano stating that the house opposite it on the Via del Castello (now no. 96, formerly no. 333) is the place where she was born "in the room

^{113.} It is taken from the codex R, t.II, ff35v-54r, found in the General Archives of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin, classified AC, 19-20.

⁸Ibid. The Queriniana manuscript is classified as B.VI.30.

⁹Ibid, 47.

¹⁰Ibid, 423, and Vatican Secret Archives 340, ff.370r-425v.

¹¹Ibid, 425.

on the north-west of the first floor." This plaque also states that she died in Brescia on January 27, 1540, "at the presumed age of 66 years."

Her father was Giovanni Merici, a literate man and a property-owner. The tradition that he could read comes from Angela's having told close friends of evenings in the family home when her father would read aloud from "spiritual books about Saints and Virgins," a practice which, according to her friend Antonio Romano, inspired her early aspirations for a "sober, pious and contemplative life." Local tradition, still widely accepted, holds that in addition to the Desenzano residence where Angela was born, the family had property at the Grezze, on farmland outside the city, where Angela probably spent her childhood. We know from the *Registro dell'Estimo* of 1523, that Angela herself owned property in this region and that it was cultivated land with vineyards, to it is reasonable to assume that she inherited this land from her father, as a portion of a larger farm.

Although it is certain that Angela had siblings, the exact number and gender of these is not clear. She had at least one sister, possibly older

¹² Ibid, 89.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid, 90. The source for this and other first-hand information about Angela Merici is Giovan Battista Nazari, a notary of Brescia, who in 1568 obtained the bishop's permission to take depositions from four of her contemporaries, Antonio Romano, Bertolino Boscoli, Giacomo Chizzola, and Agostino Gallo. The quotation cited here is from the testimony of Antonio Romano, with whom Angela lived for a period of time. Nazari's document, referred to in Merician literature as the "Processo Nazari," is included in the original Italian as Appendix D16, 595-602, in Mariani et al. It is also available in English translation as an unpublished document from the Ursulines of the Roman Union, Casa Generalizia, Via Nomentana, 236, I 00162 Romae.

¹⁵Giovan Battista Nazari, Testimony Concerning the Life of the Reverend Mother Sister Angela of the Third Order of the Franciscans: "Processo Nazari." (Rome: Ursulines of the Roman Union, Revised Translation, 1992. Unpublished Manuscript.) Testimony of Antonio Romano. See note 15 above. Hereafter this source will be referred to as Processo Nazari.

¹⁶ Mariani et al., 88.

¹⁷ Ibid.

than she, and certainly two but possibly three brothers.¹⁸ The death of her sister at an early age was one of the formative experiences of Angela's life. Romano states that after the death of her sister,

...wishing to know if her sister's soul had risen to the joy of everlasting glory, she prayed every day to the Lord. Then one day, whilst she was in a small field belonging to her near Desenzano, praying for her sister with her usual prayers, there happened that, in the middle of the day, she saw a procession of angels, in the midst of whom was the soul of her beloved sister, happy and triumphant. And suddenly the band of angels disappeared at speed. But the vision of her sister's soul stayed in her mind. That is why, always thinking of that vision, she dedicated herself more earnestly to fasting, abstinence and prayer. And thus she donned the habit of the Third Order of Friars Minor of St. Francis.¹⁹

This "vision of Brudazzo," as it has come to be known, is commemorated to this day with a cross marking a spot in the Desenzano countryside, and an Ursuline retreat center, the Mericianum, located nearby.

It is not known exactly when or where Angela joined the Third Order of St. Francis. After the death of her parents, while Angela was still a minor, she and a sibling went to live with the family of their maternal uncle, Biancoso de Bianchi, in Salò, a town of greater prominence than Desenzano, also situated on the southwest shore of Lake Garda. Some stories of Angela's early attempts at piety probably date from this period and possibly stem from her reaction to a life of greater affluence than that to which she had grown accustomed at the Grezze. One of these stories is of Angela's attempt to leave her home and lead the life of a hermit, a childlike "adventure" which could have taken place either at Salò or at Desenzano. A second anecdote relates Angela's effort to ruin her beautiful blonde hair after someone had admired it and assured her that with such attractive hair she would have no trouble finding a husband.²⁰ These and other anecdotes present a picture of Angela's resistance to the urbane and cultured life, with

¹⁸ Ibid, 89.

¹⁹Processo Nazari, testimony of Antonio Romano. See note 15 above.

²⁰Mariani et al., 108-109.

its pressures to marry, which would have probably been the norm for her Biancosi relatives of Salò.²¹

Mariani et al. place the time of Angela's decision to enter the Third Order during her stay in Salò, possibly as another step in her efforts to oppose the "worldly" influences she encountered there, and certainly so that she could have more frequent access to the sacraments. Agostino Gallo, another of Angela's contemporaries with whom she lived for a time in Brescia, stated in his deposition for the "Processo Nazari" that he had heard it said several times that she began at the age of five or six to lead a life of piety and devoted herself more and more to prayer and practices of devotion as she advanced in age.

Thus she eventually took the habit of the Third Order in order to be able to go to mass, confession and communion more easily, for in those days, lay persons were not allowed to receive communion often...²³

Historical evidence points to Angela's having become a member of the Third Order in Salò rather than Desenzano. At the time Angela would probably have joined the Third Order there was not yet a Franciscan convent at Desenzano. The convent of San Bernadino had been established in Salo in 1476 by the Friars Minor of Observance, and they also said Mass and offered the sacraments in the church known as "della Disciplina," which was near the Biancosi family home. ²⁴

Mariani et al. point out that through "belonging to such a prestigious religious family as the Friars Minor of the Observance, Angela was shielded from people's inquisitive comments and from any reproach of singularity" in regard to her desire to follow Jesus Christ more closely. Her membership in the Third Order gave her the title "Sur Anzola" ("Suor

²¹Ibid, 110.

²²Ibid, 118.

²³ Processo Nazari, testimony of Agostino Gallo. See note 15 above.

²⁴Mariani et al., 118. They cite the work of Angelo Stefani, Compendio Storico della Vita della B. Angiola Merici da Desenzano fontatrice dell'Ordine detto di Sant'Orsola scritta da un Sacerdote Secolare (Salò: B. Righetti, 1771), 26-27, for this information.

^{25.}Ibid, 121.

Angela" in later Italian) and allowed her to wear the Franciscan habit. From this time on, she was regularly depicted or described as wearing the habit in which women of the Third Order of St. Francis used to dress at this time.²⁶

The obligations which Angela undertook as a member of the Third Order would have included the following:

- -making a life commitment
- —wearing a habit in the form of a tunic and cape, made of ordinary materials, plus a small neckerchief without any frills, ribbons or other ornaments
- —refraining from attending shows that would be less than edifying, from banquets, stylish meetings, and balls
- —observing specified and frequent periods of fasting and abstinence from meat
- —going to confession and communion at Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost
- -reciting the Liturgy of the Hours
- —being a peacemaker among one's sisters and brothers, and also among others when possible

²⁶These references occur throughout the research of Mariani et al. We have already quoted Agostino Gallo's comment. Antonio Romano also mentions Angela's wearing the habit from the time she became a Franciscan Tertiary and further states that she wore it while she lived in the house of Caterina Patengola. The testimony of Giacomo Chizzola also mentions her having "taken and worn the habit of the Minors of the Third Order." [Processo Nazari. See note 15 above.] Since Angela seems to have separated herself from the Franciscans to some extent in founding the Company of St. Ursula, it is of particular interest to note her depiction in the habit of a Franciscan tertiary in the painting "The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine of Alexandria," by the Brescian artist Gerolamo da Romano, called Romanino, a contemporary of Angela's. This painting, now in the Kress collection of the Brooks Memorial Gallery in Memphis, Tennessee, formerly belonged to the Maffei collection at Brescia. Critical analysis of this work, plus the fact that the Company of St. Ursula was founded on November 25th, the feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria, suggest that it was commissioned by someone in the Company who wanted to commemorate its foundation, and that it was thus painted in 1535 or a little later. [Mariani et al. 277-279.]

- —attending daily mass when possible and participating in a monthly communal mass
- -making an offering for members who were poor or sick
- —choosing a spiritual director who would encourage works of mercy and acts of penance
- -visiting sick members²⁷

That Angela embraced this commitment wholeheartedly can be seen by the way her life unfolded from that time on.

A precise date is not known for Angela's return to the Grezze, but it is presumed she did this when she had reached the age of majority, probably joining the household of her older brother who had remained behind to manage the family farm when Angela and her sibling went to Salò. Angela continued her life of piety there, and her reputation as a spiritual woman grew, with many people turning to her for spiritual counsel. She must have kept in regular contact with her Franciscan superiors, for it was at their suggestion that she traveled to Brescia in 1516 to comfort the widow Caterina Patengola who had recently lost her children. This act of mercy on Angela's part began a new phase of her life, for she remained in Brescia and it is there in November of 1535, five years before her death, that she formally established the Company of Saint Ursula, a group of consecrated virgins who lived at home yet observed a common rule which included a commitment to virginity, obedience and poverty.

The city of Brescia to which Angela moved in 1516, had been ravaged by wars for many years. During the time in which she lived there it was again threatened on several occasions. In addition to this civic unrest, there was the disquieting influence of the Reformers as their ideas filtered south of the Alps. It was a time of papal scandals, of absentee bishops, and of

²⁷Mariani et al, 121-122. The authors summarize these obligations from the Bull "Supra Montem" of Nicholas IV as found in *Bullarium Franciscanum Romanorum Pontificum Constitutiones, Epistolas ac Diplomata continens tribus ordinibus Minorum, Clarissarum et Poenitentium a Seraphico Patriarcha Sancto Francisco Institutis concessa...* Tomus IV, Romae 1768, Typis S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 94-97. The authors also mention that nothing was stated about hair styles in the description of the required dress because it was customary for all women to keep their heads covered.

²⁸Ibid, 131.

many other lapses in church discipline, yet a time of sincere piety on the part of many of the faithful. It was to such people as these that Angela ministered, as they sought her out in numerous ways.

We are told that people of all social classes found her approachable, from the young women who eventually joined her in the Company to the exiled Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza II, who asked to be accepted as her "son." Angela never owned her own home in Brescia; she lived always as someone else's guest. After she left the home of Caterina Patengola, she was invited into that of the young Antonio Romano. Later—probably out of sensitivity to the need for more privacy on the part of Romano and his new bride—she joined the household of Agostino Gallo. It was Gallo who testified that she spent "the entire day in good offices to her neighbors." Both Gallo and Romano recalled that all kinds of people flocked to their homes asking for her, seeking her comfort and counsel, asking for her prayers.

Marie-Benedicte Rio, in *Elements of Ursuline History and Spirituality*, includes as the "good offices" bringing peace, comforting, giving advice, interceding, and teaching.³² She quotes Angela's secretary and confidante, Gabrielle Cozzano, who gives this "portrait" of Angela in the midst of her Company:

She was like a sun which gave light to all the others. She was like a fire and a furnace of love which inflamed them. She was like a throne of God which taught them.

And the one who was the greatest sinner received from her the greatest kindness because, if she could not convert him, at least with redoubled affection, she could persuade him to do some good or at least to do less

²⁹Ibid, 295.

³⁰Ibid, 170, and *Processo Nazari*, testimony of Agostino Gallo. See note 15 above.

³¹Ibid, 176, and *Processo Nazari*. See note 15 above.

³²Rome: Ursulines of the Roman Union, 1989-1990, 30. This work is presently only available in manuscript form.

evil... Her words were ardent, powerful, gentle, and pronounced with such strength of grace that each one felt compelled to say: "God is here."

Such a description evokes memories of Bonaventure's *Major Life* of Francis, whom Angela had come to resemble.

Shining with the splendor of his life and teaching, like the morning star in the midst of clouds, by his resplendent rays he guided into the light those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, and like the rainbow shining among clouds of glory he made manifest in himself the sign of the Lord's covenant.

He preached to men the Gospel of peace and salvation, being himself the Angel of true peace. 34

Angela's ministry of peacemaking gives further evidence of her Franciscan spirituality. Antonio Romano provides the following account:

I know this: from day to day, as her holiness was growing, the fame of her pious life spread amongst the people, so that many people from Brescia came to her, some in order to obtain a particular grace from the Lord through her devout prayers, others to settle some dispute amongst the citizens or the nobles of the city. Among other things I recall the discord between messer Filippo Sala and messer Francesco Martinengo, whose quarrel had never been settled, not even by the Duke of Urbino, nor by the Authorities and Nobles of the city. And this Madre Suor Angela, at the request of the wives of those two, with a few words, managed to have them make peace with one another, to the satisfaction of both.

³³Ibid, 31. Rio, unfortunately, does not cite the precise source for this quotation. Besides the works dictated by Angela to Cozzano, we have three of his writings to the Company after Angela's death to defend her vision of the Company of St. Ursula against those who wanted to make changes. These documents, called the "Epistola Confortatoria," the "Risposta," and the "Dichiarazione," have been studied and cited by Mariani et al, Appendices D22, D23, and D24, 618-656. At the time of this writing a complete English translation of these documents was not available.

³⁴Ewert Cousins, ed. Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God - The Tree of Life - The Life of St. Francis (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 180.

Her fame was spreading in the surrounding areas so that every Lord used to grant her requests. I tell you this because I remember that once, having left Brescia together, we went to Mantova to visit la Madre Suor Osanna, and we came back through Solferino, where Messer Aloisio di Castiglione and his wife were living. It so happened that Messer Alosio had outlawed one of his courtiers, a friend of Madre Suor Angela, and had confiscated his property. She went to see Messer Aloisio who received her kindly, and freed her friend from banishment, and gave him back his property. And then she returned to Brescia.³⁵

Angela had taken to heart her commitment to be a peacemaker both to those she knew intimately and to strangers.

Like her spiritual father Francis, Angela lived in troubled times and sought a creative solution to Francis's call to "rebuild my Church." She did not ignore or deny the need for reform. Her advice to the leaders of the Company, however, was:

Keep to the ancient way and custom of the Church, established and confirmed by so many Saints under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And live a new life.³⁶

³⁵Processo Nazari. See note 15 above. It might be noted that the "Madre Suor Osanna" Romano speaks of was probably Osanna Andreasi (1449-1505), a Dominican Tertiary who had received the stigmata and whose renown for sanctity was widespread in northern Italy. Since she was already dead at the time Angela and Romano would have traveled to Mantua, their trip was probably a pilgrimage to her tomb. Pilgrimage was a frequent part of Angela's devotional life, and she is buried with and often depicted with a pilgrim's staff.

³⁶Angela Merici, Writings: Rule, Counsels, Testament. Earliest-known Italian Texts and Translation by a Team of Ursulines of the Roman Union (Rome: Ursulines of the Roman Union, 1995), Seventh Counsel, 93. This edition includes the original Italian with the English translation on facing pages. Angela herself probably never wrote. What we have are her Counsels and Testament (or Legacies) as dictated by her to her secretary, Gabrielle Cozzano, from the text in the Acts of the Process of Canonization in the Vatican Secret Archives, an authenticated copy from the original manuscript of Cozzano: 341, ff.946v-958v, and two later copies of her Rule, also originally dictated to Cozzano but now only available in a late 1545-early 1546 edition found in 1985 in the Trivulzian Library of Milan, and a 1569 edition by Damiano Turlino of Brescia, discovered in 1932. Prior to this time, all editions of "Angela's Rule" were based on the revisions of it as reformed by Charles Borromeo in 1582. See Translators' Introduction to this work, IV-V.

The "new life" which Angela proposed was a creative alternative to the only options available to women at that time who wanted to live a life of dedication: an enclosed monastery or a Third Order. It was a unique form of life: distinct from a Third Order in that virginity was seen as a life commitment³⁷ and differing from what today would be considered a secular institute because the members lived their consecration publicly. It was not a religious congregation, because the virgins did not make the three traditional vows (although some may have made a private vow of virginity).³⁸ Gabrielle Cozzano described her life as "apostolic." By this he meant not an "apostolate" in the way this word is sometimes used today as a synonym for ministry but rather a life of discipleship as was lived by the first followers of Jesus and by the early Christians, especially the early consecrated virgins.⁴⁰

³⁷Mariani et al, 233. The authors make a point of this to explain why Angela may have wanted to establish something different from a Third Order: "Angela was aware of the frequent conflict between the custom that wanted a daughter behind a grille or married, and the hidden longings for a fully consecrated life outside the cloister, which many of the young women who approached her carried in their heart. The Third Order of St. Francis, to which Angela belonged, did not in itself involve a lifelong commitment to virginity, and so did not offer any guarantee against possible pressure from parents and suitors. In addition, she must have found the means of reciprocal support which it provided insufficient to safeguard the perseverance of those young girls and women who were placed sometimes in a servile position with employers, who were not always respectful of their good resolutions. An adequate structure was lacking, with a juridical value of its own, its own statutes and its own rights."

³⁸Rio, 42.

³⁹Mariani et al, 159. See note 34 above regarding Cozzano's writings.

⁴⁰Ibid, 159-160. The authors explain that in pre-Tridentine language the adjective "apostolic" had a very different connotation from the modern one. Among the passages from Cozzano's "Risposta" quoted in this section are these: "early, apostolic life," "life according to that lived by the Apostles and early Church," "[a life in the world conforming to] that model of life which Jesus Christ, coming forth from the bosom of the Father, brought from heaven. And which he wanted to live. Such is the life followed by his Apostles. and the martyrs. and so many beautiful virgins of the primitive Church and above all the Madonna." (D23, ff.11r-v, 42r-v; 37r; 49v-50r.)

Perhaps it was her experience of living a dedicated life as a Franciscan Tertiary which taught Angela that it was possible for women to take that next step of permanent commitment to virginity without adding the traditional elements of cloister and communal living.

In order to protect this new way of life, Angela set up a novel structure of governance in which elected members of the Company together with trusted matrons and men from the local area were to be its leaders, each group with a different function. The *Counsels* were Angela's last words to the Colonelli, the small group of virgins elected as leaders from the Company, while the *Testament* was addressed to the Matrons, widows of Brescia chosen to assist the Colonelli in seeing that the virgins were protected in the way of life they had chosen and that their needs were provided for. Each document gives us glimpses of Angela's spirituality and her vision of how God was calling the virgins of this new Company.

A final connection to the Franciscan tradition in the life of Angela occurred at the time of her death. Prior to this, in 1532 and possibly as an indication of her beginning separation from the Third Order of St. Francis, she had requested and received a dispensation from the requirement of having her body buried in the Franciscan church of Brescia as was customary for Franciscan Tertiaries, choosing instead the church of St. Afra near her final residence.⁴¹

Nevertheless, in spite of her having made her preference for place of burial known in advance, Bellintani recounts that there arose "a dispute between the Cathedral and the church of St. Afra over the question of her body, because these two churches were each trying to secure that holy relic." Because of this dispute, Angela's body lay for thirty days in an open

⁴¹Ibid, 233. The authors cite the petition in which "Angela from Salo,' Franciscan tertiary of the diocese of Brescia" made this request, choosing instead the church of St. Afra which was also dedicated to Sts. Faustinus and Jovita. This church, damaged during World War II, has been restored and renamed the church of St. Angela. A transcription of Angela's petition was found in the Vatican Secret Archives, Diversa Sacrae Penitentiariae Clementis P.P. VII, anno IX, 1532, Reg.79. f.s.n. It is cited as Appendix D8, 582-583. The reply, given in Appendix D9, 583, is from Girolamo Lombardi, *Vita della Beata Angela Merici, Fondatrice della Compagnia di S. Orsola*, Venezia, 1778, 132, nota f. Emendata.

⁴²Ibid, 244, citing Bellintani, *Vita...*, Biblioteca Queriniana, ms.B.VI. 30, f [20r]; Monumenta..., 92.

coffin in the crypt of St. Afra's, yet it did not decompose. Gallo is quite explicit in his testimony about this.

It so happened that after her death, almost the whole city was able to observe an extraordinary thing: her body, clothed, was kept in the open coffin for thirty days in that place where the bodies of the blessed are buried in the chapel under the church of Sant'Afra; well now, not only did it not give any unpleasant odor, but also, during all this time, her arms and hands remained so flexible that whatever and wherever they were touched or pressed, the flesh returned to its original state, as in any living person. 43

Because of the long delay in the burial of her body, it was possible for Romanino to make a portrait of Angela in death. Although this painting is now lost, it was carefully studied and described during the process of Angela's beatification. The report of the artist Francesco Savanni, one of the experts appointed to examine the painting for the beatification process, included this description:

Blessed Angela Merici is shown here as a dead person lying on her back, and I know it is she from having seen some printed pictures of her which are circulating here and there, and there is a perfect likeness between these and the one in the painting, both in the physiognomy and in the habit, which is what the religious of the Third Order of St Francis used to wear, namely the veil and the religious wimple which the Tertiaries today, at least in Brescia, no longer wear, and the long gray-beige cape which completely covers her, apart from the hands and the feet which remain uncovered.⁴⁴

Thus we see Angela, even in death, displaying that Franciscan influence which shaped her life and ministry for so many years.

Writings of Angela Merici: Elements of Franciscan Spirituality

In spite of Angela's move in a new direction and somewhat apart from her Franciscan connections, there are many ways in which her writings reflect the Franciscan influence, especially in their Gospel foundation, tender images, and call to such typically Franciscan virtues as poverty of

⁴³Processo Nazari, testimony of Agostino Gallo. See note 15 above.

⁴⁴Mariani et al, 245-246, quoting Savanni's report from the Process Acts in the Vatican Secret Archives, 340, ff.687v-688r.

spirit, harmony and peace, joy, and devotion to the humanity of Jesus Christ.

Her *Rule* comes to us much as does the *Later Rule* of Francis. There are still elements of Angela's vision and spirit evident in the text, but overlays of other influences are also apparent. The *Counsels* and *Testament*, on the contrary, convey Angela's personality and spiritual vision with a freshness which is still intact. As with the writings of Francis, Clare, and other early Franciscans, Angela's words contain numerous references to Scripture, both as actual quotations and as allusions to other passages. For example, the Prologue of her *Rule* includes two direct quotations and an allusion to a third passage from Scripture. Angela gives the Latin text from Scripture, followed immediately by a free translation into Italian, not necessarily literal, but rather Angela's interpretation intended to clarify or stress her point. Angela's vision, like that of Francis and Clare, was that the Gospels would be the primary source for this way of life.

A further example of this evangelical foundation is contained in the chapter on poverty in the *Rule*. This brief chapter of two paragraphs contains three quotations: "blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:3), "seek first the kingdom of God and all these other things of yours will be set before you" (Mt. 6:33), and "do not be anxious in seeking what you will have to eat or what you will have to drink, because your heavenly Father knows very well that you have need of all these things." (Mt. 6:31-32)⁴⁸ That the first scripture passage was one which held special significance for Franciscans is evident in that it is quoted in the

⁴⁵The most obvious of these later influences is the injunction to wear a leather belt "as a sign of exterior mortification and perfect interior chastity." [Merici, Rule, Chapter II: How they should be dressed, 17.] This was added after the death of Angela, who herself never prescribed a distinctive form of dress and never speaks of "chastity" in reference to virgins, but always of "virginity." [See translators' footnote.]

 $^{^{46}}$ Ibid, 7-13. The scriptures quoted or alluded to are Mt. 24:13, Lk. 11:28, and I Pet. 5:8.

⁴⁷Merici, Translators' Introduction, VI.

⁴⁸Ibid, 45-47. In each case, what is given here is the translation of Angela's interpretation rather than a literal translation of the Latin quotation.

Prologue of the *Sacrum Commercium*⁴⁹ and also in the section on "Poverty of Spirit" in the *Admonitions* of St. Francis.⁵⁰

Angela repeatedly stresses that this way of life is centered in Jesus Christ. As she tells the Colonelli, "Learn from Our Lord." And again, speaking of the whole Company, "Let them have Jesus Christ for their only treasure."

But it is more frequently through spousal imagery that Angela describes this relationship with Jesus Christ. Like Clare who wrote to Agnes of Prague, "You are the spouse and the mother and the sister of my Lord Jesus Christ and have been adorned resplendently with the sign of inviolable virginity," Angela's writings are filled with nuptial imagery. The Prologue of the *Rule* contains this passage:

Therefore, my sisters, I exhort you, or rather I beg and entreat you all, that having been thus chosen to be the true and virginal spouses of the Son of God, you will be willing first of all to recognize what such a thing implies, and what a new and astonishing dignity it is... And, all the more my sisters, must we be vigilant as our undertaking is of such importance that there could not be a greater, for our life and salvation are at stake, and we are called to so glorious a life as to be spouses of the Son of God and to become queens in heaven.⁵⁴

⁴⁹Marion A. Habig, ed., St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of Francis (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 1550.

⁵⁰Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius Brady, eds., Francis and Clare: The Complete Works (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 32.

⁵¹Merici, First Counsel, 71.

⁵²Ibid, Fifth Counsel, 87.

⁵³Armstrong and Brady, 1Lag 12-13, 191.

⁵⁴Merici, 7-9.

The chapter on virginity states:

...each one should behave in everything in such a way that she would not, within herself or in the presence of others, do anything unworthy of the spouses of the Most High.⁵⁵

The *conclusion of the Rule* refers to Jesus Christ as spouse. In prescribing prayers for a sister who dies, it states that these prayers are to be said:

...so that if her soul were in the pains of Purgatory on account of some sin, our gentle and loving Spouse Jesus Christ, would draw her out of these pains, and lead her to the glory of heaven with the other virgins, crowned with the golden and most shining virginal crown.⁵⁶

Spousal images frequently appear in the *Counsels*, too. In the Prologue, Angela tells the Colonelli:

How much, therefore, you must pray to God to enlighten you, and direct you, and teach you what you have to do for love of him in this task—and there cannot be another more worthy than to be guardians of the spouses of the Most High.⁵⁷

In writing to the Matrons, Angela's *Testament* also stresses this spousal relationship of the sisters with Jesus Christ. The Prologue invites them to:

...consider your great grace and good fortune, that God has deigned to make you mothers of so many virgins, and confided his own spouses to your hands, and entrusted them to your government.⁵⁸

The Fourth Legacy contains a long passage in which the Matrons' care of the sisters is compared to the care with which human mothers dress

⁵⁵ Ibid, 43.

⁵⁶Ibid, 55.

⁵⁷Ibid, 65.

⁵⁸Ibid, 107.

and adorn their daughters in order to please earthly spouses. Angela urges the Matrons to:

...be eager and ardent in putting all your zeal and concern into ensuring that your daughters are adorned with every virtue and with all regal and refined manners, so that more and more they may please Jesus Christ, their Spouse.⁵⁹

After explaining the care which natural mothers take in preparing their daughters for marriage, Angela concludes:

How much more, then, must you do this for these heavenly daughters of yours, who are spouses not of earthly husbands..., but of the immortal Son of the eternal God. Oh, what a new beauty and dignity to be ladygovernors and mothers of the spouses of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and so to become in a way mothers-in-law of the Son of God...⁶⁰

We can see from some of the writings already quoted that Angela made use of family relationships as images for members of the Company, as did Francis and Clare in regard to the Franciscan family. The authors of the book *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God* speak of the "deep tenderness in the relationship between Francis and Clare" as characterizing "the quality of life of the Franciscan community in the relations of all the brothers and sisters."

⁵⁹Ibid, 117.

[&]quot;Ibid, 119. This spousal imagery, which was downplayed for a time after Vatican II, is being given renewed attention. Appreciation of the beauty and power of spousal imagery as a metaphor for the relationship with God has been enhanced by the work of such feminist scholars as Renita J. Weems in her interpretation of "The Song of Songs" in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Know Press, 1992). In this essay, she notes the fact that it is a woman who is the protagonist in the Song, that this poem "insist[s] in a rather dramatic manner on a woman and a man's right to love, irrespective of prevailing cultural norms, whomever their heart chooses," and that, "nowhere else in Scripture do the thoughts, imaginations, yearnings, and words of a woman predominate in a book as in the "Song of Songs." To the extent that the Song, as a part of the canon, does express religious insight, that too is mediated through a woman." [156]

⁶¹ Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, OFM, Cynthia Moe-Loebda, Stuart

This same quality of tenderness is evident in Angela's words to her sisters. In the First Counsel, Angela describes the leaders of the Company as "my daughters and sisters most dear in the Blood of Jesus Christ" (le mie figlie et sorelle nel Sangue di Jesu Christo carissime). She exhorts these leaders in the Eighth Counsel to "love your dear daughters equally" (amati le vostre figlioline egualmente). In her Eighth Legacy, Angela tells the Matrons, "have engraved on your mind and heart all your dear daughters, one by one" (haver in mente et nel core scolpide tutte le vostre figliuole de una in una), and she tells them:

Therefore, my most loving mothers, if you love these dear daughters of ours with a burning and passionate charity (Siche', le mie cordialissime madre, se avareti queste nostre figlioline con viva et sviscerata caritade), it will be impossible for you not to have them all depicted individually in your memory and in your heart.⁶⁴

Angela's tenderness and her great wisdom are both evident in her Second Precept (Counsel):

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. For you will achieve more with kindness and gentleness than with harshness and sharp rebukes, which should be reserved only for cases of necessity, and even then at the right place and time and according to the persons.⁶⁵

As in the writings of both Francis and Clare, maternal images abound in Angela's writings. Like Francis who in *The Rule for Hermitages* provided that there should be at least two "mothers" even if only one

Taylor, St. Francis and the Foolishness of God (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 126.

⁶²Merici, 68-69.

⁶³ Ibid, 94-95.

⁶⁴Ibid, 110-113.

⁶⁵Ibid, 73. For some reason, the Second, Third, and Sixth Counsels are each called a *Precetto* (precept), not an *Arricordo* (counsel), in the original Italian. Traditional usage in Ursuline circles is to call them all Counsels.

"son," Angela provided that both the Colonelli and the Matrons would act as mothers for her Company. In her Third Precept (Counsel), she instructs the former to be obedient to the latter:

For obeying them, you will be obeying me; obeying me, you will be obeying Jesus Christ, who, in his immense goodness, has chosen me to be mother, both alive and dead, of such a noble Company, even though, for my part, I am most unworthy of it... And know that it is right to love the mothers if they are good, and bear with them if they are eccentric. And be very careful never to complain, or grumble, or speak ill of them, whether to others or with your daughters. But always and everywhere preserve the honor and respect due your mothers, seeing that if God commands us to honor our natural fathers and mothers, how much more our spiritual [mothers] should be esteemed.⁶⁷

Clare in her Rule speaks thus to future community leaders:

I also beg that sister who will have the office [of caring for] the sisters to strive to exceed others more by her virtues and holy life than by her office so that, encouraged by her example the Sisters may obey her not so much out of duty but rather out of love. Let her also be prudent and attentive to her sisters just as a good mother is to her daughters; and especially let her take care to provide for them according to the needs of each one from the things which the Lord shall give. Let her also be so kind and so available that all [of them] may reveal their needs with trust and have recourse to her at any hour with confidence as they see fit, both for her sake and that of her sisters.⁶⁸

Angela too exhorted the leaders of her Company to lead first of all by example: "As for you, live and behave in such a way that your daughters may see in you a model...For it is right and fitting that the mothers be an example and a mirror for their daughters." "69

⁶⁶ Armstrong and Brady, 147, #1.

⁶⁷Merici, 77.

⁶⁸Armstrong and Brady, 231, #19.

⁶⁹Merici, Sixth Precept (Counsel), 89-91. Angela's use of the image of a mirror here is possibly an echo of Bonaventure's allusions to Francis as a "mirror of holiness" in the Major Life. [Cousins, 228 & 321.] Or perhaps Angela was aware of Clare's Testament in which she states: "For the Lord Himself not only has set us an

Angela's concern that her daughters' needs be provided for is expressed to the Colonelli as follows:

You will be careful and vigilant to know and understand the behavior of your daughters, and to be aware of their spiritual and temporal needs. And then, as far as possible, you yourselves provide for them, because you must give the matrons as little trouble as possible.

But if you cannot provide for them yourselves, go to the principal mothers [matrons], and quickly, and without any hesitation explain to them the needs of your lambs. And if you see them slow to provide, be insistent; and in that case, in my name even be importunate and troublesome. For if ever, through your fault and negligence, one of them were lost, God would demand from you a strict account of it on the day of judgment. For you must know this and hold it for certain: that he will never fail to provide for their needs, material as well as spiritual, on condition that nothing is lacking on your part. For if God planted this Company, he will never abandon it, for as Scripture says: "Nunquam vidi justum derelictum nec semen ejus quaerens panem," that is, never have I seen the just abandoned nor his children go begging.⁷⁰

Because Angela's daughters did not live communally, special care needed to be taken for their spiritual needs. Thus the Colonelli were told:

Please go often, as you have time and opportunity, especially on feast days, to visit your dear daughters and sisters (*vostre figlie et sorelle care*), and greet them; see how they are, comfort them; encourage them to stand firm in the life begun; invite them to desire the celestial joys and treasures, to long for those joyful and new feasts of heaven, those blessed and everlasting triumphs...

And when you visit them, I give you this charge, to greet them and shake hands with them, also on my behalf...

Comfort them, encourage them...

an example and mirror for others, but also for our [own] sisters whom the Lord has called to our way of life, so that they in turn will be a mirror and example to those living in the world." [Armstrong and Brady, 227-228, 6].

⁷⁰Ibid, Fourth Counsel, 79-81.

Also, 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. How many lords, queens and other great persons there are who, with the many riches and possessions they have, will not be able to find true relief in some extreme need; and yet these little ones, poor as they are, will find consolation and comfort.

Also, tell them that now I am more alive than I was when they saw me in the flesh; and that now I see them and know them better. And can and want to help them more. And that I am continually among them with my Lover, or rather ours, the Lover of us all, provided they believe and do not lose heart and hope. And so, especially for those you see disconsolate, doubtful and faint-hearted, enlarge the scope of the promises, which will not go unfulfilled.⁷¹

Angela saw herself as not only mother and sister to the virgins of the Company, but also as faithful friend. One of the most poignant passages in her *Counsels* is her final blessing:

And at the same time rejoice, because, without doubt, what I say to you will be so. Not to mention the immense and inestimable grace that my Lover, or rather ours, will grant you at the supreme moment of death, for in times of great need, true friendship is recognized. And believe firmly that then, especially, you will recognize me to be your faithful friend. Now I leave you; be consoled, and have a lively faith and hope. But first I want you to be blessed, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.⁷²

How like the final blessing of Clare to her sisters these words are! One wonders if Angela was familiar with the words themselves or only with their spirit:

I bless you in my life and after my death as much as I can and more than I can with all the blessings with which the Father of mercies has and will have blessed His sons and daughters in heaven and on earth. Amen.

Always be lovers of God and your souls and the souls of your Sisters, and always be eager to observe what you have promised the Lord.

⁷¹Ibid, Fifth Counsel, 81-87.

⁷²Ibid, Last Counsel, 101.

May the Lord be with you always and, wherever you are, may you be with Him always. Amen. 73

Angela's emphasis on the virtues to be cultivated by her daughters differs from her Franciscan roots in several ways. Poverty is still important, but it is not the "queen of virtues" as it was for Franciscans. ⁷⁴ Her stress is on poverty of spirit. In the *Rule*, the chapter on poverty states:

Finally, we exhort each one to embrace poverty, not only effective poverty of temporal things, but above all true poverty of spirit by which man strips his heart of all affection and longing for created things, and of his very self. And in God he has all his wealth; and apart from God sees himself to be completely poor, and a total nothing, and with God to have everything. For Truth says: "Beati pauperes spiritu quoniam ipsorum est regnum coelorum," that is, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Like Francis and Clare before her, she encouraged her sisters to put their trust in God's providence. In the Fifth Counsel cited above, she told the leaders:

God will provide for them wonderfully... How many ... great persons there are who, with the many riches and possessions they have, will not be able to find true relief in some extreme need; and yet *these little ones*, *poor as they are*, will find consolation and comfort.⁷⁶

Yet Angela made it quite clear that there was not to be a "privilege of poverty" as was practiced by Clare and her followers. ⁷⁷ Her Ninth Legacy contains this admonition to the Matrons:

Ninth: Know that if it were not useful and suitable that this Company have some income, God would not have begun to provide it. I warn you however: be prudent in this matter, and be good and true mothers, and

⁷³Armstrong and Brady, 234.

⁷⁴Sacrum Commercium, 1560, Omnibus.

⁷⁵Merici, 45.

⁷⁶Ibid, 85-87, emphasis added.

⁷⁷Francis and Clare, ClTest 12, 229, n. 7.

such income as you have, spend it for the good and the development of the Company, according as discretion and motherly love will suggest to you.⁷⁸

Replacing poverty as "queen of the virtues," in Angela's vision, is virginity. The chapter on virginity in the *Rule* begins:

Each one should also preserve sacred virginity, not making a vow on account of any human persuasion, but voluntarily making to God the sacrifice of her own heart. Because *virginity* (as also the canonists say) is sister of all the angels, victory over the appetites, *queen of the virtues* and she possesses all good.⁷⁹

As with poverty in the Franciscan view of the spiritual life, virginity for Angela is a means of being united to Jesus Christ. She says in the Fifth Counsel:

They should do honor to Jesus Christ, to whom they have promised their virginity *and their very self*. They should place their hope and love in God alone and not in any living person... Let them have Jesus Christ for their only treasure, for there also will be love.⁸⁰

Angela lived at a time of great social upheaval, as did Francis and Clare. In addition to the ravages of war, there were many abuses in the Church. Like her Franciscan forebears, Angela stressed loyalty to the Church while not denying the need for reform. Her chapter on obedience in the *Rule* contains the following passage:

[E]ach one has to obey... what the holy mother Church commands, for Truth says: "Qui vos audit me audit et qui vos spernit me spernit"; that is, the one who listens to you listens to me, and the one who despises you despises me. 81

Her concern that her daughters not be deceived by the thinking of the Reformers is expressed thus to the Colonelli:

⁷⁸Merici, 125.

⁷⁹Ibid, 41, emphasis added.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 85-87, emphasis added.

⁸¹ Ibid, 39.

Know that you have to defend and protect your lambs from wolves and robbers, that is, from two kinds of pestilential people: worldly persons or false religious with their deceits, and heretics...

Now, as for protecting them from the pestilential opinions of heretics, when you hear that some preacher, or other person, has a reputation for heresy, or preaches new things outside the common practice of the Church, and contrary to what you have received from us, then, tactfully, prevent your dear daughters from listening to such a person. For it often happens that certain bad seeds are planted in the mind, which cannot then be uprooted except with great difficulty.

Therefore, do not yourselves be on familiar terms with them either. Leave them alone. Consider each one as good, but be prudent for your own good. For it is better to follow what is certain, without danger, than what is uncertain, with danger. Keep to the ancient way and custom of the Church, established and confirmed by so many saints under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And live a new life.

As for the other opinions that are arising now, and will arise, leave them aside as not concerning you. But pray, and get others to pray, that God will not abandon his Church but may reform it as he pleases, and as he sees best for us and more to his honor and glory. For in these perilous and pestilential times, you will find no other recourse than to take refuge at the feet of Jesus Christ. Because if he directs and teaches you, you will be [well] taught, as the Prophet also says: "Beatus quem tu erudieris, Domine"; that is, blessed is the one whom you, Lord, have taught. 82

In spite of the caution expressed in the passage quoted above, Angela did not hesitate to urge her daughters to attend to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Her way was never meant to be a rote following of doctrine or rigid adherence to rules. The chapter on obedience in the *Rule* lists all the levels of authority—including ecclesiastical authority—to be obeyed, but adds this remarkable passage:

And above all: to obey the counsels and inspirations which the Holy Spirit unceasingly sends into our hearts, He whose voice we shall hear all the

⁸²Ibid, Seventh Counsel, 91-95. This passage is quoted at length because of the juxtaposition of the injunction to lead a new life with that of remaining loyal to the Church and praying for Church reform, all echoes of Franciscan themes.

more clearly as we have our conscience more purified and clean. For the Holy Spirit is the one who (as Jesus Christ says) "docet nos omnem veritatem"; that is, teaches us all truth.⁸³

In addition to the evangelical virtues of poverty, virginity, and obedience, Angela's Franciscan heritage is apparent in the other virtues which she held up to her daughters. The Fifth Counsel contains this summary:

Tell them that, wherever they are, they should give good example. And be to all a good odor of virtue. And be obedient and submissive to their superiors. And seek to spread peace and concord where they are. Above all let them be humble and gentle. And let their behavior, their actions and their words be with charity; and let them bear everything with patience, for with these two virtues especially, one crushes the head of the devil.⁸⁴

Angela's stress on harmony and peace, in particular, reveals how deeply influenced she was by Francis, of whom (as cited above) it was said,

He preached to men the Gospel of peace and salvation, being himself the Angel of true peace. 85

We have seen above how Angela lived this way in her personal ministry of peacemaking and reconciliation. Her writings, in addition to the injunction to "spread peace" just quoted, emphasize harmony and unity. Her Last Counsel contains this passage:

My last word to you, by which I implore you even with my blood, is that you live in harmony, united together, all of one heart and one will. Be bound to one another by the bond of charity, esteeming each other, helping

⁸³Ibid, 41. The "dangerous" nature of this passage quickly became apparent to ecclesiastical authorities. When Charles Borromeo rewrote the Rule after his visit to Brescia in 1580, he changed this section to one which urged obedience to the Holy Spirit whose inspirations were expressed through the mediation of superiors. His wording reads: "In addition to this [the hierarchy], to the interpretations that they know come to them from the Holy Spirit in the judgment and with the approval of the spiritual father." [Rio, 62, emphasis added.]

⁸⁴ Ibid, 83.

⁸⁵ Bonaventure, Major Life (quoted more fully above), 180.

each other, bearing with each other in Jesus Christ. For if you strive to be like this, without any doubt, the Lord God will be in your midst. 86

Her Tenth Legacy reiterates this message to the Matrons:

Be on guard, then, and take care especially that they are united and one in will, as we read of the Apostles and other Christians of the early Church: "Erat autem eorum cor unum," that is, they were all of one heart.

In the same way, you also strive to be like this with all your dear daughters, because the more you are united, the more Jesus Christ will be in your midst as a father and good shepherd. 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, for he himself says: "In hoc cognoscet mundus quod eritis mei discipuli, si diligeretis invicem"; that is, by this the world will know that you are mine, if together, you love one another.⁸⁷

Hints of the "uniquely Franciscan vision of a transformed relationship with creation" also appear in Angela's writing. The last section of the chapter on obedience in the *Rule* contains the injunction to "obey God and every creature for love of God... provided that nothing is commanded us contrary to the honor of God and our own integrity." In her Last Counsel, Angela continues her exhortation to live in harmony thus:

⁸⁶ Merici, 97-99.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 127-129.

⁸⁸ Dennis, et al, 107.

⁸⁹Merici, 41. The recently discovered Trivulzian version of the Rule gives us a glimpse of what has been lost of Angela's actual words, revealing her spirituality. In this example, in regard to creation: the chapter on prayer includes a prayer Angela has composed. In the Turlino edition, a portion of this prayer reads, "I beg you [Jesus Christ] for this by your most Sacred Passion, by your Precious Blood shed for love of us, by your holy Name Jesus; may it be held holy in heaven and on earth and with all the heavenly choirs of angels and archangels." [Angela Merici, Rule, Counsels, Testament: Early Italian Text and Modern Translation (Rome: Ursulines of the Roman Union, 1985), 33] The Trivulzian text contains this wording: "...and by your holy Name, be it blessed above the sands of the seas, above the drops of the waters, above the multitudes of the stars." [Merici (1995 edition), 31, emphasis added.]

For if you strive to be like this, without any doubt, the Lord God will be in your midst. You will have in your favor our Lady, the apostles, all the saints, the angels, and finally, all heaven and *all the universe*. Because God has so ordained from all eternity, that those who for his honor, are united in doing good enjoy every prosperity, and that what they do turns out well, because they have God himself *and every one of his creatures* in their favor. 90

Angela's writings also show appreciation for the Franciscan spirit of joy. The chapter on virginity in the *Rule* says this of each sister: "But let her be joyful and always full of charity, and faith, and hope in God." And like Francis of whom it was said that he "maintained that the safest remedy against the thousand snares and wiles of the enemy is spiritual joy," Angela instructs the Matrons to gather the sisters together from time to time:

And then (according to whether you have at your disposal a suitable person) have them listen to a short sermon and exhortation, so that, together like this, they might also meet each other as loving sisters, and thus, *talking over spiritual matters*, *rejoice together*, and together encourage one another, which will be no small help to them.⁹³

For Angela, awareness of the humanity of Jesus Christ is expressed mainly in terms of the Passion. As with Francis whose contemplation of the Passion was with a devotion so intense that he was "utterly transformed... into Jesus through love and compassion," Angela's desire was also to "partake in [Jesus'] most sacred Passion." Her writings contain a number of expressions like the following one from the Prologue to the *Counsels*:

⁹⁰ Ibid, 99, emphasis added. Cf. also Romans 8:20-28.

⁹¹Ibid, 43.

⁹²²Cel 125 as quoted in Dennis et al, 143-144.

⁹³Merici, Eighth Legacy, 123, emphasis added.

⁹⁴Raphael Brown, ed, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* (New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1958), 191.

⁹⁵Merici, Rule, Chapter V: On prayer, 31.

I ask you all, or rather I beg you, for love of the Passion of Jesus Christ and of our Lady, to strive to put into practice these few counsels which I am leaving you now to carry out after my death... 96

The Prologue to the *Testament* includes a similar request:

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 which, by the grace of God, you will find here, set out below, one after the other.⁹⁷

It has been said that "a truly Franciscan spirituality is not so much a mysticism of suffering as it is a spirituality of following Jesus." The love which inspired Francis and Clare to strive to be one with the kenosis of Jesus Christ also inflamed the heart of Angela. It is this love which she sought to foster in her daughters. Her vision for the Company of St. Ursula, though unique in many respects, as we have seen, was deeply influenced by the Franciscan spirituality which had been her heritage from the beginnings of her spiritual life.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 69.

⁹⁷Ibid, 109.

⁹⁸Dennis et al, 136.