

ANGELA MERICI - The scribe and the witnesses

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and the
witnesses*



Presented
by Marie-Bénédicte Rio, osu

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Three writings of Gabriel Cozzano,
Angela's secretary and
Chancellor of the Company
(1540 - 1546)

**Testimonies of the life
of the Reverend Mother Sister Angela
Franciscan Tertiary**

or

"Processo Nazari"
(1568)

Translated from the ancient texts

Roman Union of the Order of Saint Ursula
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Basic Texts

EPISTOLA CONFORTATORIA

alle vergini della Compagnia di sant'Orsola composta per il suo cancelgliere Gabriello Cozzano.

Città del Vaticano. Archivio Segreto Vaticano. S.C. Rit.
Processus 341, ff. 958v-969r.

RISPOSTA

contro quelli persuadono la clausura alle Vergini di sant'Orsola.

Brescia, Biblioteca Queriniana, ms. D.VII.8.

DICHIARAZIONE DELLA BOLLA

Città del Vaticano. Archivio Segreto Vaticano. S.C. Rit.
Processus 341, ff. 969r-983r.

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Le Justificationi della Vita della Reverenda Madre Suor Angela Terzebita

Città del Vaticano. Archivio Segreto Vaticano. S.C. Rit.
Processus 341, ff. 936v-945v.

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GABRIELE COZZANO

The three writings of Gabriel Cozzano

- "*Epistola Confortatoria*"
to the virgins of the Company of St Ursula.
- "*Risposta*"
against those who want to urge the virgins
of St Ursula to enter a monastery.
- "*Dichiarazione della Bolla*"

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Angela Merici - Lettere del segretario - 1540-1546,
Áncora gennaio 2000

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Introduction

Three writings — but supposing there had been a fourth? This is not altogether unthinkable when one reads the "Preface to the reader", copied out between the end of 1545 and the beginning of 1546 in the Trivulzian codex just before the "Regula". Written when? A little earlier no doubt. Its author, anonymous, knows the Company well; the thinking, the style, the tone have a Cozzano "flavour". Listen to the words: "Who is the person who would be envious or spiteful enough to dare open his mouth boldly?" Does this not recall Cozzano?

What is more, if, as it is thought, it was the case of preparing the copy of the Rule for printing, to whom would those in charge of the Company have turned for a preface to it but to the one who had taken it down from the lips of the Foundress herself and who, in addition, was the chancellor of the Company?

But analysing this text would yield us nothing that we could not find elsewhere. So let us leave it anonymous.

* * *

Gabriel Cozzano. A man of indeterminate age, apparently rather dull, about whom practically nothing is known except that he is called "grammaticus et litterarum professor" in the epitaph which he composed for Angela's tomb, and "notary" in an official act. This is the man of discretion, though, whom Angela chose to be her private secretary before appointing him chancellor of the Company and its protector.

When and how did she get to know him? We do not know. Perhaps he had been a tutor to the young Patengola children; Angela would then have had the opportunity to meet him when she was staying with their mother, Catherine Patengola, and to recognise in him the sterling qualities that would

stand her in good stead later. It does not matter really; what counts is what Angela and the young Company saw in him. We can only refer you here to the study made on the subject in the work of Luciana Mariani, Elisa Tarolli and Marie Seynaeve which from now on will be referred to by the letters MTS.¹

What counts also is that it is from Cozzano that we learn about the Madre, her intentions, and about the life of the early maidens of the Company. He pours all his heart and zeal into this, thereby discounting any suggestion that he was an unfeeling man. We cannot but be moved by his loyalty to the foundress, her thought and her work.

This is how he presents the Madre surrounded by her daughters: *"She was like a sun that gave light to all the others. She was like a fire, a conflagration of love that set them all alight. She was like a throne of God which instructed them..."* (MTS, p.176). He shows her welcoming suggestions from her "giovinette", discussing them with them, encouraging them to try them out (cf. MTS, p. 391). Cozzano gives us some explanation, as far as it is possible, of Angela's regret at having been so slow to begin to serve his divine Majesty (cf. Rule V, 27) by making us feel her hesitations: *"First of all, God himself inspired and at the same time compelled our Mother foundress to plant and to establish in his name this holy Rule of life. So very true is this, that she did not call it her Company, but that of Jesus Christ...and although she had been inspired with the idea of it from an early age and shown it from on high, and although she had a great longing for it, she had never wanted to start it, however, until commanded by Jesus Christ to do so, until he had cried out within her heart and had impelled and constrained her to begin and to establish it"* (MTS, p. 255).

¹ MARIANI, TAROLLI, SEYNAEVE, *Angela Merici, Contribution towards a Biography*, Ancora-Mediaspaul, 1989. See especially pages 25-27; 145-148; 159163; 268-269; 317-322; 329-350.

Then there is that little personal detail which brings us a new insight into Angela's intimacy with her Lord: "*How many times, not in a human spirit or in a spirit of untruthfulness and vanity, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, she used to call him her "LOVER ", so close was this generous and sublime soul bound to God by love*" (*Dichiarazione*, f. 969v).

Cozzano is the first to set out clearly Angela's aims in establishing the Company: to restore the honoured place of the "apostolic life" in the Church of her day, in other words a "*life according to that lived by the Apostles and early Church... the most perfect life there has ever been or ever will be... the life of the first flowers of the Holy Church, and especially of the Madonna... this life which Jesus Christ, coming forth from the bosom of the Father, brought from heaven, and wanted to live...*" (MTS, p.160). And through Angela's efforts, that life has now been "planted anew" on earth.

Cozzano continues by pointing out how this "apostolic life" was lived by Angela's first daughters — and by the Madre herself. This is the first account of what will be, for Ursulines, the ideal of a life completely unified in the Holy Spirit: "*An active life, but with the mind always raised heavenwards... Thus [the virgins] live among human cares and troubles, but without losing that special peace of mind of those who constantly place their trust in the peaceful help and consolation of the Holy Spirit... And so, living in the midst of the world and this active life, they enjoy the contemplative. And, in an admirable way, they synthesis together the two ways of life. The height of contemplation does not distract from daily tasks and these tasks do not distract from enjoying the things of heaven. And the heavenly light does not suppress the activities. Thus, the Apostles, and numerous other martyrs, virgins and confessors, in the midst of their work that they were carrying out solely for pure love of God, were nearer to God than others ever were who, freed from any human worries, devoted themselves entirely to contemplation. Such is the life of this Company. Such was the kind of life led by the Foundress. New apostle in this corrupt age of ours, such was this heavenly virgin*" (*Risposta*, [50r-51v]; cf. also MTS, pp. 159-162).

Yes, Cozzano certainly understood Angela well.

But when the Madre is slandered, her intentions distorted and her work threatened, the faithful secretary sees red; he becomes the fierce champion of all that Angela had stood for, and he goes into the attack. With a fiery spirit and passion, together with his legal knowledge, he makes a formidable polemicist.

This may be the place to recall a few points.

Angela's death had left the Company distraught. Her undertaking was so new, so audacious, that certain souls even within the Company itself were wracked with doubt, while from without all kinds of criticism rained down, both from the civil society and from ecclesiastical circles. There were attacks against Angela, against her foundation, and manoeuvres to bring about a more normal situation by urging the young members of the Company to marry or to enter a convent.

Cozzano reacted with two writings probably written about the same time.

To the virgins of the Company, he wrote an "*Epistola confortatoria*" — a letter of comfort — to encourage them in their vocation and to show them its beauty: "All Cozzano's grief is expressed in this letter; his search for comforting arguments is touching; his faithful devotion to the Foundress makes him adopt an almost paternal way of speaking and he adopts expressions which echo Angela's teachings... This writing is certainly the calmest and the most serene, but also the most grieved, the most perceptive and the most convincing. In it, Cozzano extols the merits of the Company without falling into the heated polemics of his other two writings" (MTS, p. 318).

The "*Risposta*" is addressed to the government members of the Company, the matrons and colonelle, so that they would know what action to take against those "who are urging the virgins of the Company to enter a convent": "A prey to anxiety and bitterness, disappointed, by the defections, worried over the specious arguments advanced by both the laity and the clergy, Cozzano tries to marshal together all the valid points... most likely to help those in government refute their adversaries... His style becomes contorted, over-weighted with arguments... and so violent becomes the polemic that Cozzano resorts to invective language..." (MTS, p. 320). Cozzano does not deny the value of enclosure but he also strongly endorses the dignity and value of the Company, "*planted and introduced by the great power and eternal virtue of the Son of God*" (*Risposta*, f. 969v). He also saw, no doubt, "the direct threat to this institution, the only one of its kind in Brescia, which was able to offer to a great number of women the possibility of self-fulfilment in a life of consecration, even though they could not enter a monastery or were not attracted to the cloister. If some of them were to enter a monastery, this could well unsettle the others; a transformation of the Company into a monastery would once again frustrate the aspirations of the majority of its members and would once again restrict their field of choice " (MTS, p. 320).

The "*Dichiarazione della Bolla*" comes later. Written after the promulgation in Brescia of Pope Paul III's approval of the Rule and the Company, on 14 April 1546, it gives Cozzano's immediate reactions to this promulgation. It will surely come as no surprise to us that these reactions are exaggerated, and a mixture of joy and fury.

Joy, jubilation, because at last the long awaited approval has arrived: "*So at last we have finally read and re-read this long-desired bull in which our Sovereign Pontiff lays open to this holy Company the innermost depths of the great kindness of his most generous heart.*"

And we have looked at it with such jubilant joy, as if the living source of all kindness had come down to us here from heaven. Because today the Holy Father has bestowed such an abundance of apostolic liberalities on our pure, royal and angelic Company that they could scarcely have asked for more. So let us rejoice together. Let us be jubilant and exult in our hearts and proclaim our joy with festive voices on all sides (ff. 969r-969v; cf. also MTS, p. 330).

Joy also because the Bull allows the virgins to retain the right to enter into possession of any inheritance as if they were married or leading an enclosed life. This amounted to the Church giving official recognition to a new state of life (cf. MTS, p. 348).

Joy finally because the members of the Company will be able to benefit from a plenary indulgence on the day of their entering and on the day of their death (cf. MTS, p. 346).

These are the three graces that Angela had so keenly longed for and therefore a cause for jubilation.

But also fury, because the Bull grants to the members of the government, among other concessions, permission to modify the rules then in force and to promulgate new ones, provided that they are lawful and honest. Now the government of Lucrezia Lodrone had, by a decree of 11 December 1545, ordered all the members of the Company to wear a cincture, something that Cozzano cannot accept. It was not in the Rule and so was neither lawful nor honest. Fair enough if changes are made to any measures introduced by the government, but to make changes to the Rule, to change what the Madre had dictated — heaven forbid! "*The contents [of the Rule] are from the Holy Spirit, dictated through the foundress*", he says (f. 974r). And "*if our innovators insist on not obeying the Holy See, on giving grief to the virgins who are leading an irreproachable life, and in thinking they are absolved from all this by pontifical grace, they will find that they have placed themselves under some curse or other and that there will be no defence in heaven or on earth*" (976v).

The poor chancellor cannot find words harsh enough against the "innovators" who are betraying the Madre's thinking and who, by so doing, also risk, in the more or less long term, destroying her work.

* * *

Caught up in joy and even more so by indignation, Cozzano loses control over his words, and his tortured and confused style makes the translation of these last two writings all the more difficult given that the language is the Brescian dialect of the period. Yet what pearls are to be found when one has avoided the pitfalls of this impossible prose! How moving it is to hear Angela's faithful servant state that "*she alone, under divine inspiration, was the foundress of such a great work. She is the real and living mother, who has generated and regenerated them in the Word of truth and in the Blood of Jesus Christ*" (f. 974r; cf. also MTS, p. 457). How thrilling it is to come across again in Cozzano's writings the teachings of Angela: her warnings against the devil, her references to the Holy Trinity, the expression of her love for Christ — a spousal love, her unceasing recourse to the Holy Spirit, her fidelity to the Church! And, sometimes even, to hear the echo as it were of the Madre's heart beating in the writer's own heart.² So enjoy your reading as you meet Cozzano — and Angela. May the journey bring you joy!

MARIE-BÉNÉDICTE RIO, osu

² Cozzano's writings are well constructed, but this is not always the case with his sentences; ideas and words come tumbling out after each other; words are frequently omitted; whole sections come between the verbs and their subject — and this is sometimes just implied. Regarding the translation, there were two possibilities: to remain as close as possible to the original text, resorting at times to certain necessary adjustments, or to present a more elaborate and smoother text, certainly easier to read. From one point of view this would have been a satisfactory solution, but it would not have been true to Cozzano. It is the first solution, therefore, which has been adopted.

Line spacings — non-existent in Italian (cf. MTS, pp.618-656) — have been used sparingly, and the punctuation adapted, to bring out the main points of the argument.

N.B. The technical remarks above apply equally to the translation of the Processo Nazari, pp. 101ss.

"EPISTOLA CONFORTATORIA"

Letter of comfort to the virgins of the Company of Saint Ursula written by its Chancellor Gabriel Cozzano

I have heard spoken, O saintly sisters (I am now calling you sisters because you are daughters of the same mother) — I have heard spoken, I repeat, of your righteous sorrow [959r] because certain members have left the Company, falling from such a beautiful place like so many stars of the sky. Your grief is increasing, not so much at hearing that yet others, their minds poisoned to the value of the kind of life chosen, are thinking of following suit, but even more by the fear that others may have left it already, at least in their minds, and will be ready to do so as soon as they can, with honour and at their convenience. Your pain goes even deeper, because you have a great fear that some weaker souls, led astray by this plague of bad example, may become less fervent in their love and faith in this great celestial vocation.

Your grief is fully justified, worthy of truly virginal and generous souls. Can there be anything nobler or more righteous than to suffer for and to weep over the loss of one's sisters? To torment oneself through the fervour of zeal for God's honour which is thereby seriously violated? For this Company belongs to his only well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ (as the Foundress, faithful minister of his will, has very clearly attested). And [God the Father], out of respect towards his Son, wants it to be honoured. And now here are people trying to strip it of its reputation, especially by leaving it to enter monasteries! Diabolic jealousy is certainly at the root of this, because people want and are doing their best to bring dishonour on what God wants to see honoured in a special way. So, reverend sisters, since a twofold flame of love is burning in you, both through your zeal for the honour of the Son of God and

through the sadness caused by the loss of your sisters, you are gaining a double crown of glory in heaven and on earth.

[959v] But I feel obliged by your grief to write something to console you, which may not only sweeten our¹ legitimate sufferings, but also change them into greater rejoicing.

There are four things I want to say to you here briefly, not taken directly from my head (may rashness keep silent here, and at least suspend any judgment about which it has no definite knowledge), but based on the holy intentions of our Mother. In one respect I am sure in advance that I will in no way succeed; what I am going to say will be but a shadow compared with what is in reality and could be expressed by a more felicitous tongue.

The first part therefore will console your grief. The second will aim to strengthen those among you who are weak. The third will bring back those who have gone astray. The last will be to instil a fear of the dreadful consequences in those who are thinking of leaving [the Company] or have already left.

* * *

In the first place then I am addressing myself to you, to those of you who are sensible and steady, firmly established like an impregnable tower because you are founded not on sand but on living, solid rock. I am addressing myself to you, I say, to you who have suffered so much from all this. Put an end now to all your anxieties. Here are some new consolations which heaven is offering you. Lift up your hearts, with strong faith raise your spirits to God. And there, take rest in his comforting light; this is how he offers it to you: having known

¹ "*our* legitimate sufferings ", according to the official transcription of the APC (Acts of the Process of Canonisation); "*your* legitimate sufferings" would seem to be more logical. (Translator's note).

from all eternity, and in himself, this Company and its Foundress, and having loved it with an everlasting love before establishing it here on earth, and having also, in his eternal wisdom, [960r] fixed the number and multitude of virgins of this congregation of his which he wants to glorify in his kingdom, no one will ever be able to be missing from the legitimate number that will be his pleasure to ordain.

It will therefore be just as impossible to uproot it, or that the number fixed by God should be reduced in the slightest way, as it is impossible that God should fail in anything and be destroyed. Because [the Company] existed before it came into being; and before it was achieved it was already complete and perfect. And if someone wants to cause its disappearance and destruction, this is not what will make it disappear; but rather those persons who want to see it go are the very ones who will disappear and be destroyed, as happens to those who are feeling giddy and think everything is turning upside down, whereas it is they themselves [who are turning upside down]. Because what God has ordered, no power can destroy it. Because who can be greater or equal to God?

We must not therefore become sad over any loss that may take place, because in truth this not so, even if it seems to be. In fact, those who have abandoned this celestial rule or who are on the point of doing so either were false and hypocritical — and what damage is done to lose anyone who is not true but false and pretending? Or they have allowed themselves to be deceived and overcome by errors and false advice, and so have foolishly fallen like so many stars.

It is certainly true that by the law of charity we should feel great sorrow over this fall, otherwise we would be worse than wild animals. For even David will shed tears over Absalom; Jesus Christ himself wept over Judas and the city of Jerusalem!

But such [960v] grief must be consoled. It must be

changed into new rejoicing, because God — with whom (as has already been said) it will never be possible for the number fixed for this holy Company of his to be reduced — God will call upon others to enter it to replace those who have proved themselves unworthy of such a crown of glory, and those entering will take their crown, just as Judas' place went to another who took from him the glory which the former had forfeited through his fault. And those whom God sends to replace those who have departed will be much gentler, wiser and holier than the ones who have left. The former have clearly proved themselves foolish by losing such happiness, and the others will prove themselves wise by recognising [this happiness] and by embracing it. Thus it is a loss that will result in a greater gain. At the end we shall see that these adversities have taken place for our greater joy and glory, and that the enemy, in his wickedness, has rendered us a service. And the honour of the Son of God, which on account of this, seemed already to be overshadowed, by rising to a greater light of glory, will shine forth even more wonderfully.

We should accept this consolation, not only on account of those who have already left, but also for those who are thinking of leaving, provided it is not through our fault, and that they cannot complain on the day of judgment that they have not been shown what charity [961r] demanded to prevent them from falling from such glory. But after having done everything possible for them, if they leave us, what can we do except to say in the words of Saint John: "Ex nobis exierunt sed non erant ex nobis", in other words: "They came out of our own number, but they had never really belonged". Because if they had belonged to us, never, in all eternity, would they have left. So let them take their leave, like foolish, vain and false women and let them make room for wise and true [virgins], and (as Scripture says) let them not place obstacles in the way of others who should bear fruit.

In this way the enemy remains disconcerted because, thinking he is harming us, he is helping us. May he at least

now begin to know, (provided he wants to understand it), that no prudence or cleverness whatsoever can prevail against God's wisdom, which knows how to turn round to his greatest glory the betrayals and deceits of his enemies; he does this in such a way that they find themselves tricked by their own cleverness and by their own weapons, and so it is by their own sword that they are killed.

Thus there will be for us a triple cause for even greater rejoicing: First of all, the ruin done will be repaired. Then, the gain will be greater than the damage. Finally there will be cause for fresh rejoicing in new admiration of the divine wisdom, [because] God acts in such a way (as Scripture says again) that it is through the deceits of the enemy that we are given victory.

There is great jubilation therefore at the thought of this way of overcoming and defeating the enemy: not to use any other weapon than the enemy himself. Oh! What great joy to see this! And only in part at present; while in heaven it will be complete and forever.

[961v] I am saying nothing about the other advantage that you have, a very big one in my opinion, namely that the downfall of others is the cause of your greater steadiness, and of greater vigilance over yourselves; this is why you are gathering closer at the feet of Jesus Christ, the one and only "Lover" of our Mother, hers and ours, and of anyone who loves him, according to the saying: "Ipse Pater amat vos quia vos me amatis". May he watch over you, comfort you and keep you steady forever - because what has happened to one can happen to everyone.

This weakness in us, this tendency to fall into the same error, is thus corrected and strengthened by the fault of another. This is why a writer says: "from the downfall of another, the wise man draws profit". Thus the fall of Judas was and is a powerful lesson for others not to do the same. Thus the angels in heaven were not strengthened until the devil had fallen headlong into disaster. For their life was made all the more

stable in proportion to the seriousness of his fall.

It seems that it is necessary therefore that, for the salvation of the good, similar scandals take place. This is why it is said: there would have been no Abel if there had not been Cain. Nor would such a glorious array of martyrs and other saints have shone forth in the Church if, from the world and the devil, so many serious discords and scandals had not played their part.

This is why Truth says: "Necesse est ut veniant scandala, sed vae homini illi, per quem venerint", that is to say: [962r] scandals (discords, heresies and other bad seeds and examples) are necessary, but woe to the person who is responsible for them! And Saint Paul says: "Necesse est ut veniant haereses", in other words: "Heresies have to come". So, if it is necessary for errors, scandals and heresies to come, this can only be for a reason: good souls would not be good unless they were tested, purified and strengthened by God in this way. In fact, (as Saint Augustine says), God [who is] good would never allow evil things to happen if he did not draw some greater good from them.

And so, reverend sisters, breathe; breathe again, I say, and be comforted. And act in such a way that the folly of others makes you want to act with greater prudence and steadier will-power; that it may be for you a reason to bind your heart ever more closely to God, so that, in this way, your virtue may be strengthened and the honour of your heavenly Spouse shine forth even more in you. For the more you are honoured for your good works and virtues, the more the Son of God will be honoured in you.

What must I say then about that other kind of rejoicing which will arise for you from this [from this situation] throughout Paradise, and the hope of which must henceforward produce in your heart an inexpressible joy? What glory, what satisfaction, there will be, when you are honoured and praised by God, by the Virgin Mary, by all the heavenly court,

because you have persevered in the midst of bad examples. Look, they will say in this kingdom of light, look at those who have remained steadfast in temptations, while others were going away, while some persons of noble birth, of high standing and trustworthy, were inadvisably asserting that one can also live [962v] and serve God better elsewhere, even by leaving one's own celestial vocation; [look there are those who] despite everything have remained firm in their rule, who have remained faithful. O generous and wise young maidens, truly worthy of the crown promised to them!

And thus you will go triumphantly about in heaven, praised on all sides. For perseverance alone deserves the crown. So take heart, be comforted, be encouraged by these thoughts, because your righteous thirst for God's honour and the prestige of the Company will more than amply be repaid in heaven and on earth, according to the words of the Gospel: "Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt justitiam quoniam saturabuntur", in other words: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is right, for they will be satisfied.

For the time being let this consolation suffice. I will just add however that I am on your side, strong and valiant fighters that you are — even though the Holy Spirit must bestow on you many other consolations.

* * *

Now, since according to the Apostle's teaching, persons weak in faith should not be despised, but welcomed and embraced in a gentle and kindly manner, on this account I am addressing these present words to those sisters who are weak and who, unless they were encouraged, visited and helped, would allow themselves to be easily led astray or to change to a less elevated life or to return to the world. And this, either owing to poor appreciation of the rule, or out of fear of not having their needs met and of being abandoned, or through lack of faith in their ability to persevere by remaining in this

kind of life; as if God, who helps anyone who [963r] gives herself to him, would not then be ready to come to the aid of those who have offered him their innocence and their first virginal flower.

May these sisters pay attention, please, pay attention, I say, to the great happiness that is theirs and to which God has invited them, and to their great loss if they do not take care to understand it. How many, noble ladies there are who would count themselves happy to have been just the servant of one of those who have truly and firmly persevered in this divine Company!

First of all, God himself both inspired and urged our Mother Foundress to set up and establish in his name this holy rule of life. So true is this that she did not call the Company hers, but [the Company] of Jesus Christ; and she devoted herself to it not as a mistress but as a servant. And although the idea of the Company had been inspired in her childhood and divinely revealed, and although she had a great longing for it, yet she had never wanted to start it until commanded by Jesus Christ to do so, until he had made his voice heard in her heart and had urged and compelled her to begin and establish it. So that no creature, in heaven or on earth, could ever say that she had put anything of herself into it — that it was hers — not even the slightest bit, but [recognise] that it [= the Company] depended totally on the pure counsel of the Holy Spirit, in Christ Jesus, only Son of the eternal Father and of the glorious Virgin Mother.

O all-divine and purely celestial rule! A really powerful and strong virtue was certainly needed, in this iron [= hard] century of ours, to scatter plants of virginity amidst the thorns of the world.

What a beauty [963v] of life, therefore, what a honourable profession to be counted among the number of those whom God himself has chosen in a special way! To be a

member of this Company, which, by a certain specific privilege, is called the Company of the Son of God! O new happiness and bliss beyond all bliss, if only it is recognised! Without any doubt, the most beautiful grace that God can now bestow on a person is an appreciation of the value of this life, of this new treasure of his, new and old, shown to the world in these latter days ruined by so much corruption, by so many vices and heresies almost impossible to count.

God does nothing in vain, nor does he ever introduce anything new, except in extreme needs. If he had known that many of those who need to be saved could have saved themselves elsewhere, or better, or as well, or quite simply save themselves, he would never in recent times have kindled in the world this other light of life.

Oh, a fiery desire cried out in our Mother, such as proceeds purely from the Holy Spirit! [Oh!] I repeat, this burning desire cried out: may it please God that the whole world comes under the shadow of this rule! Pure was this desire, stripped of all human feelings. Thus, it could only have originated in truth. And, if this is so, what other conclusion can be reached except that this life is the most chosen and highest light of life that can be?

So consider, o virgins, the great gift that God, from the height of heaven, has offered you in these latter days of so many needs. They would indeed be wretched those among you who, invited by God, did not accept a gift of such importance! And [those who], [964r] having accepted it, did not preserve it until death. Whoever removes herself in fact from God's invitation removes herself from God. Whoever removes herself from God perishes forever. Let no one be mistaken on this point, because this truth will be revealed at the end. If God wants something, why do we want something else? If God calls us to honour this holy Company of his, why do we dare to dishonour it? And so, sisters, be advised, be

prudent, be firm and constant, persevering right to the end, so as not to fall from such a glorious life into very deep wretchedness.

Now, supposing there was nothing else to influence it, should not a name as attractive and noble as that of the Company of Saint Ursula induce any heart as hard as iron to long ardently for this life? And will we ever find a congregation more worthy than that of Saint Ursula? Large in number, royal in dignity, triumphant in victories, powerful in merits and divine in honours. Such is this Company of ours and such it will be, at least from within. And those who are faithful, who make every effort to do what the Foundress has commanded, will become just as glorious.

And so believe, let every one of you believe — and she will be believing the truth — that she [Angela] did not give this name to the Company by chance, nor to ennoble it by calling it this, as happens in the world when one chooses important names or those of great saints [for a child], either to adorn that person or out of devotion, or again in the hope [964v] or desire that this child will grow in virtue by imitating the saint whose name has been given him, or for all these things together or for other similar reasons.

No, I repeat, this Company has not been named in this way. But its name has come from heaven, given through the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. In its name a new grace from the Most High is promised to everyone who perseveres faithfully in this obedience. Promised also is that virtue of sanctity which was given to those eleven thousand virgins who obeyed Ursula's will, or rather the divine voice in her, that virtue through which they overcame themselves and conquered even death. A new crown of glory is promised them, because a new spiritual strength is also given to them. What matters, in the meantime, is to agree to want to belong to this holy group, and to persevere in it faithfully until death. Faithfully, I say, by keeping this new seed of spirit that God has

given through his [intermediary=Angela] to those who in truth freely give their consent here [= in the Company]. The most beautiful life that has ever been and that ever will be is made fruitful through this spirit Believe me, these are not fables, but inviolable truths.

Blessed are those who commit themselves in all sincerity, who will not allow themselves to be deflected from such a faith [= form] of life in order to follow other rites and spirits. Blessed, I say, and more than blessed, because they will be crowned in heaven with a new and special crown, unlike other ordinary ones, which will shine throughout paradise and which will attract the admiration of all [965r] the celestial court on seeing it. Look, they will say, there is a new crown — what a marvellous jewel! See what honour, what precious merit is shining in this glorious group! These are the ones who, in the midst of so many thorns of perverse opinions, have kept themselves whole. In the midst of so many heresies and bad examples, they have remained faithful, and living in the world, surrounded by demons, they have kept the faith; they have not denied my name [the name of God] nor abandoned my ways that my friend [Angela] had shown them. These words, and yet others even more beautiful, surpassing all expression, will be spoken about you in tones of admiration in this heavenly homeland, [accompanied by] such festivity and triumph that, if even a thousandth part of these consolations and joys descended into hell, all the punishments of the damned would be alleviated.

So stand firm and valiant, so that others do not snatch your very precious crown from you. Do not allow yourselves to be deceived by the idle chatter and spitefulness of the world.

If one of the eleven thousand virgins of Saint Ursula had abandoned her company, the one to which she had been invited, to go off and serve God elsewhere, that person, living

to please herself, would never have been glorified (because God had chosen her to be honoured by her there, in this company; and so it is there that he wanted to bestow on her the crown of glory). In the same way, if one [of ours] who, abandoning the path that God had shown her, and led astray by other counsels or by her own whim, [965v] then followed other paths, she would be acting more than foolishly. For instead of receiving the reward, she would have deserved God's eternal anger, such as he threatened when saying: "Ipsi vero non cognoverunt vias meas, quibus juravi in ira mea, si introibunt in requiem meam", in other words: these people did not want to know my ways and so, in my anger, I swore that they would not enter the place of rest I had for them.

God's paths are those indicated by his true servants. His paths, in the time of Saint Ursula, were what this Saint wanted. In the time of Moses, they were the actions he performed. In our own day, the paths of God are the counsels, the teaching and the examples of our Foundress. And so, just as the one who had scorned the counsels and invitations of Saint Ursula would also have scorned God's will and so deserved his anger, a similar thing will happen to those of ours who, in order to follow other paths, will abandon the divine counsel, especially if they have already welcomed it, and who will renounce the invitation which they have already accepted, the certitude of which God had already breathed into their heart, but who then have forgotten this word, either because of other advice, or through negligence, or for having yielded to some strong temptation, or for some other reasons.

What else then can we fear for these people except the frightful divine threat I mentioned above? Unless, repenting and recognising their wretched error, they come back with greater fervour and become more faithful and steadfast. Because it is not enough [966r] for the one who is repenting to be like one's former self; that person will have to work harder

and with greater effort than before. For it is only right that one who has exceeded others in doing wrong should then exceed them in doing good.

I will not say anything about that other beautiful grace which God has granted to you, to you in particular: namely that it will happen, by a singular privilege, among so many others who enter after you, that you will be the first-fruits of the new spirit of this holy Company. What a great honour and what a new glory, (if you but realise it), to have been chosen by God to be thus the first and fresh flowers of his new garden! Should this not be an incomparable joy? And just as incomparable as everlasting? And, if for no other reason, should not one prefer to die a thousand times rather than to be deprived of such an honour and so much glory? Oh! what a folly it will be for those who have made themselves unworthy and allowed such a new and beautiful treasure to fall from their hands! The heavens and all the elements will certainly be astonished at such a degree of folly on the part of these unfortunate creatures.

But should these praises be spoken of as if they were the greatest? This chosen life consists of other things even more admirable. For the moment I will only speak about one of them. Please listen to it with an attentive heart.

[966v] The form of life that the Son of God brought on earth from the bosom of his eternal Father and that he himself lived, as did also his Apostles and so many others in the early Church, this same life he has planted afresh through his faithful servant [=Angela], in our own day, almost at the end of the world, so that the end may be in agreement with the beginning and be linked to it as in a circle.

The Church began through virginity and it must end in virginity. A virginity, I say, which in its exterior form is lived according to what is commonly held to be right. And which should be heavenly in spirit and walking always with God, but

at the same time, as far as possible, it should conform in practice to praiseworthy common usage; and it should behave according to the law, customs and counsels, divine as well as human, by doing nothing, in clothes, gestures or any other action, nothing which is singular or extraordinary and which could give one's neighbour grounds for commenting and murmuring. Saint Luke wrote that this is how Saint Zechariah and Saint Mary Elizabeth lived: "Ambo", he said, "erant justi ante Deum incedentes in omnibus mandatis et justificationibus Domini sine quaerela". That is to say: both of them were worthy in the sight of God and scrupulously observed all the commandments and observances of the Lord, in other words according to legal and ceremonial procedure and ways, without argument, without giving rise to any comment and without attracting any admiring attention to their way of behaviour. This was how the holy Virgin Mary used to live, Saint Joseph, [967r] Saint Martha, and so many other martyrs and confessors, so many widows and virgins, Saint Anne, Saint Monica, Saint Thecla, Cecilia, Agatha, Saint Ursula and many, many others.

Leading the active life, they were in heaven, with the contemplative in the active and the active in the contemplative. What a wonderful kind of life! This is the way God bestows his grace, when and how it pleases him. He has planted this light of life in the world in our own day for his holy Spouse [= the Church]. This sublime gift, has not been given or promised in the monasteries, because it was not necessary, since God gives the grace of his Spirit according to the requirements of the undertaking. But this gift has been bestowed here [in the Company], and it is promised to anyone who decides to enter this blessed group. Consider then, o virgins, all the reasons you have for remaining steadfast in it. Consider that you can only fall from on high, by going elsewhere.

Oh! If God revealed even the thousandth part of the new splendour of this new form of life, everyone would be

smitten with it and even the very stones would marvel at such a beauty. O new grace, o great glory in our day, new flame of truth! Happy is the one who will be able to recognise them! Very few will be those who appreciate this jewel, because they are always rare those to whom is given the true light of knowledge, especially in these very corrupt times. But, no matter how few, they will be happy.

But then, if these persons, to whom such a grace of life is not given (because they find themselves [967v] surrounded by so much corruption and new sects of suspect life), [if these persons then] are going to be unhappy, what can be said about those who have agreed to take the path necessary to know it, but who then have turned back and want nothing more to do with it? What [to say] about those who have clearly known and loved it, and then abandoned it? And who, having denied the divine life that God had shown them here, follow with a blind heart other ways of life? Because those, who unjustly abandon the light of the Holy Spirit which has been given to them in a rule and by a Mother, [those] will in justice be blinded by that same light of life in another [rule]. Those who have received the first fruits of the Spirit in a Company will no longer be able to receive them in another, because no one can be a child twice over, or be born of two mothers. This is why Saint Paul said to certain people: "Even if you should have a thousand masters, you can only have one father, and it is I who have begotten you in Jesus Christ". And God does not change; he cannot want to give his Spirit at one time in one way and at another time in another way.

"Stay as you were at the time of your calling", exclaimed Saint Paul. And we, then, would we abandon God under the pretext of serving God? Would we want God to be our servant? To make these changes, what is it really but trying to find one's peace according to one's own whims? Is it not to want to lead the spiritual life according to one's own desires? And to hope to enter heaven burdened under the weight of one's pride?

This, though, would be for some an error of judgment rather than a trick of the evil one, because these people, in order to conceal [968r] their shame better, claim to be inspired by God and boldly call their bad desire heavenly inspiration; but by speaking about this to others, still not very strong, they lead them astray, by spreading abroad such a plague of bad spirit, that the latter become infected with their poisoned seeds. And the interior senses are ready to conform to these wicked deeds, because bad opinions, being more in keeping with sensuality, are always more readily accepted by the soul.

With the result that these unfortunate souls thus live on earth guilty of three crimes: one, for having denied the way of truth; another, for having blasphemed by calling their own will divine inspiration; the third, for having also infected others with such a noxious example. This is how the new rebellious heretics have acted and are still acting, and they are exhorting others to do the same. "So take courage", they say, "take courage to leave behind this weight of subjection if you feel it could be more advantageous for you elsewhere, and come to evangelical freedom". By employing such words, good on the surface but execrable and deadly within, they deceive the poor creatures and drag them along to the depths of the abyss.

But let us return to the delights of our garden be-decked with flowers, and let us sing yet once again here a song of praise in its honour before ending.

Among the other graces with which this house of God is embellished, one of the greatest is this: God [968v] promises anyone who enters this holy army that every need of hers will always be met, both spiritual and corporal. Indeed, what good and faithful captain does not see that his soldiers are given the wage owing to them, and also other necessary things? And who would be bold enough to doubt that God might fail in any way those who enter faithfully into his service? Let no one ever speak of such an infidelity! But rather hold on to some-

thing more true and certain, namely that there never has been, nor ever will be a father who embraces his beloved son with as much love as that with which our heavenly Father embraces in a special way the faithful belonging to this new militia of his beloved Son. And what is more, no comparison can be made here between the love of any kind of earthly father and that of the eternal Father.

The Gospel says in effect: "If you, then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him". And he will give it all the more insofar as anything is done pleasing to his will. And as honouring this blessed Company of his Son is one of the things which pleases him most today, so it is his desire to bestow favour in a special way on the one who pays him honour by entering it.

Never will this person be abandoned. She will have the help necessary to meet her material needs. Each one will be assisted according to her situation. God himself will take care of her wonderfully; he will put at her disposal everything she needs. Amazing things will be seen. With regard to spiritual help, God's gracious hand will be even more keenly felt. They [969r] will be delivered from their doubts. Concupiscence will not weigh on them. Celestial dews will cool their passions. Powerful help from the divine strength will appear, especially at death. They will be tempted, but not abandoned. The jubilation of consolations will sing forth through the sadness of tribulations. But I will not say what cannot be put into words. When this soul departs, what a welcome, what new songs, what jubilation will be awaiting her in Heaven! How many empresses would long to have tasted just a tiny drop of these refreshments that will be offered to the least of ours [of the Company], and it will not be given to them.

"RISPOSTA"

against those who want to urge the virgins of St Ursula to enter a monastery

To the lady-governors of the Company of Saint Ursula, namely to the prudent and worthy Matrons, and to the devoted and watchful Colonelle.

Many times turning over in my mind the reason why our Company should be attacked and shaken in so many different and subtle ways, I can see no other cause but [this]: if the enemy persecutes it in this way, and tries to destroy it with all his mighty power, it is because he clearly knows that, in a special way, some beautiful divine treasure is concealed within it.

For if he did not see here the seeds of life, [if he did not see] shining here the true stars of the sincere faith of holy Church (which today is almost extinguished as is clearly evident from obvious [1v] signs and proofs), the concealed and famished thief would certainly not tire himself out with so much effort and such cunning methods to destroy it.

But he well knows that God has placed here in a special way a very secure refuge similar to Noah's ark, free and open to all, where one can be saved from such a big and almost universal flood, from a multitude of corruptions and from an almost infinite number of pestilential heresies. This is why the impassioned enemy of this good, namely man's salvation, neglects no way, no useful means without employing it to draw poor souls away from such a safe and secure port, [2r] so that, straying and removed from the sheltering wings of holy Church (whose spirit and true ways are here [= in the Company]), they fall into everlasting perdition.

For outside the counsels, outside the paths and wishes of holy Church, in the faith of which alone is found the virtue of the passion of Jesus Christ, never, never in all eternity, will there ever be found any path of salvation. With the result that the devil, consumed with a burning passion for the perdition of mankind, is like a ravenous wolf when he considers that, throughout her lifetime, the Foundress of this holy Company has been a true and living example of sanctity, of pure divine truth and of every sincere Catholic sense, and how she has shone out [2v] in the world like a brilliant sun of translucent faith and divine love, of every true virtue and royal custom.

So, whoever does not know the real essence of virtues, the ways of holy Church, and its true meaning and spirit, may that person consider the spirit of Mother sister Angela and her behaviour and model himself on it. And he will be a true and faithful Catholic. And he will not be able to fall into danger or be entrapped in the snare of the terrifying scourge of divine anger that is already venting its great wrath over all the earth. The enemy, I say, knowing that the stars of this true and living light are alight in our congregation [= the Company], never stops trying to put them out; and above all he is searching, by crafty and cunning ways, [3r] to obscure faith in the Foundress. Achieving that, he will then be able to destroy the entire Company, or falsify it and put it among the number of his new spiritual [movements].

What I am saying is not really anything new. Prophecies are crying out aloud, in fact, that many, in our own day, are ready to be converted from a worldly life to a spiritual one, but that most of them are adopting a false spirituality and even become the most redoubtable of the devil's horns. These people, who are living with a human not to say a diabolic spirit, and are being led by certain fashions and new heretical behaviours, are further removed from true life the more they draw profit from their spiritual fervour and [3v] their obstinacy in

living a singular new life. God protect all souls from such a great calamity!

The astute beast thus has at heart, above everything else, to belittle the counsels and behaviour of such a Foundress, so as to lend enchantment to his new ways. For by removing faith in this virgin, what is it if not to extinguish the living light of the Catholic way of life? What is it if not to lead lost creatures away from the Church? The person who, in fact, snatches away from them their faith in one who is clearly a believer, what else is he doing but throwing him outside this same faith?

Can one really believe that the devil can be [4r] sleeping here! `[Think] how he has to sharpen and arm his rage to smash to pieces this good bequeathed to us by God's infinite goodness. And, on the (other hand, [see] how much each of you must keep watch here, and be on your guard, in order to escape skillfully from an almost infinite number of cunning snares, and to overcome, with strength of the Most High, such an outburst of rage and fury [on the part] of a determined enemy.

Woe, woe! cries saint John in the Apocalypse, woe to anyone living on earth, because the dragon [= the devil] has descended here in great anger, knowing that he has not much time. So here, in our own days, which are the last, the [4v] dragon has greatly enkindled his rage. He is enthroned here on earth, in other words in the ways and counsels of earth -, and those who follow them find themselves under his sway. So it is not on earth that we must find help against such a mad beast, since his strength and victory lie there, but in heaven, whence he has been chased and where he can no longer mount. It is in the wisdom of the Son of God, therefore, that we must discover his tricks, escape his snares, recognise his ambushes. And, by virtue of his passion [= of the Son of God], overcome the devil's power and crush his rabid army.

[5r] So, all of you, be alert, governors and custodians of such a chosen flock; keep watch and realise that you will certainly be betrayed by the hidden thief unless you are more than on your guard.

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I do not want at present to speak to you about all the different ploys and betrayals that he has tried and is still trying hard to make use of. How he would like to seal mouths so that there is no further favourable mention of the Foundress, spewing out his steamy insinuations, as ill-judged as they are venomous, on the wise and holy things she has done, saying she could be mistaken and, by subtle means, stripping her of her reputation and of the faith people have in her. How he obscures the value of the Company and does not want her praises to be spread. How, unceasingly, he removes from it all the useful means needed to help it to keep going and to increase. And, under [5v] guise of depending only on God, [how he makes] it fall into temptation and under the curse of God. How [he says] it is not necessary to utilise means, even material, to attract souls to good, but to leave this concern to God, [because] if he himself attracts them, they will be attracted, otherwise the rest is in vain. Pestilential opinion and more than heretical!

And I am not going to speak about what is even worse, how he is striving and has striven to snatch it [the Company] away from heavenly counsels and even from the heart of God and to plant it in the midst of earthly not to say even diabolical counsels, disguising it with strange and heretical rites and ways - and this also by means of his henchmen. He is also employing and has employed many [6r] other tricks, among which a new treachery has just been discovered, all the more poisonous in that it seems more reasonable. For the moment I just want to point it out to you. And to combat it with the living sword of truth.

When [some virgins] have agreed to enter the Company, or are already there, the devil uses three methods to steal them away from it: either by the return to the world, or by leading a spiritual life according to other ways and new rites, or again by the desire to enter a monastery. These three methods, however, [6v] all originate largely from a common root, namely from the loss in their heart of esteem and love of this Company. And the new light [of the Company], which God had started to light within them, they have foolishly allowed it gradually to go out, under the pretext of good; with the result that God's spirit, which was growing in their heart by this light of love, is completely uprooted from it and lost. And so they completely turn away from it to a material life or, if they persevere in the spiritual life, they lead it according to their own human or heretical way. And so, in a spirit of pride, they devote themselves to the spirit. And this is none other than adoration of self, or the devil, thinking it is adoration [7r] of the true God.

Let careful attention be paid to this point, because God can only be adored in his Spirit and in his ways. But these persons generally, say, in order to ennoble the life they have adopted, that there is no better rule than that of Christ, or no better profession than that of baptism. And that the one who has Christ has everything and that it is enough to obey God. And in this way, wiser than the wise and the saints, they put themselves above every level of knowledge, as if they were not only already on the path of discovering this truth and this good but already had it in their hands.

[7v] Nor is there any shortage of apparent reasons on the part of those who want to marry to excuse or to cover their shame. They "say that, even married, they can do good, and even that one can be saved in this way of life, and that it is not a sin to marry. And so, with these excuses, they console themselves in their damnation. Wretches! If only they were

not corrupting other poor girls! But may each one be alerted as soon as possible so as to not fall into a similar calamity. But I do not want to say anything more about these people.

I now come to those who, just recently, have caused trouble in the Company by deciding to become nuns, [8r] certainly the work arising from diabolical envy, with the aim of disparaging such a noble Company by these means. Those who are acting in this way are harming themselves more than those who are returning to the world. Those, therefore, who have committed this act of such disloyalty have made it understood, by clear signs, that they have left their sisters to please themselves more and not to serve God better: they disliked earning their bread by their own hands and living by their daily toil. They had no trust in divine Providence and were afraid of falling into need. Abandoning the opportunity of increasing their faith in God, robbing themselves without being aware of it, they are getting themselves received into convents, finding that it is a [8v] good thing to sit down at a table all ready and to eat their bread without knowing where it comes from.

I do not want to imply that, by acting in this way, they may be doing more wrong than those who are returning to the world. But neither do I want to deny it. I leave it to the divine judgment. But there is one thing I really do want to say, namely in whatever manner it is done, they have done wrong and committed an injustice by deserting their Company. And all those, if there are any, who are on the point of leaving it would be acting wrongly and unjustly; unless it is for some sound reason that they are forced to do this.

But now, let each of you pay attention to the forceful and clear [9r] reasons that I am going to put before you. I will set out all their opinions or, to be more exact, their gilded falsehoods by means of which, not only do they strengthen their error, but they also try to persuade others to do the same. The [opinions] of which will be so well refuted that everything will be turned to the greatest glory of our Company.

Thus, o faithful governors, do not let the devil lead the Company astray in this way and, by his evil ways, trample on and tear your flock to pieces. And then, once he has devoured your sheep, also to prove to you that this is a good thing, to make even greater fun of you. And after causing you harm, to make fools of you. [9v] Let us oppose him, and let us act in such a way that he admits himself that it would be more advantageous to him not to try to do it, seeing that everything has ended in his greater confusion and in greater felicitous honour of our Company.

So tell those who have such a guilty desire, tell them quite openly, I say, that they would be acting unjustly by walking out of their profession [= of the Company], without having any reason to make them do it. And even if they did have one, it would not be a lawful and, civil action to go off without valid permission and without common consent and approval of all the Company.

And these are not the only ones acting badly and [10r] in an unwarranted way, but also those who receive them, because they are taking what belongs to others and keeping it for themselves. Indeed, if our rule forbids accepting those who have promised themselves to monasteries, even more should monasteries in their turn be reluctant to receive not only those who have promised themselves to the Company, but also those who have already committed themselves to it. Because the latter cannot give themselves since they no longer belong to themselves, seeing that, by a firm and free consent, they have given themselves to this Company. And the Company has received them. Therefore they are doing what they have no right to do according to the law and with good conscience. And never would the duty of charity allow it.

[10v] Then impress on them, with a variety of reasons, the seriousness of their error. Tell them: is it not thoughtless and feckless after having agreed reasonably to live in one place, to then change their mind and leave it without any reason? Tell them also that it is unjust to abandon one's own

mother and sisters to go looking for others. While on this subject, put this comparison before them: just as one cannot leave someone already chosen for a husband to take another, so it is not lawful to leave a mother, a sister, a Company already chosen. Make them also understand another comparison which is very apt: just as a soldier acts unfairly if, after receiving a part-payment or his wage from [11r] one captain, he goes off to fight under another, so do those [act] unjustly if they go off elsewhere after having been accepted [into this Company] and received from it a way of life, counsels and direction.

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Besides this, see that they know the following four good points:

Firstly, this Company being the Company of the Son of God recently planted in the world, those who leave it are acting without devotion and reverence for such a Lord, not appreciating or honouring what God wants to be honoured and appreciated.

Then because this life is modelled on the life of the apostles and the early Church, renewed by God in our own day, a life in which what one possesses is held as if having nothing. In dependence [11v] on superiors, one spends not according to one's own will, but according to the will of the one who governs; and those who have nothing live joyfully from day to day, in order to have greater reason to depend solely on God through faith and hope. But by becoming nuns, they are leaving this first and apostolic life and are falling from high to low, since they are abandoning a greater opportunity for faith and hope in God. For poverty and need always result in a greater reason for love and faith in God. Seeing that everything is provided in common in the monasteries, this golden opportunity for hope, when one has to live from the work of one's hands, is lost.

To say nothing about what is said, especially by Saint Victor, about the decadence of monasteries with regard to their first and ancient observances; [12r] this being so, how sensible would such a choice be - to go into a corrupt milieu in order to do better?

The third reason is that they are setting other sisters a bad example of poor esteem for their rule, by putting them in great danger of losing their fervour or of succumbing to similar unjust and stupid desires. Unless they allow themselves to be frightened by the fearsome threats that God makes to those who cause such scandals when he says: "Vae per quem scandala venerint", that is to say: Woe to those who cause scandals! And never, in the divine angers, is there any malediction that does not contain eternal damnation. So, they should give careful consideration to the implication of these bad examples.

[12v] And lastly, they are acting against nature and the divine law that commands honour for one's mother. And if [one should honour] one's natural mother, [one should honour] even more one's spiritual mother. But those who are abandoning Mother Angela, what are they doing but disowning the mother who spiritually has given them birth? And so falling into disobeying God's commandment? I am not adding that it is impossible to be born twice; and that God does not change by wanting to give his Spirit now in one way, now in another. I am saying nothing about what Saint Paul commands, namely that one should remain in the vocation to which one has been called by God. And I am not saying, like Saint Peter did, that one should love one's own company and fellowship. Nor how these people are transgressing this [13r] apostolic commandment by deserting their sisters in this way.

Let these reasons suffice for the moment to show them in part the seriousness of their fault. These reasons, though, are worthless to those who sin out of malice, but they will be of service to those who sin through error, and also to

others, ill advised, so that they are not infected by such examples. This is of the utmost importance and it is for this reason that this letter has been specially written.

Now, if there are some (there has indeed been one) who say that they are thus inspired by God, tell them immediately that they should be very careful not to blaspheme three times in one sentence against God. The first: by calling divine inspiration their own iniquitous desires. The second: [13v] by making God someone changeable who, aging called them to this rule of ours, would now like to make them be reborn to another. The third blasphemy to be found in this one sentence is that now they want God, who is a God of peace, to be the agitator of the Company and a God of murmuring and contempt, especially with regard to this Company that he himself has planted, inspired and esteemed.

What do they want to say, these people, with their inspirations, even though they are more likely to be shams? Or else, if they are inspirations, let it be understood that there are three kinds: one originating from human dreams — and this is really vanity; another comes from the devil; the third from the Holy Spirit, spirit of love and concord, joy and peace. Would we really want to say that these agitations come from [14r] the Holy Spirit? May such words never issue from [our] lips! If they were divinely inspired, there would be great signs, there would be joy, and there would be peaceful hearts. There would not be sadness, lessening of charity and esteem of the rule. May these persons learn then, may they learn, I repeat, to think, say and do better things. Or else, by their works and their fruits, may they demonstrate their good spirit.

We now come to the point of uncovering a subtle poison that the dragon never ceases from spreading within the Company to quench the ardour for it in their hearts. There are principally two kinds of it. One poisons minds, under the specious argument that it is better to turn to a more perfect life

such as that lived in the monasteries. The other, [14v] using a verbal attack, pokes fun and turns a nose up at the Company. What is this Company that everyone is vying with each other to deride? Friars, priests in particular, and other persons of good sense. And to think that doubt has even been voiced about the salvation of the Foundress herself, blamed by so many others. And what kind of foundation has it [the Company], without any indulgences, with weak ecclesiastical approval, barely approved by only a Vicar? And certainly she deserves to be reviled, this Sister Angela, who urged so many virgins to promise their virginity without giving due thought to the fact that she was leaving them in the midst of the perils of the world with the risk of falling into danger, or [15r] getting married, or taking some other path. Hence one can see what is happening: no gentlemen, no noble ladies, no other persons of any standing, desire or want their daughters to enter here [= this Company] where there are only girls of humble origin, servants and poor creatures. And what did she [Angela] think she was doing? Imitate a Saint Benedict, a Saint Clare, a Saint Francis? <And more than that, she wanted to be above [them] and, by intending to leave virgins in the midst of the world, she was thinking of something never attempted by any of the patriarchs>.¹

O intolerable blasphemies against the Holy Spirit! Do you not perceive, even you, that these voices are not human but diabolical, not celestial but infernal, not angelic but spewed out from the bottom of Satan's heart, [voices] through which he contrives to ensnare ill-advised souls and drag them along under his yoke, [15v] while at the same time he is denigrating heavenly counsels and is holding them in disdain?

But let us rebut these contemptuous remarks to his face; and may his, insults against us give rise to a greater glory

¹ The mark <...> indicates a margin or interlinear note, in the same writing as the manuscript (Translator's note).

for us. And so, to his peat humiliation, his wickedness may prove useful to us. Oh! wretched creatures who serve the devil in such an abominable task! of let us now begin to reply to him point by point.

* * *

Many, it is said, are making fun of it, and because of this it [the Company] deserves contempt. This is not a valid reason, because there are indeed very few, if any virtuous and holy men who have not been mocked and derided. Our Lord himself was mocked; it is not because of this that everyone must suffer the [16r] same thing. Tongues free; each person can say what he pleases since he has free will; Bach person can think and say whatever he likes, for good or for without depending on us. So people are speaking falsely when imply that our Company deserves contempt because many are deriding it and holding it in contempt. Contrary to this, anyone — especially with intelligence — can and must find grounds for holding it in greater esteem, seeing that what is happening to it [the Company] is what usually happens to any good and holy thing. And if there were no other proofs except that the pure light of the true faith burning in it, and that it is not on the side of heretics, these defamations themselves would be more than enough to prove it, [16v] because lip mockeries have always been the work of evil and corrupt persons against those who walk sincerely and faithfully according to the customs and laws of the Church — especially in our own age of those with heretical views and false religions. As Scripture says: "Erunt in novissimis temporibus illusores", in other words: There will be scoffers in the last days; that means, in our own times, which are the last.

Is it surprising then if we are mocked, given the abundance of malicious scoffers? Our Company is so honest and acts so reasonably, even by human standards, that no one can denigrate it except malicious people, moved by jealousy of the

good that is achieved. [17r] And those who say it, those who criticise it, are not so numerous. And those who do, do so either by following the natural instinct of the wicked, who believe everyone else is like them; or because they would like this to be so, or again because they would like, by lying so wickedly, to extinguish completely such a shining light of life. Because it is not true at all, but a downright lie, [to say] that wise men and good religious are deriding it, because in all truthfulness they cannot speak badly about it. But it is only the truly wicked <who blame it>. By whom was the Saviour most blamed but by the bad priests and doctors of the law? And that solely out of spite and [17v] jealousy. How do they know whether it [our Company] is guilty <bad> or not? If they know it, why do they not prove it openly? If they do not know it, why do they not resolve the doubt in the best possible way? Or at least not remain undecided. It is a feature of the wicked soul to want to vilify whatever is not blameworthy. In any case of doubt, however, one should save as much as possible, because this is what duty demands.

As for those who curl their lip and turn up their nose, falsely saying: "What is this Company?" if they want to understand it, let them listen: It is such that the least among the Company who is doing her best to live according to its rule, [18r] will one day be crowned with glory and will judge all the powers of the world. So that, these deceivers in particular will be kept under her feet with a gnashing of teeth and wringing of hearts, and they will be forced to exclaim in their great grief: "Here are those whom we held up to ridicule, calling them poor and lowly house workers. Look at them now numbered among the elect, the children of God. We are the ones who have been vile and foolish, and they are the ones who are noble and wise". They will be so beautiful and powerful that just by looking at them, all the devil's fury and ugliness will be exacerbated, and they will tremble.

He knows, the devil knows from now on, the humiliation that awaits him from these virgins; and this is why, [18v] to avenge himself for his future punishment, he is now looking, through his supporters, to at least make fun of them, since he cannot attract them to his kingdom. But even here he is acting like a madman. For this will result in an even greater torment for him. In all fairness the eternal Judge will pass sentence that the one who has taken pleasure in this world to mock unfairly, will suffer the displeasure of being fairly subjected to mockeries in the other. Know, you who are thus sneering, that this is the way our Company is made. <I am saying nothing, however, about the special graces that [these virgins] have and will have from God>. And if you do not believe it, rest assured that you will soon be certain about it and that you will experience it. Oh! how much better it would be for you to act at least like a sensible person, and to reserve judgment about what you [19r] are not really sure, rather than to let yourself be dominated by such wicked and foolish spirits.

As for what they are saying, that there is doubt about the salvation of the Foundress, I could add a whole lot of things to show how ungodly and villainous this wicked rumour is. I will say just one thing about it: it comes naturally to a wicked person to cast doubt on the salvation of any truly holy [person]. Indeed, just as he harbours within him a constant and secret fear, and almost the certitude of eternal damnation, so he is, by nature, forced to judge the neighbour by his own standards, especially as this helps to lighten his inner sadness. If, at least, these people did not let their absolute wickedness thus blind their common sense, thanks to [19v] which they have clearly been able to see and know from experience the evident and singular sanctity of this virgin, from every point of view. And [if at least] they said that this is compelling them to say: "If she is to be damned, who then will be saved?"

With regard to what they are saying, that our Company has no foundation and is deprived of help from the Church, in other words of indulgences, privileges and similar things, and that it has not had any confirmation from the Church except from just a Vicar, [I say that] all these remarks are full of spitefulness, crass ignorance and rashness. O presumptuous tongues! How do they know that it has no foundation? I repeat, how do they know this? Are they by chance [20r] so divine that they have explored everything in God's heart and have not seen that it [the Company] is lodged there? Or perhaps one of the highest spirits has come down [from heaven] to reveal it to them? Once more a brazen assumption! It has no foundation? It is firmer than heaven with all its elements. And the one who was able to plant it in this way, was also able and knew how to make it known. It has no big indulgences or impressive privileges! And so for this reason it would not be among the most prestigious, or ordained by God? Foolish reasons! For just as it is possible; and very true, that many very holy souls are in heaven and are not yet canonised by the Church, so it is very true that this rule, although it has not [20v] many approvals from the Church, is most worthy in God's eyes.

In addition, these people are speaking like fools. All holy persons, in fact, and all holy companies, are not holy because they are so honoured, but are honoured for their holiness. First of all they must be both good and holy, and then they will be appreciated and honoured as such. I will even say that many rules have shone with a greater light of sanctity long before all these later indulgences. For these indulgences are given specially to establish and increase faith, by confirming that such a way of life and such works are according to the divine will, and by pardoning sins with God, and by welcoming at the same time with favour all the works thus carried out.

Moreover, perhaps it pleases God that [21r] this Company of his is flourishing without so many graces of exterior indulgences, since he has promised it his blessing by a special privilege. And this is certainly the case, as the Foundress has promised to those who obey the rule the plenary blessing of the eternal Father, from whom comes all paternity and pardon.

Finally, these indulgences do not bring perfection, but come to the aid of removing big imperfections. There were many saints, men and women, in the early Church. There was Saint Ursula with her companions, who did not have these exterior graces. They had, however, all the indulgences and privileges from God's infinite bounty, but within his Church. For God grants no grace without his Church; and the Church gives nothing without God. Because holy Church has two kinds of indulgences: [21v] one is secret and interior; the other is visible and exterior. By the interior grace, the Church continually extends all its blessings on every living creature according to God's will, by conforming to him and by praising him without end. Even though nothing may be known about it externally. And such is the case of the most chosen souls who are in the Church, who, by serving according to the counsels of the Church, make their ascent to God without all its incentives and easy promises of exterior indulgences.

It is erroneously therefore that people want to prove that our Company should be held in contempt, since it is not strengthened by many indulgences and privileges, when it is, for this very reason, more worthy of admiration. And this [22r] should even be an admirable thing in the eyes of every creature with intelligence and sound judgment, [to see] that this Company is still surviving, without privileges and apostolic briefs, without favours or human help, on the contrary with many persecutions. This is none other than divine power, God's living finger. It is not so surprising for [other] obser-

vances and many other rules, because they have had great favours and human approval.

Lastly, how can they know that, even exteriorly, [the Company] will not receive from the Church greater graces than those ever received by other rules? Who can know God's will in this? May these people first learn therefore to keep quiet, so that they can then speak well.

* * *

[22v] Then there are those who are doing their best to pour scorn on it [the Company] saying that no one is entering it from the nobility, but only daughters from working and lower class families. Here, the devil is speaking against himself. Here, he is gouging out his eyes with his own hands, as is his wont. Could he give truer praise to this Company? Could he make a more apt comparison about this apostolic Company? No high-class Jewish men or women followed Jesus Christ, with the exception of a very few, like Saint Lazarus and Saint Martha. And Saint Luke relates that many ordinary folk, including soldiers, were going along to be baptised by Saint John the Baptist. But the leaders of the people [23r] used to say that they had Moses. Just like those people who say that they have monasteries — as if our doctrine and way of life were different from those of the patriarchs! And as if the behaviour and spirit of Saint John the Baptist were different from those of Moses, whereas they conform to his. O liars! What are these people doing then? They are acting in such a way, that just as the judges who rejected Saint John were in fact neither from Saint John nor from Moses, so also they are acting, these people, that [ours] afterwards will not be from Saint Benedict, Saint Clare or our Mother.

As for saying that our virgins are of the lowly type, here again it should be seen, as is very evident, that it is all part of [23v] God's wisdom to ennoble the poor and lowly ones of the world, to humiliate the great and noble who do not want to suffer humiliation by following God's ways.

He chose poor men for his Apostles, he [who was poor] himself, with mother and father from the poor working class. And yet, the whole human power bows down with reverence before Saint Peter [who was] a sinner. Because true nobility, true distinction lies in the heart, in the prudence that knows how to choose what should be loved beyond all else. For, when this is so, so also will be the heart and soul of the one who has loved it.

[24r] It is something (to finish for now replying to so much exaggerated slander, <and I am sorry not to reply to everything, because it would take me too long to do>), it is something, I repeat, that people are not afraid to even think of such a thing, against such a great virgin, [namely] that she wanted to appear wiser than the patriarchs themselves by attempting something which they never had the courage to do. O wicked aspersions! And presumptuous blasphemies! They want to make her out to be the most foolish and proudest person alive. Shut your insolent mouths! For our age has never known anyone more humble than her. <O blasphemy against the works of the Most High Trinity which has, through its omnipotent power, refashioned this soul, governed it with its wisdom, sanctified it with its power. Put a curb, I repeat, on your wicked tongue>. Because everything carried out by this virgin has been under the order, <and in the strength> of the Son of God. And not through her own presumption, [24v] as you are falsely asserting. If this is not the case, prove it to me by citing any of her works that contradict what I am saying. And if her works do not support this, why do you not at least admit doubt in the best possible way, as required by natural law?

She has, you will say, attempted a work that many saints never attempted to do. And so, according to you, (I am not the one saying it) and in agreement with your own words, she is greater than these saints since she has done things which

others were unable to do. [And I am telling you]. <Firstly, we do not know God's will, and the more one is pleasing to God, the greater that person is. And moreover it is possible to do greater works without being greater. Joshua did more than Moses and the Apostles more than the Son of God himself. Et majora horum facietis>.

If you say that [the virgins] will not persevere because they are living in the midst of dangers and that already many of them have left, this is certainly false, because they have been persevering over a number of years, not through human assistance but through their own strength — [a strength] which is given to them however by God. And neither will they fall into dangers, since many who persevered have died, steadfast and holy. [25r] And therein lies their admirable glory, namely that surrounded by dangers and devils, they nevertheless persevered.

Neither your words, nor others equally pernicious can shake them in any way. Even those who are leaving are not preventing and will never prevent others, ever more numerous, from entering, and the Company from increasing greatly. Even in Saint Francis' own day, many of his followers went away. And guilty Judas does not stand in the way of others from being good. And can you diminish the number ordained by God? Oh! How much better it would be to have a change of heart, and to recognise and [25v] to embrace with longing the help to be saved which God, out of his infinite goodness, has deigned to offer us! And to cease, not only from attracting them away [= from the Company], but also, like one jealous of a neighbour's good, [to cease] from making every effort with your slanders to persuade others to do the same, with the result you become guilty not only of the loss of your own soul, but also of many others.

* * *

In what we have been saying to you so far, we have rebutted the obvious blasphemies and insults employed against our Company and its Foundress. Let us now turn to those who, not openly but underhandedly, humiliate her as much as possible. The words of these people are all the more harmful in that there seems to be a grain of truth in them. How true it is that hidden poison is the most dangerous! For example, they say: it has always been good to go where life is more perfect. Numerous reasons are given: it is easier to be saved in the monasteries and to do more good than here, in this Company. Furthermore, everything done there [in the monasteries] is more saintly. In particular, [they say], that enclosure, behind which, buried as it were from the world, they put an end to every opportunity of worldly pleasures, is a sign of a high degree of perfection. This is why it was so favoured by the early Fathers. Similarly, this is why, in the monasteries, they have a greater opportunity for doing good, being thus enclosed, far removed from the thousand and one obstacles and dangers facing them if on the other hand they remain under this [26r] rule. Then, the fact of being deprived of any personal possessions exceeds any good that can be done here. It is also added that the least obedience carried out in the convents is more meritorious than the greatest in ours, because there [in the convents] every action is blessed and endowed by graces from the Church. <In addition they preach that the Church gives permission to leave one religion² to enter a more perfect one>.

And finally, they say, what is wrong in becoming a nun? (as if it were the same thing!) They are not abandoning God's service by doing this, since all religious rules are good and founded on the Holy Spirit. This is enough for them, since they are serving God.

² The word "religion" at this time, in Italian as in French, also had the general meaning of "religious congregation". This is the case here, and will be met with again later. A similar double meaning applies to the words "rule" and "obedience" (Translator's note).

Poisoned by these and other similar diabolical insinuations, some [poor] creatures abandon this angelic life, and under the appearance of an [27r] equal or greater good, they unfairly become attached in spirit to the monasteries, without realising that these reasons are not true, but superficial and false. These are not divine and angelic suggestions, but infernal and diabolical. They are poison cleverly coated over with sugar. We will now point this out clearly.

To begin with, just supposing that things are as they say, that the monasteries are a better way of life than our Company, these rumours even so would be malicious and unfair. First of all because it is undoubtedly unfair to try and appropriate something belonging to someone else, without taking into account many of the reasons given above. [27v] Then, because these things are said unreasonably and at the wrong time. This can make a thing or word very bad and deadly even though good in itself. A medicine may be excellent in itself, but if it is not administered as it should, it will lead to death. Thus, [these reasons] would be valid when a person is enflamed with a divine desire for a very austere life. And again if the monasteries were like this [which they should be], these counsels would be completely justified. But this is not the case here, and it cannot be, as we shall see later. But these words are especially malicious because they are spoken out of season and beyond all reason. For many who had been drawn from the world by the [good] odour of this Company, and who would never have envisaged leaving it, on hearing the value of their rule depreciated [28r] when compared with the monasteries, will finish by losing the love of this life which hitherto they had held in singular esteem. And it was because they were convinced about this that they were detached from the world. And so, the poor souls, ill-informed, will not belong to our rule or to that of the monasteries. That is how such words spoken in this way at the wrong time can be lethal. Woe to those who thus scatter such seeds. They sow seeds of death.

This is so true that those who, their heads stuffed [with false ideas], go off to become nuns would be doing wrong. We are not saying that these religions [= monasteries] are not as holy, provided that a holy life is lived there, according to the spirit of holy Church and according to their rule, [and] provided that [the nuns] have died to the world. But, even though admitting that it is certainly possible to live like that there, this would not be a good reason for abandoning our rule [28v] to enter a monastery.

The reason for this is clear: God does not save [us all] in the same way, I mean in the same state or kind of life. He does not lead this person and that person by the same path. He does not have one formula for every kind of nature. But, according to his pleasure and to what he thinks is best, he calls and inspires one person with one way of living, and another person with another [way]. And each must of necessity follow this way, <unless God does not give help later with some other advice, according to what is said: *Despexisti omne meum consilium*>. Otherwise one would fall into diabolical pride, by preferring the advice of the devil, or one's own or another's to the divine. And by rejecting at the same time the great wisdom of God who employs different means for different persons. For in his eternal wisdom, God has [29r] so ordained that the same thing is not suitable for all. And so, just as on the human level, when God has given a creature [person] a skill in some area, this person would be ruined if she were urged to take up another [skill] for which she has no natural aptitude, so it is in the spiritual life: if God has promised to help and to glorify [a person], whom he has inspired himself or has invited through his agents, to one kind of obedience, that person will be ruined if she accepts another obedience recommended to her. The virgins of Saint Ursula would never have been glorious martyrs if they had wanted to follow another path however laudable and holy. Because God (as it is said) is unchanging; [29v] he speaks, but only once. He inspires, he calls the crea-

ture to where she can find her salvation <according to the divine will>, if she is but willing to follow his counsel. And she will believe in vain that she can find her salvation by [following] other counsels, her own or those of others — [counsels] which are heretical or from worldly people, or from false religious and seducers, or from ignorant and proud people lacking true spirit.

For these reasons and for many others, even if, as they say, life in the monasteries were more perfect, those people would be acting wrongly and iniquitously who are exhorting one of ours to go there. But how much more serious their fault will appear when it is clearly proved that our Company is [30r] of greater excellence.

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Here I regret that I have to make some comparisons, which are always odious. I regret, I say, that these ill-considered tongues have reduced the matter to such a point that it is necessary, in order to resurrect faith in God's ways in the heart of many, to discuss with them which rule is the more perfect. I know how any intelligent person views as an obstacle and with contempt comparisons of this kind, but the fault lies entirely with those who first introduced these comparisons. Wanting, myself, to maintain God's honour in this rule [30v] and faith in it, I cannot do otherwise than reply to these tiresome and unfair tongues by making use of their own way of speaking. Thus, Saint Paul, to conserve his prestige and reputation, so essential for the salvation of many, was obliged not only to boast about himself to others, but also to put himself above them. Similarly we also, in order to reinforce and strengthen faith and love of this holy rule in the souls of many, we will not deserve rebuke if we exalt our Company. So may each one here in justice forgive us.

[31r] But now let us confront those people who, under cover of being so zealous in praising the enclosed religions, are making every effort to seduce our virgins to them. So, to those saying that these religions are more perfect than ours, and that a more holy life can be lived there, we reply quite openly that this language is presumptuous and false. Presumptuous, because whoever says this is, in fact, as if he had been God's counsellor in introducing this Company in the Church and so is in a position of knowing that all the other [religions] are more pleasing to him [God] than this one. For the more perfect and beautiful a thing is, the more pleasing it is to God. If by chance the divine thought regarding this subject had been revealed to these people, it would be wrong perhaps to call them presumptuous. They would be able to realise [31v] their evident folly here, if they were not [blinder] than moles. And false, because if they want to they will realise, from the exterior and visible conditions of the life, the dignity <in which God holds it>, ours will surpass the others. For it is similar to the most perfect life that has ever been and will be, because it follows the flower of every life: the life of Saint Martha, Saint Thecla and the other first flowers of holy Church, and especially the Madonna.

But this is not the place here to explain the hidden excellences of this divine way of life; hidden, but obvious to anyone who has sincere eyes to see them. For the moment, let us reply only to the reasons they give for refusing it this singular praise. [32r] They say that the other rules are more perfect on account of this enclosure, celebrated as the best way by the Fathers — filled with the Holy Spirit. Erroneous and fallacious arguments! Thus, according to them, any soul who has not lived the enclosed life has been less perfect. And so many flowers of virginity have not reached complete sanctity because they have not lived enclosed in this way! And so Saint Ursula lacked wisdom in this respect because she did not choose such an enclosure for her company so that it might be more perfect by being more withdrawn from occasions of sin!

But is there any need to continue speaking about this? [32v] One can discover for oneself the falsity of their reasons, and even a hidden and sly blasphemy against the Church and the Spirit. And at the same time a rash and false judgment against our Company. At first, the Church, in the early days of her existence and in her golden age, was without enclosure, without convent grilles. Later, on account of decadence, monasteries appeared. With the result that these people, preferring the cloistered life to any other, are about to abase perfection itself and the primitive golden age of holy Church, which our [Company] resembles. [33r] Instead it seems a good thing to give consideration to God's order and wisdom, which makes everything turn round, as in a circle. The Church, in her early days, was enriched with this excellent and chosen state of life. And here towards her end (because we are now near to Antichrist), she is renewing her former golden age, so that the beginning joins up with the end as in a circle.

So who is there who wants, I am not saying to make it superior to [the cloistered life], but only to compare this incomparable state of life [ours] to any kind of enclosed life? In addition, something in this way of speaking reveals a veiled insult to God himself and to his Holy Spirit, as if he could, or would no [33v] longer give his assistance and strength to live a perfect life, <and according to their own rule>, to those who live dispersed in houses, if they do not go to the cloister, where if not out of love at least by force, they will be looked after.

These are some of the presumptuous blasphemies they fall into. At the same time, carried along by I know not what hidden intentions, they are in more of a hurry to turn elsewhere than to recognise the new invitation and the new strength of the Holy Spirit here. New and old, but now of necessity renewed. [They are blaspheming] because they give as their excuse that it is impossible to live according to their Rule [of the Company] where it would be necessary to remove

dangers and opportunities. But look: even in the midst of these dangers, God is still showing that he is giving his aid and help to whoever has wanted it. This should give them [34r] cause and a new incentive to do good and to glorify the great divine goodness. Instead, they are doing more harm to themselves. And they want as it were to judge the Holy Spirit, and to condemn and inveigh against his works before even knowing them.

The Holy Spirit is now calling and inviting anyone who wants to live this kind of life, with the promise of new strength on account of the greater need. And who will dare deny this? Who will want to judge the invisible power of God? Who can know it, except the person to whom it has been granted, or in whose heart the Spirit reveals and promises it?

[34v] Let these people then, so as to make me revolt against this new call from God, not want me now to sing unreasonably the praises of their enclosures. These, I am ready to concede, have been counselled and established by the Holy Spirit, <as something sovereign and unique>, but to meet their epoch. Until the time has arrived for this new grace through which, (without in any way bringing to an end the inherent value of these enclosures), a person is invited and placed in the most beautiful life possible, provided she wants it and can understand it. And no one can give any other judgment here, not being able to do [35r] so lawfully, because one would have first to know it [this life] through the path of faith or through an interior spiritual experience, or to be cognizant of all God's thinking about this subject, as has already been said against the blind presumption of those who have the audacity to say that this life has no foundation.

Finally, as for these people who are saying that our virgins are more in the midst of worldly things, all the imperfections of which are eliminated if one is enclosed in a convent, they are passing a rash and at the same time a false

judgment on them. As if they knew with certainty that they [our virgins] always love worldly things, and that, having the opportunity to do wrong, they are therefore indeed drawn to wrong. And so these people are committing at the same time, and silently, three wicked sins. [35v] One is against the Holy Spirit, who [they say] would be unable or unwilling to give the strength of perfect self-protection outside enclosure. The other is against holy Church, as if such a multitude of saints, and so many virtuous and chosen souls, had led a less perfect life because they did not avoid or overcome the dangers by shutting themselves away behind the walls. The third insult is against our Company which they want to judge unfairly, [saying] that [the virgins] are not being careful or living as honestly or as perfectly and according to God's wishes as they would be if enclosed. But as they have no clear knowledge about this subject, they should think the best about it. Although, in this case, they can be almost certain of the new [36r] divine strength given and infused here, if they do not allow spitefulness to completely blind their intelligence. Enough has been said for now in reply to them about their enclosure.

I now come to what [they are saying] to diminish esteem for our life and to promote theirs further: they allege that the fact of possessing nothing of one's own constitutes the highest possible degree of perfection. What should I do first in reply to these words? To feel compassion for their ignorance? Or to feel irritated against these harmful passions? Thus [according to them] Job, very rich, as also Abraham and other patriarchs, on account of their possessions, attained a lower degree of perfection! As for Saint Paul, [36v] he used to earn his living by working; but he did not hand over his earnings to someone else to distribute — he spent it as something belonging to him. I am not going to speak about so many others of the early Church. Not about Saint Joseph, or about the Queen of heaven.

So from these examples, may anyone with intelligence draw the conclusion that here [we are dealing] with a very high degree of life, which surpasses any life in which nothing is owned. And may that person join together — although this may be difficult, if not to say impossible, relying just on human intelligence, because these beautiful secrets can be penetrated by faith alone, may he join together, [37r] I repeat, the fact of possessing something of one's own and that of being totally dispossessed: it is one and the same thing. And from this results the most beautiful life ever. The Apostle knew this secret well seeing that, although perfectly entitled to live by the Gospel [that is to say by his preaching] as well as others, he nevertheless wanted to earn his livelihood by his own toil. He used to say: "I know what is useful for me". This is one of God's secrets, *quae non licet homini loqui*. Such was the life of the Foundress of this Company. For those who are sincerely committed to it [to the Company], the same high degree of spirit can be attained. Human [37v] philosophies that deny that opposites can exist together, should keep quiet here. Cardinal Nicola Cusano himself also very clearly proves that this sentence is false even for things pertaining to human intelligence, so how much more then for divine things.

So may this people learn at least not to pass such unformed judgment on the life of others before knowing it well, unless they do so out of ignorance; but if they speak motivated by spite and jealousy, then they should keep quiet, because they can only bring discredit upon themselves by speaking. Where then, where then, can the greater virtue lie (and may each one give me answer): to abstain completely from things and to live without them? Or, having these things, not to have them? To stand firm in the fire and not to be there? And in the midst of covetousness and pleasures, to live without pleasures?

Their reasoning would be valid perhaps if a comparison was made between those who are not entirely detached from reliance on things of the world, and to whom the Church would give permission to have as their own whatever they feel they cannot do without, and those who have truly deprived themselves of everything personal in order to avoid any opportunity of placing their love and hope in them. But not in comparison with those who are called to be true dispensers, according to God's will, including of what they have earned [38v] at great cost.

This high degree of life surpasses the condition of poverty as practised, they claim, in the religions [= monasteries]. But here [= in the Company] the property is poorer, and riches reach the extreme limit of poverty. Otherwise, it would not be lawful for a brother of Saint Francis' profession to become bishop, or cardinal, or pope, because this would be demeaning, which has never been permissible to anyone.

So then, even if the holy Fathers, moved by the Holy Spirit, had esteemed enclosure above anything else, who can deny that the Holy Spirit, sovereign and true [39r] dispenser, does not provide according to the needs of the time the ways and means necessary to live and to be saved? Anyone who had said at that time that those ways were not the very best possible would have sinned. In the same way, whoever said to a small child that milk is not the most perfect food possible would be speaking foolishly. In their day, [the ways of the monasteries] were certainly the best of all. But since it has pleased God, according to the needs of the times, to raise up and plant this new rule of life in his Church, it is only right that the others make room for the new.

* * *

[39v] As for what they are saying, that holy Church has given permission to leave one religion [= form of consecrated life] to enter another and that one can legitimately leave ours

to go to another, I really believe that they will not deny that this can only be done in the right way and for a good reason. So this is going to be our answer to this, but with fear, and out of respect for Father Brother Agostino, who is of the opinion that one can leave our Company to enter a monastery. Not that he praises this — on the contrary, if it just depended on him and he could, he would make many of those who have entered there leave to come and live here under our beautiful rule — [40r] but because in his view it would seem that ecclesiastical laws allow it.

We are saying, therefore, that holy Church has laid down laws on the subject of the rules of life that existed then, when those constitutions were made; but she has not given any ruling about our rule of life since it did not exist. But now, when the Apostolic See will be getting ready to discuss and decide about this divine Company, what will be able to influence the Holy Spirit who rules the Church, if not what he himself made and planted in the chosen hearts of this rule? In other words, those who abandon this Company do so unlawfully and unjustly. So that no person can truthfully say that one can leave here to enter a monastery, because no one can know God's will unless [40v] God reveals it to him. How do they know, these people, if these virgins whom God is calling here are not destined to some special glory, as he did for the virgins of Saint Ursula? If they went off elsewhere, he would no longer have this end in mind for them, such as he would have done for the aforementioned virgins of Saint Ursula. How do they know if the name, Company of Saint Ursula, has not been given with this sole goal and reason in mind? How do they know if the Holy Spirit does not infuse those who sincerely commit themselves here with such a kind of spirit that they are guided by it towards the most perfect way possible? How do they know, finally, (God having shown different [41r] ways and rules to enable the best possible life to be lived according to his will), if this [way] is not the one best suited to

the kind of person who has entered here? And who, by going off elsewhere, on the contrary, would be quite reluctant to do any good? For not every rule is suitable for every nature.

* * *

But I am not going to say anything more on this subject; I come now to what they are saying about obedience in the monasteries being more meritorious, especially because the Church blesses it with indulgences. In this, if only they were acting (as it is said) in a friendly way, [41v] by judging obedience, both ours and theirs, to be of equal merit and equally pleasing to God! But as they want to exalt themselves above all others, it is only just that they should be abased and put beneath [others]. First then (considering all things equal), how do they have the audacity to say this since our virgins also live under obedience to their holy rule, just like others? And, in a nobler manner and in greater conformity to the celestial and terrestrial hierarchy of holy Church? Then, if they are not more than blind with jealousy, can they not see that ours, by obeying [42v] where they could more easily do wrong, having more opportunities, practise an obedience of greater virtue, and consequently of greater merit?

Moreover, obedience is admirable in this, that in a new and special way, God gives and promises, in the hearts of those who wish to live under this obedience, the continuous voice of the Holy Spirit, and they must listen to this voice constantly so that they know how to govern themselves in everything, while still living in the tempestuous sea of this world. This special grace is not so necessary in the monasteries, because the religious there are continually in front of people's eyes that see and watch over them.

[42v] How much more admirable is this life then, such that, while living in the most corrupt century that has ever been, they nevertheless are leading holy and upright lives,

thanks to this special help divinely bestowed upon them. It imparts to them a strength that is all the greater in that it comes from God without any intermediary. And that [the Holy Spirit] strikes straight at their heart. And so true is this that this same Holy Spirit, who is bringing about these things at present (because such is his pleasure) in the hearts of those who want to live here, has induced the Foundress to lay special stress on the precept of this in the Rule, saying: "And above all, obey the inspirations of the Holy Spirit".

[43r] This agrees with the Apocalypse, which says, with regard to the fifth angel, that this is of special concern to these times of ours, as is generally agreed by everyone. This is the meaning of what it says: "I know you have little virtue. But here is the door I have opened for you; in other words, I have prepared your hearts to be open to the rays of the Holy Spirit; being taught and consoled by him, you will manage to lead a just life".

They say that our obedience, unlike theirs, is not confirmed by many indulgences from holy Church, and in particular not blessed with acts and deeds. [43v] It would be more to their credit to keep quiet about this. First of all [because] they are sinning by passing judgment about something they cannot know, namely that the obedience of the monasteries is more pleasing to God than that carried out by our virgins under this rule. He alone knows which is the more pleasing to him. And then they are mistaken and mislead others when they say that holy Church has not blessed our obediences. On the contrary, they are all the more blessed since they are by God himself, if not exteriorly, at least interiorly. For, just as the eternal Father truly approves them and blesses them with an eternal blessing, so does holy Church, [which] is always in conformity in will to the eternal Father and embracing [44r] continually anyone who does God's will and its own and who makes progress in the true spiritual life, give whole-heartedly eternal blessings to our

Company. Although this has not yet been published in any Bull or Brief of the apostolic See because this light of life, set alight here by God in our own day, has not yet been presented to the Holy See, or again because it is not the moment to spread in such a way this new divine grace, one thing is certain, and that is that, at this particular time, the obedience carried out without incentives and in the strength of faith alone pleases God and the Church more than if it depended on written promises and relied on a recognised authority.

[44v] As for what they are saying, [namely] that those in monasteries act more prudently because they escape the various sinful occasions that confront ours, even if several things have been said above about this subject, sufficient to reply to this objection, we will nevertheless add [something] here against these vexatious and unjust words.

First, that they are judging rashly, because it may be inferred from their words that, theirs, enclosed as they are in the walls of the cloister, avoid many of the sins into which they would otherwise fall if they had not thus fled the occasions, while ours do not escape from these sins since they are living [45r] in the midst of dangers. This is a great lie.

On the contrary, with our virgins there shines forth in everything not a lesser, but an even greater, continence than that found in the cloisters, even if they have every opportunity to sin. This has no need of proof. Experience clearly shows it. Nor are they showing less prudence by not escaping from the opportunities, but rather a greater prudence by undertaking to live a more vigorous and generous life, guided not by their own presumption but by the divine call. And although they are as vulnerable as others, they are not overcome by concupiscence, even though living in the midst of so many [45v] sin-inviting opportunities, being placed as it were in the inferno of so many worldly scandals and corruptions.

For since God calls them to greater dangers, and they give their consent to the celestial call, he gives them also greater strength; because God does not give a call to this kind of life without giving the necessary strength to remain and to persevere in it. This is shown clearly in those who, guided by the Holy Spirit, leave for the desert. So that, our virgins, thanks to this new strength God grants them for having consented to live under this rule, will take care of themselves and will triumph over the dangers among which they find themselves, as easily and even more so than those who, fleeing from these same dangers, live sheltered and enclosed [46r] lives behind walls. And even the condition [of our virgins] is all the higher in that it is a more glorious thing to have overcome a stronger enemy. So this is how these people who are making every effort everywhere to have us held in contempt are the cause of our value being revealed, and, the more they think they are humiliating us, the more, to their vexation, they are raising us up.

It is God therefore, God who today promises and puts in the heart of our virgins this strength, this noble virtue which formerly he gave to St Ursula, St Agnes, St Thecla, St Cecilia and to so many other generous virgins of the primitive Church. It is God, I say, who, through his [46v] servant and ambassador, has set alight this new spirit in our Company.

Finally, there are some people who in order to withdraw themselves from this source of life under some pretext, some people, I repeat, who say that it is enough to want to serve, and that by going off to a monastery they are not turning away from God, but rather [going] to the places and paths ordained by the Holy Spirit. These words are untimely (as has been shown above), and are deceitful, put forward more in favour of their own will than that of God. Who knows that this is not enough, [47r] provided one serves God? On condition, though, - let it be well understood — that it is done truly

and justly. Truly, [that is] with a sincere heart, moved by the Holy Spirit alone, and not by one's own will. Nor for one's greater physical convenience. Nor to escape the trials and causes of suffering. Justly, [that is] by acting in such a way, that if God should give a call to another path, one would want [first] to know it. And not suddenly wanting to choose one according to one's judgment, especially when it gives rise to trouble to one's sisters and to distressing scandals. To serve God in this way is to be God's enemy. It rouses his great anger. This is why his terrifying threats are directed against those who do not want to accept his ways, saying through the Prophet: "Ipsi vero non cognoverunt vias meas, quibus juravi in ira mea, si introibunt in requiem meam". In other words: They have not known my ways, and I have sworn to them in my anger that they will not enter into my rest.

So to serve God like this is not to serve him. To go off to become a religious in this way is a hypocritical move, it is going under disguise. Outwardly, one gives the impression of being mortified and being espoused to Jesus Christ. But, [48r] inwardly, one is filled with one's own desires, enamoured with one's own cravings, with one's own spirit, or the diabolical spirit, if the impulse comes from it, either from outside or within. In the end it means being attached to the model of all pride, since one sets more importance on one's own opinion and counsels than on those of God.

Thus, it is not surprising if God addresses these words against these people: "Despexisti omne consilium meum. Et ego in interitu vestro ridebo", Namely: You have scorned my advice. And I, for my part, will laugh at your distress. And [48v] elsewhere God says that his people have gone astray because they had not recognised him on the day when he visited them; they did not appreciate the paths God had shown them. For God, at different times and in extreme needs, always comes to the help of the world in some new way, since the old ones no longer really serve, having for the most part

ended in scandal. And it is necessary that all God's ways be carried out and planted by one of his great ministers.

This rule [49r] was in the heart of the Most High from all eternity. But he has only brought it to birth and inspired it now, in these times of Antichrist's precursor. This is all the more marvellous as it is certainly true that the strongest remedies are always kept until the end, when the illness is most serious. Just as it is also true that the more one advances, the more God reveals the greatest secrets of his wisdom. This rule of life was missing from holy Church. But today, in [49v] her extreme needs, the Church relies on it as on one of the most beautiful gifts that God has ever bequeathed to the world.

* * *

So may people enter then, may they enter this form of life. But first they must know it. Because they do not enter into anything so new and beautiful except by conviction. And once they have known it, they will then be able to pass judgment on it, if they want to be a good and fair judge of it. May they enter, I say, and may they have humble hearts by having faith in such a strength-giving life. And they will see, clearer than the sun, that this is the model of that life which Jesus Christ, coming forth from the bosom of the Father, brought from heaven. And which he wanted to live. Such is [50r] the life followed by the Apostles. And the martyrs. And so many beautiful virgins of the primitive Church. <And above all the Madonna>. Such is this life; an active life with the spirit always raised heavenwards.

[The virgins] possess their own things, but subject to the discretion of those who govern them, or, through perfect mortification and total self-abnegation, they share them out, sometimes among themselves and sometimes among others, not as something belonging to them but to God who is continually dispensing it according to his will. They are just as ready to be content, with having nothing, as [50v] ready, if

they have anything, to act according to the counsels of the Holy Spirit who, in a special way, governs such souls.

They live indeed amid earthly cares and troubles, but without losing that special peace of mind that is theirs, placing their trust continually in the peaceful help and consolation of the Holy Spirit. And since they receive everything as coming from the divine hand, they drink it willingly. And this bitter cup changes into celestial sweetness for them.

Living thus in the midst of the world and this active life, they savour the contemplative. And in an admirable way, [51r] they live harmoniously in one and the other. The height of contemplation does not hinder daily activities and these activities do not hinder the taste for heaven. And the heavenly light does not obstruct the activities. And so the Apostles, and so many other martyrs, virgins and confessors, in the midst of the labours they were undertaking for the one and pure love of God, were at a much higher level in God than others ever were who, freed from the cares of the world, devoted themselves entirely to contemplation.

Such is the life of the Company. Of such a kind, was the Foundress. That celestial virgin has been a new Apostle in this very corrupt age of ours.

[51v] But this is not the place to speak about the wonderful praises of our mother Foundress. For the moment it is enough that I have replied in this way, in haste and at top speed, interrupted at times by other occupations, I repeat, that it is enough that I have replied as I have to these [nasty] tongues, nasty to say the least, if not iniquitous.

As for you, Matrons and all the other governors [the Colonelle], be on your guard, so that these misplaced and irrational voices do not harm your flock, placed in your hands by God. Through these means, and other better ones that your prudence [52r] and especially the Holy Spirit will bring before your eyes, resist with all your strength these poisonous insinu-

ations. And do not let yourselves be influenced by apparent reasons that seem on the surface to be plausible and which, under the pretext of good, would lead and precipitate you into ruin, you and the Company. Never allow - as far as you can and with all your physical and spiritual strength — the slightest diminishment in the prestige and honour of the Company and of its Foundress, because you are bound to do this by a duty of justice. Since in this also consists all your good and all your glory in heaven and on earth. Rest in peace.

Laus Deo et sanctae Matri suae. Amen.

COMMENTARY ON THE BULL

[Commentary on the Bull of Pope Paul III]

Gabriele Cozzano, through God's grace Chancellor, although unworthy, of the reverend Mother lady Angela, foundress of the rule of Virgins called the Company of Saint Ursula, and elected Protector of the aforesaid virgins, to the noble matron lady Ginevra Luzzago and the Company.

So at last we have finally read and re-read this long-desired Bull in which our Sovereign Pontiff lays open to this holy Company the innermost depths of the great kindness of his most generous [969v] heart. And we have looked at it with such jubilant joy, as if the living source of all kindness had come down to us here from heaven. Because today the Holy Father has shed such an abundance of apostolic blessings on our pure, royal and angelic Company that they [those who had requested the pontifical approval] could scarcely have asked for more. So let us rejoice together. Let us be jubilant and exult in our hearts and cry out joyfully on all sides with festive voices.

I, myself, certainly knew, that this rule of life having been established and introduced through the great power and eternal virtue of the Son of God, his Vicar had no choice but to confirm eternally what had come from his eternal Saviour. Nor was it possible that the mediator of such a blessing (who, having practised self-abasement to a wonderful degree, through the strength of her faith, could not but possess in an admirable way the Divine and Holy Spirit who did not cease to guide, enlighten and enflame her in a marvellous way), [it was impossible then] that she should not obtain readily from her immaculate Spouse everything she desired, for she had no will but that of the Son of God.

He it was whom so often she used to call her "Lover", not by human impulse, nor illusion, nor vanity, but by the strength of the Holy Spirit, so intimately was this generous soul bound to God in love.

I repeat, let us celebrate. Let songs and various melodies resound all round. Let everyone sing, one "Jubilate Deo omnis terra", another "Cantate Domino canticum novum, laus eius in Ecclesia [970r] Sanctorum". Let another make the notes of "Exultet caelum laudibus, resultet terra gaudiis" ring out. Let there be no joyful song in divine Scripture that is not sung now in honour of the Son of God, who, and he alone, is marvellous in his works, and gloriously magnified and exalted above [all else].

What will he do now, Lucifer, with his supporters and henchmen? What will he do, I say, the big fool? He who, with such insolent audacity, believed he could destroy or counterfeit this holy rule in his own fashion; he even hoped, as <he thinks>¹ he is superior to God, to know better how to dispose, or to destroy completely what the Holy Spirit had planted and ordained according to his own taste. As if true power and wisdom dwelt more in him than in the Foundress. And now how will he find himself, he and all his terrestrial, heavenly and infernal power? When he will see clearly that the Apostolic See, whose power on earth is the same as that of the Most High Trinity in heaven, has approved in the wisdom of the Son, has fortified in the virtue of the Holy Spirit, has by Decree established in the power of the Father this holy and divinely planted Company, with its rules and ordinances made with very great wisdom?

He is defeated here, but will he admit it? Thrown down to the ground, will he still have the audacity to pick him-

¹ The mark<...>indicates a note added later on by someone else (Translator's note)

self up again? Want to act the bravado with God? And, puffed up with pride, to say: "in caelum ascendam, super astra caeli exaltabo solium meum, et ero similis Altissimo".

Look at the beast swollen with anger still threatening to make himself equal to God. Just as God has ordained in his true wisdom, and planted in his true strength a Company [970v] of spiritual life in the world, and made it stable by his eternal power, so does he [the devil] also, like a monkey, with his inflated knowledge, his false spirit and vain power, try to introduce the synagogue of his spiritual [supporters]. And what is more (in an even more arrogant and daring way) he has the audacity, as <he reckons himself> wiser, to change the ordinances and ways of God, to alter them and to refashion them anew according to his own spirit and desire. And he tries to give these simple and unprepared souls the impression that it is still God, and also divine Scripture, and also the Vicar of the Son of God who are willing to approve these things as if true. And for this, as if his scheme was honourable, it serves him that God deigns to approve these changes.

Oh! Once again, savage beast, horrible and monstrous, make use of all the snares you like, because then the Lion of the tribe of Judah [Christ] always gains the victory; he has always defeated you; he defeats you and always will defeat you through the friend of the Son of God, by virtue of whose blood she conceived this holy Company, brought it into the world, nurtured and watched over it, and will always protect it as long as the world lasts. Amen.

Let us then open up all the hidden corners of our hearts in fresh and jubilant rejoicing. May one and all unite together to rejoice in God: women, men, young and old, consecrated and unconsecrated, and especially the young and the joyful and jubilant holy virgins; may everyone [971r] make ring out everywhere: "Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto, sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen". It is sinful at this present moment not to have a cele-

bration for so much kindness on the part of our Lord [= the Pope], because I believe that even the Angels and all Paradise are rejoicing over it. And in addition, no doubt, all the inhabitants of this blessed Homeland are finding joy there and are celebrating it. The Queen of Heaven is rejoicing; the Patriarchs are celebrating; the Apostles are triumphant; the Confessors are exulting; the Doctors are singing.

And so the Virgins, and especially victorious Saint Ursula with her glorious company, and generous Saint Catherine, are all singing, with greater liveliness than ever this new song, their song, which they alone have the right to sing; and to those who are singing, all the heavenly hierarchies respond and start singing together: "Blessed is the one who sits on the throne, [on the] spotless, golden throne. Amen throughout the centuries".

Introduction to the translation of the Papal Bull confirming the Rule and the Company of Saint Ursula.

Lady Ginevra, without having even let me know in person your desire to know and to be able to read for yourself the Bull that our Lord [= the Pope] has granted us, I had already understood it, and immediately, to give you satisfaction, I began to translate it from the Latin into the vulgar tongue. In so doing, I have not always translated word for word, which would have been too difficult, and, in some way, would have resulted in a strange and incomprehensible translation. Especially because, in these bulls, it happens that between two words which should go together a whole lot of other words is found inserted. If this method and way of speaking was translated [971v] into the vulgar tongue, I do not know what kind of obscure, strange and disagreeable thing I would have presented. But be assured that I have not changed anything of the integrity of the meaning, which is inviolable (this would be a serious sacrilege). On the contrary, I have kept everything very

faithfully. So that you can clearly and easily understand everything that is useful to you, I want to divide it into clear and well-defined sections for you.

The Bull thus has four principal parts: the preface, the petition, the concession, and the conclusion. And what is contained in one [part] is also in another, but in a different way. In the preface or introduction, in fact, can be found virtually all that is said expressly and at length in the concession, and which briefly but distinctly concludes the epilogue [= conclusion]; and also which is specifically requested in the "supplica" [= the petition]. The work is thus simplified and made one, the parts corresponding in relation to each other as I have said, and no one part is in any way opposed to the others.

I am saying this so that you know clearly what wrong they are doing who force the letter of the Bull, making it say what it is in no way saying and which it should not or cannot say. I am speaking of the fact that it is their wish, at all cost, that the Sovereign Pontiff should grant and give permission to alter, to change and to rewrite the ordinances and teachings of the Rule already approved here by the Episcopal See. It is a sacrilege just to think of it.

[972r] *Commentary of the first part, or prologue [= preface] of the Bull.*

First of all, then, our Holy Father begins with a short and clear prologue, like a beautiful and gentle overture song, in which, with loving attention, he encourages the virginal souls to hope for every grace desired, [provided it is] just, from his very speedy liberality. And he says four things. He speaks first about his position and how the divine will has made him pre- side over the government of the entire Church. Then he says that, having a special affection for virgins, he is moved to satisfy their pious and celestial desires. Thirdly, he says how con-

cerned he is that the good dispositions taken in honour of the divine cult should always remain pure. Finally, he promises to take even further salutary measures about this.

But before this prologue, he places a short address to the Protectors that His Holiness is giving us. Although I do not know to what purpose our lady-governors asked for the Bishop of Verona as protector, refusing our own Episcopal See which has been so favourable to us; this they have done unjustly and maliciously, without seeking counsel or consent. But this is how this short prologue sounds in our language.

Translation of the short prologue to the Protectors

Paul Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, to our venerable brother the Bishop of Verona, and our dearly beloved sons, the Archdeacon and the Archpriest of the Brescian Church, greetings and apostolic Blessing. Today, we have published the following letters [= the Bull].

Translation of the prologue regarding the grace requested.

Paul Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, may the matter be perpetually [972v] known. Being (for the Lord has so ordained it) placed at the head of the government of the universal Church, although we in no way merit it, we are constrained and compelled by continual and insistent thoughts so that (according to the office of the dispensation [of graces] which has been put in our hands and entrusted to our fidelity) some salutary measures should be taken (as far as this is divinely allowed us) to encourage the true piety and holy desires of every person, taken one by one, who, with purity of life is trying to imitate the immaculate Lamb, and especially for those of the feminine sex, who, having no regard for the com-

pany of and marriage to a mortal man, are vigilant and alert, with intention and clear mind, in reality and in practice, to protect their chastity and virginity in all their purity; which virgins, in truth, are of great comfort to us when they make progress.

Also, when this is asked of us, we add the solid strength of the apostolic blessing to those things which, thanks to this holy and virginal life, we believe have arisen to the praise and glory of the divine cult, ["divini nominis" in Latin] so that they always remain steadfastly unchangeable ["illibata" in Latin!]; and in addition to this, we are adding yet other measures that, in the Lord, we deem to be useful and salutary.

*Commentary of the second part of the Bull,
which is the "supplica" or petition.*

The second part, which is the "supplica", contains chiefly two things. The first speaks of the way in which the Rule and the Company have been established; the [973r] second contains the object of the request.

Now the first, once again, contains three things. The first deals with how some virgins, divinely inspired, established this Company. The second with how, to govern the Company, they made a certain Rule. The third with how this Rule was confirmed by the Episcopal See.

Now the second and principal part likewise contains two sections. The first: how it is requested that this Company and this Rule be reinforced also by the solid strength of the Apostolic See. The second: that it [= the Apostolic See] may be pleased to take any other suitable measures, namely five, as will be seen in the concession.

But, see again here, as for the other part of the Bull, how it is clearly obvious that the Apostolic See does not want the Rule to be altered, but always to remain unchanged, since

it is requested that pontifical strength be added to the Episcopal confirmation so that its substantial essence may be stabilised. These words, note carefully, contradict their [of those people referred to earlier] false and forced interpretations.

Translation of the first principal part of the "supplica"

Now a request has recently been presented to us on behalf of our beloved children, the present men and lady-governors of the Company of virgins under the protection of Saint Ursula, which has been introduced according to the rules in the city of Brescia.

This request explained that there were some young girls and other women (in other words, virgins of a certain age and experience) who have trampled underfoot and suppressed in themselves the taste for worldly delights and pleasures, and spurned the love and company [973v] of mortal men. Touched and enflamed by the Holy Spirit, they desire ardently, by their perpetual virginity, in the fragrance of their virtue, to offer a pleasing sacrifice to the Most High, attentive to the good pleasure of the One who is the most beautiful of the children of men. Aspiring to the perfection of charity and other pious works, they established and instituted the aforesaid Company. And so that it may be well governed and increase, they made some ordinances and laws. These ordinances then, and these statutes [= the Rule] have been seen and read by the Bishop of Brescia or by his Vicar-General; the latter, having received, as he has stated, special power from the Bishop in spiritual matters, both as Vicar and with his ordinary authority, confirmed and approved the above-mentioned statutes and ordinances, as has been recorded in the official letters of the Bishop or Vicar, and in the other public documents produced on this subject.

Commentary of the first principal part of the "supplica ".

I myself and a Canon Doctor, Dusina by name, both personally presented it [the ordinances and statutes = the Rule] to the Vicar called Lorenzo Muzio, who, often said with amazement while reading it (I recall) that it had been done with great discernment. The notary who affixed the seal to it was called Boarno. I wrote it with my own hand, and it was entirely composed by me. But the contents were by the Holy Spirit, dictated through the intermediary of the Foundress.

Every person should know therefore [974r] that, regarding these young girls and other women mentioned in the Bull, everything happened as I am saying, and as you also, Lady Ginevra, are in the position to know. There were many virgins who were the first-fruits of the Holy Spirit in this fraternity, and [who were] like stars shining amidst the darkness of the world. The youngest were Simona, the daughters of Dolza Drusilla, Laura, Andriana, Peregrina and others; there were also the Peschere sisters, Lady Chiara Gaffura. The eldest [were] Barbara, Chiara, Margarita and Maria. Among them was the oldest and the saintliest, the reverend mother Angela. She was in the midst of them all like a sun that gave light to all the others. She was like a fire, a conflagration of love that set them all alight. She was like a throne of God who instructed them; or rather the Son of God living in her was. doing all this through her. She alone, under divine inspiration, was the foundress of such a great work. She is the real and living mother, who has generated and regenerated them in the Word of Truth and in the Blood of Jesus Christ. But in a preliminary letter which she made me write, she wanted to be numbered among the others and her name to be omitted; it was out of humility or perhaps for some other reasons and motives which are hidden in the divine secrets.

She obtained from these virgins what she herself communicated to others, and she enabled them to do the same. Then she used to talk things over with them, encour-

aged them to act, saying that it was not she, but the virgins with her who had done it. She used to insist that she was indebted to them, truly indebted, and as a true friend and true daughter of God she gave them God as the powerful rewarder, who [974v] would repay man for what he himself has carried out through him with his consent, as if he [man] had done it alone. Thus she told me one day that I alone with her had written this Rule, although in fact there is nothing of me in it, except a tiny bit of craft in writing down her holy thoughts and teachings as faithfully as I could.

She was so appreciative and pleasant toward anyone who kindly rendered her even the smallest service, that it seemed she could never reward them enough by any act of courtesy. "May God be the one who repays you", she used to say. Her love of God and her union with him were so great that she made herself indebted to every creature that lived in every respect an honest and just life in God's eyes. All the honour, in fact, and all the respect, which that creature had with regard to God, she considered as having been rendered to her, since God belonged to her as her only Love and her unique Good. She had such a hunger and thirst for the salvation and good of her neighbour, that if it had been necessary in order to save even the least one, she was completely disposed and ready to give not only one life, but a thousand lives, if she had had that many. Her charity was so great that it reached from heaven to hell, and she embraced every creature with maternal love. The more sinful a person was the more he received kindness from her, for if she was unable to convert him, at least she gently and kindly persuaded him to accomplish some good or to do less evil. She used to say that he would thus have at the moment of death at least some relief for the little good he had done, and in hell, fewer torments. Her words were earnest, powerful and gentle, and uttered with such [975r] compelling graciousness that everyone had to admit, "God is here".

But this is not the place to recount the glory of God's marvellous works in this virgin. Oh! If only it was known with what strength of the Holy Spirit she, divinely inspired from her youth, conceived this royal Company, and then, in her own time and commanded by God, brought it into the world and established it, the world perhaps would have greater respect and reverence for her worthy and irreproachable ordinances and teachings.

But let us continue with the text of the Bull.

Translation of the second principal part of the request.

This is why, on behalf of those in Government, it has been humbly petitioned of us to deign, [by virtue] of our apostolic kindness, to strengthen and reinforce, by the confirmation of the Apostolic See, this foundation of fraternity, and these laws and ordinances as well, so that this rule of life may be established on a firmer basis of substantial being. And to deign also, regarding the aforesaid subjects, to take any other further measures.

Commentary of the concession, the third principal part of the Bull.

After having thus presented the substance of the petition, the Holy Father opens up the apostolic fullness of his heart to grant what could have been rightfully asked of him; and in this part, he does seven things. Firstly, the Holy Father says that he willingly gives his consent to the request. Then he absolves the persons of Government from any impediment, should there be any, to obtaining the effects of the favour at present [975v] being conceded. Thirdly, he establishes by eternal decree the Rule and the Company. Fourthly, he grants a sanation for any faults that may have been committed. Fifthly, he gives permission to change the constitutions that may have

been made regarding the government and to make others; and again to modify the latter and to make new ones, and he confirms those made in such a way. Sixthly, none of the legacies left under certain conditions to the virgins of the Company must go elsewhere. Seventhly, that on entering and on dying, they are always to have a plenary indulgence.

Translation of the concession

We, therefore, who willingly consent (as far as we can) to these desires, from which it is hoped the salvation of souls will come, we first of all give absolution, through the text of these [letters = the Bull], and we consider the aforementioned men and lady-governors, individually and altogether, absolved from any ecclesiastical sentence, censure and pain of excommunication, suspension and interdict, and any other sentences, if they have in any way been implicated in any of these, no matter for what reason or circumstance the punishments have been given to them, whether effectively or legitimately. It is our wish, though, that they are thus absolved so that they may obtain the effect of these present letters of ours.

Commentary of the first and second parts of the concession.

Here, may our innovators note well — if they thought that what they had implored with false [976r] and hypocritical supplications would be made valid — [may they note carefully] that the Apostolic See does not give consent to everything requested, but only what it thinks can procure the salvation of souls. This See, in fact, grants nothing in an absolute way, but only on condition that it is exactly as it has been described, and with the presupposition that there will be an increase of faith, peace and harmony in the Church, otherwise the request is void.

May they also take note, and note carefully that, if as a result of their supplication this absolution is granted so that they may be freed from any Episcopal interdict or order against their unfair innovations [namely, the imposition of the cincture], this absolution will be of no help to them; it will even be rather harmful to them, because they will incur both God's anger and apostolic indignation. First, because this excommunication or Episcopal commandment has been done for the necessary relief of the virgins unjustly oppressed. Then, following on this, to conserve the prescription of the Rule, which does not admit of such an innovation. Finally, [this absolution will not help them] to obtain the effect of the present papal Bull, which confirms by decree this Rule and everything found in it.

So if our innovators insist on not obeying the Episcopal See, on giving grief to the virgins who are leading an irreproachable life, and thinking that they are absolved from all this [976v] by the pontifical grace, they will then find that they are caught up in some curse or other by what they are doing and that there is no defence for them either in heaven or on earth.

Is it possible that they cannot renounce this unfair decision that they have taken? Do they not see, at least if they are able to see clearly, that a person fairly rejected and excommunicated and who then asks unfairly to be absolved and freed, not only will not be absolved, but that her sin will increase, because she is lying and believes it is possible, by deception, to obtain an unfair grace from the Holy See?

Translation of the third part of the concession

Then, being inclined as we are to [satisfy] these requests, because through our presents [namely, everything relating to the present letters], we believe that therein is expressed

the truest meaning of the aforesaid letters and documents, we approve and confirm the institution of the Company, its laws and ordinances, and also anything relating to them, everything as a whole and each individually which are thus contained in both the aforesaid letters and documents, those which are derived from them (provided, though, that they are lawful and honest and do not contradict the holy Canons); this is why, with assured knowledge and in the plenitude of the apostolic power, through the content of the present letters, [we approve and confirm] with apostolic authority all these things as a whole and each one in particular, and we add to this the solid strength of perpetual stability. And deliberately, by decree, we dispose that these things should be firmly and continually observed [977r] in the future for all times.

Commentary of the third part of the concession.

Here is the most important point, here is what was more desired than anything else: that this new rule of life, having come from the eternal God, be confirmed for eternity through all the power of his Vicar.

It is now, in fact, surrounded by a triple protection, just as if the wisdom of the Son of God had come down from heaven since it [= the Bull] says: we approve it; and the strength of the Holy Spirit when it says: we add our solid strength to it; and the power of the Father when it says: by decree we want to give it this stability. For the Apostolic See has on earth the authority that the Most Blessed Trinity has in heaven. And know [you innovators] that the Sovereign Pontiff having confirmed the Rule by decree, the nature of the decree is such that it annuls anything that has been passed contrary to it, or that will be passed.

So all these innovations [the imposition of the cincture] are collapsing; and those persons, who are striving to enforce them by any means, by going against the Bull, risk

falling under the threats of the Bull. May those introducing innovations be very careful, and not ingenious in deceiving themselves and others. This new Rule of life, I say, is established as firmly as any other religious life, as firmly as the firmament in heaven. It is thus established in the Church by the ecclesiastical power, I say, because it had already first been eternally foreseen and created by God; just as the Church canonises a saint [977v] in the world not so that this canonisation makes him holy if he was not one already, but because he is already a saint of God and rendered holy by God, and it is this that the Church announces and confirms to the world.

So may any evil power, on earth, in the skies, and in hell be confounded; may it burn and be consumed, because it will no longer find any place where it can exercise its hidden poison.

Then, having given this eternal confirmation, the Holy Father immediately bestows another beautiful act of generosity. He says this:

Translation of the fourth part of the concession

And if some breaches of the law, both legitimate [di ragione = relating to Canon law] and effective [di fatto = committed in good faith], should occur in these matters, we pardon them all, each and everyone of them.

Commentary

He says that he forgives the "di ragione" and "di fatto" faults if they happen. Do not think however that, if something unfair or contrary to the Canon laws was introduced, it should or could be kept by virtue of this decree; on the contrary, it

should be immediately abolished. This means that when something good in itself is done, but which the law, for a number of reasons, does not want done without permission, and this law is not known, it is treated as legitimate ["di ragione"] ignorance. On the other hand, when the law and the interdiction are known and one goes against them, but one does not think that it is contrary, this is effective ignorance ["di fatto"]. For example, the Church forbids anyone (except in religion) from making a public vow in a church into the hands of a priest. [978r] If one of ours has done it, without being aware of the point of law, the Holy Father gives absolution for this breach of the law; it is as if no fault had been committed against the forbidden matter, and as if one had had permission to do it. If someone, on the other hand, knowing the Church's prohibition, placed a vow of virginity into the hands of a priest, secretly and without the others knowing about it, while believing that her action does not come under the interdiction of the Church, she would be committing an effective ["di fatto"] fault. Just like someone, carrying some pellets on him, did not think he was going against the edict that forbids carrying arms.

So the Holy Father states: if one of these faults has occurred, he is removing it; occurred, I repeat, in matters regarding the Rule approved by the Episcopal See. "What has occurred", he says, not "what will occur". Nor does he say: what would happen in other ordinances made afterwards, or in those that are about to be made. This absolution makes no mention of these, so it seems.

Know also that a bad thing, when it is known as such, must no longer be committed, otherwise one would be sinning with intent, and once this is done, one does not deserve pardon. Because the one who sins thinking that he will be forgiven later, is removing the reason of pardon.

Translation of the fifth part of the concession.

And, similarly, we grant to the fraternity, its governors and its lady-governors, both present and future, the power to add [978v] any other statutes and ordinances, provided they are lawful and honest, concerning the government, peace and tranquillity of the fraternity of virgins, or concerning their number, conditions and age, and also to make others.

And they can (as it appears to be shown [in the Bull]) change, modify and rewrite these constitutions and ordinances; which, once changed, modified and rewritten, will be immediately confirmed by this same Apostolic Authority; and they will then be judged as such and held as such; and [the Governors] can impose any punishment against would-be offenders, without asking permission to do so from the local Ordinary.

Commentary.

This grace and addition that our Lord [the Holy Father] is giving us today, has not been requested from him by common knowledge and consent, but secretly and with malice by our innovators, to attain their unlawful goal. This grace, however, has not been given in the way they were hoping for, but wisely (because only just and peace-bearing things can come from this august See); it cannot therefore in the slightest way help them in their unlawful desires; and it can in no way harm us, but instead be useful to us. For it is so well qualified that it really goes quite counter to their desires and contains everything opposed to this innovation of cinctures, even though that would not be contrary to the Rule.

[The Holy Father] says that he gives permission, first to the Company, then to the men Governors, thirdly to the lady Governors, to make new laws.

This is what we have always done. [979r] Because the virgins first put to me the new thing they had in mind; then I

put the proposal before the lady Governors; and then in the same way, by common consent, after giving due consideration to its evident purposefulness, not without having prayed about it before, during and after, the law was passed. But here, in this innovation, everything has been done without this fair way of proceeding, without common consent.

Then, two further restrictions arise from it [the grace], by saying that it must deal with lawful and honest things. This innovation [still the cincture] is not lawful, for several reasons, nor honest, which we will show you later. So, neither can they introduce it on account of this second restriction, even though it may have common consent. But again: let us suppose that all these conditions were fulfilled, the concession would still not allow this innovation. Because it [the grace] says in fact, imposing greater restriction, that the ordinances which can be made lawfully are those that concern the government, the maintenance of peace, the number, the condition, the age of the virgins. This innovation does not belong to any of these things; therefore no permission is given here to introduce it. Because [the Bull] does not give permission to introduce just any kind of lawful and honest law, but only those that are conducive to good and peaceful government. [The concession] allows changes to be made to laws of this kind that have been or will be made (as is allowed), but only these; only these, I repeat, and not those of the approved Rule; and [the new ones themselves] can be rewritten, if it is agreed that there is a need, because a good thing badly done, just as a bad thing [979v] well done, has no standing.

Now the rules about these things are like the first one made by the Foundress, who made the principal Mother; then she made the Colonelle; thirdly, she established the gentlemen Protectors. But before this, she made the Chancellor who wrote the Rule and everything pertaining to it. And she made him write many other things, and she made him Protector of this Company in order to defend it from evil doctrines and opinions, and to make clear the truth of her doctrine. But the

things [of the Rule] must not be changed, because the Madre made and bequeathed them; and another such Chancellor could not have been found, because no one could have understood the Foundress' mind as I did.

After the death of the Foundress, the office of "Archicolonella" was also created, about which numerous laws were passed; Novice-mistresses, Procurators can be made, and laws regarding them, which, once passed, seeing from experience that they are really not helpful to the said government, [the Bull] allows them to be changed and rewritten. This is something fair and honest.

But as for the ordinances made by the Foundress and confirmed by the Episcopal See, [the Bull] wants them to remain intact and unchanged. This is how it is, and it cannot and must not be otherwise. This is because - the letter [the Bull] shows it very clearly — it says first that it approves and confirms them; that it gives them power in perpetuity; and that it decrees that they must be observed forever. Then it goes on to say (where it gives permission to modify): not these same ones, but others, [980r] which means the same with regard to the general kind, but of a different type; so that the reading of the Bull gives a clear message: that there are other ordinances which can be changed by virtue of the papal concession.

It cannot be otherwise for three reasons.

First, the preface, the petition, the epilogue [= the conclusion] all say loudly the same thing; and so, if the concession did not correspond, the matter would be unsuitable, disproportionate, against itself; it would be like a human monster, a little like Horace's monster.² This is something unthinkable in these revered pages; on the contrary, everything here is truly balanced, simple and unified, in accordance with the precept of this same Horace.³

² Cf. Horace, *De arte poetica*, 1-5

³ Cf. *ibid.*, 23.

Secondly, there would follow something else impossible for the Apostolic See, from which only just and wise things can issue; namely that the Holy Father would be inconsistent, self-contradictory if he granted this; if what he has established today by eternal decree, quite suddenly and almost at the same time and with the same breath, he gave permission to alter and modify it, or to make other laws that would destroy it. Sacrilegious blasphemy, that one should even think of it for a man of commonsense, let alone of our Holy Father.

Thirdly, this [namely, to change the Rule] cannot be done because these chapters are filled with apostolic doctrine; in them, we find the evangelical bread broken for these virgins, and the Word of Life. Anyone who can have permission to [980v] change and modify these documents will therefore also have permission to distort the Divine Word and the ways of the Holy Spirit! I say the same about what is worn, which has been settled according to the apostolic teaching. With the result the Bull cannot give this permission.

It cannot, I say; but there are four reasons why it should not say these things. The first, because it would be doing something contrary to ecclesiastical laws that want the statutes and ordinances of the Fathers to remain unchanged, as said by Popes Gelasius and Leo; and, with regard to this, they are quoted by Saint Bernard. The Church, in fact, wants what she knows to have come from the Spirit and not man to remain inviolable. This is why Scripture says: "Legem matris tuae ne despexeris" — that is to say of every holy person who begets you in the Word of Truth.

The second is because it would be doing wrong to his brother Bishop, who had given daily indulgence to anyone who observed what he had approved as being divinely inspired, if now the Pontiff allowed human intelligence to manipulate it at whim. Such a disloyal act and against the duty of fraternal love could never come from the head of the Church in his dealings with those who govern with him and are his

companions in governing such a big enterprise [= the Church].

The other is that, having been requested by us to give greater strength to the ordinances of the Rule, the Holy Father would be showing a strange lack of courtesy not only if he were not to grant it, but also to suppress it, by granting power to change what the Episcopal See has given him.

Then because he would be giving to others greater power than [his own] supreme [power], since others would be able to do what he would never do, in other words to weaken what he himself has already established: Quia, quod semel placuit, amplius displicere non debet.

Another undesirable outrageous thing would follow, [namely] that a subject has the power to remove [981r] the Episcopal Seal and to change things that had been approved by him.

And yet another thing would follow, which would render possible what is impossible, since what the Church has never done and is not doing, according to Saint Jerome, [this] just cannot happen.

It would also follow that the same thing would be both established and not established, and thus two contradictory things would be put together.

And it would also result in the lesser power defeating the greater one.

And again it would follow that the qualities given and attributed to a principal member would not be his but those of another principal party.

Finally, it would be something completely outside any rational discourse that the Pontiff should entrust to a human spirit to twist as he wishes what he himself has said to be established by the virgins inspired by the Holy Spirit. So the matter remains clearly as we have said; it must not and cannot be otherwise. And those who obstinately want to assert that, by this addition, our Holy Father is giving permission to change and to violate the inviolable teachings and ordinances

of the Rule, [981v] I would say that they are forgers of Apostolic Bulls, and that they are undermining their sacred decrees, and so they will incur the terrible anger of the Almighty God, and of his holy apostles, Saint Peter and Saint Paul.

But let us return to the translation of the other two parts of the concession, where the Holy Father grants these virgins two other beautiful and important graces, and reinforces one and the other by decrees; the first concerns legacies made under certain conditions and the second one [concerns] the plenary indulgence.

Translation of the last two parts of the concession.

We also grant to these virgins and to each one of them that, on entering this Company, they can have and retain any legacy and settlement, any other inheritance and gift of any kind of goods and things, whatever the quantity and quality, even when they have been bequeathed on condition that they enter some monastery, or that they make religious profession or they marry; and this by any person whatsoever, even in their last wishes and under penalty (if they are doing the opposite) of being deprived of these goods, so that they [the goods] will go to other persons or charitable institutions, or alternatively in some other way as set down in these legacies or are about to be set down.

We are making this grant, I say, with the authority and in the way we have spoken about above; and we are also granting these virgins the grace that, on entering the Company, they are judged (insofar as this enters the question) to have met the wish of the testators, just as if they had entered a monastery, or made [982r] religious profession, or contracted a marriage; by a deliberate decree on this subject, we lay down that these goods cannot go elsewhere, or be held for transfer or alienation. So that if some judge, with or without knowledge, tried by some authority or other to do or did something else, this

would have to be judged and interpreted as void and as having no legal value, because from those, and from anyone else doing the same, we remove all authority and power to judge and interpret differently. In addition to this, to the foresaid young girls and virgins, to each and everyone, we piously grant in the Lord and graciously bestow the plenary indulgence and the remission of all their sins, on the day when they enter this Company and on the day of their death. And by deliberate decree, we lay down that this indulgence must in no way whatsoever be subject to the revocations, suspensions, dispensations imposed on similar or different indulgences, whether on behalf of the fabric of the Basilica of the Prince of Apostles in the City, or again on behalf of the holy Crusade, or if it was a question, in other respects, of those passed by Us or the Holy See at the appropriate time. We decree that this indulgence must never be included in such things but must always be exempt from them; so that any constitution or apostolic ordinance that were contrary to it would be no impediment to it.

Commentary.

I realise now, through experience, that it is true what the Church says [982v] when speaking to God about his saints: "Et desiderio eorum non fraudasti eos". For I now see clearly that God has listened to the Madre Angela's desire with regard to this Company and that he has fulfilled it even more than was possible. Not only, in fact, has the Holy Father granted it the three favours she wanted, but he has also reinforced and strengthened them with many other decrees. One was about the confirmation of the Rule, the other about legacies, the third about the plenary indulgence. All these three matters have been obtained with superabundant apostolic liberality. So our Company is now fully armed against all its enemies.

Oh! What thanksgiving our holy Mother, in heaven, must be offering to God, the Most High Trinity, the holy Virgin, the Apostles, the Martyrs, the Confessors and Virgins, and the whole celestial Court for such a great and inestimable kindness!

Translation of the conclusion, fourth and last part of the Bull.

So, in no way and to no person is it lawful or permissible to infringe or to criticise with presumptuous audacity this document with our absolution, approval, confirmation, addition, supplement, concession, gracious gift of indulgence and decrees. And if anyone was arrogant enough to dare to set up opposition to this, he should know that he would incur the anger of Almighty God and of his blessed apostles Peter and Paul.

Given at Rome, in the one thousand five hundred and forty fourth year of the Incarnation [983r] of the Lord, on the fifth day before the ides of June [= 9 June 1544], in the tenth year of our Pontificate.

*Translation of the commission
of the Sovereign Pontiff to the Protectors*

By these apostolic writings, we rely on your discretion, every time that you, or two or even one of you, are required about this subject on behalf of the men and lady Governors, or on behalf of one of them, where and when and each time there is a need, you or someone else or others, to publish formally the above mentioned letters and everything therein contained, and see that everything is observed.

Take care, therefore, to uphold these aforesaid things with effective protection, making arrangements in such a way,

on our authority, that these letters, and all that they contain, are firmly observed. And may all those, each and everyone addressed in these letters, enjoy them in peace. Do not allow the meaning of these same letters to be interfered with in any manner by anyone, whoever they may be. [See to it] by constraining and punishing, with ecclesiastical censures and punishments, those contradicting and rebelling against it, without paying any attention to their appeals. And in addition to this, [carry it out] by gradually increasing the punishments each time, provided that the Processes on this matter are carried out according to legitimate ways and forms.

May there be in no way any impediment to the measure of Pope Boniface VIII of blessed memory, our predecessor, according to which provision is made that a Judge or Protector from another town or diocese may be taken.⁴

⁴ Cozzano's text stops here with a synthesis of the last part of the commission to the Executors (the Archdeacon and Archpriest of the cathedral church of Brescia).. Nor does he indicate the date here repeated in the Latin text. (Cf. MARIANI, TAROLLI, SEYNAEVE, *A. Merici, Contribution towards a biography*, p. 612).

TESTIMONIES OF THE LIFE
OF THE REVEREND MOTHER SISTER ANGELA
FRANCISCAN TERTIARY

"PROCESSO NAZARI"

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Introduction

Can these testimonies, really rather unpolished, tell us anything that we do not know already? What role do they play, in the history of Saint Angela?

The origin. 1540: death of Angela. The Company was left, still trying to find its feet. The first difficulties that were encountered resulted in a crisis and a split in unity. Unity and peace returned about the year 1558. Another testing period, and ten years later, because the Company had increased its membership and was spreading rapidly, it was decided to get its Rule and Ceremonial printed by Damiano Turlino. So why not get a biography of the Foundress written as well?

The moment was favourable: the Company was flourishing; Angela's reputation of sanctity continued to grow; and — who knows — the Superiors may also have realised that the 30th anniversary of her entry into heaven was approaching!

The Bishop of Brescia was Domenico Bollani. In 1559, he was carrying out his office of mayor so well that Paul V — almost overnight — made him move from the centre of civil authority to that of the bishopric! His Venetian background, his political and diplomatic experience, his training as a layman all contributed in giving him a sense of moderation, respect for freedom of the individual, trust towards the laity. He would thus have appreciated this Company of secular virgins that represented a state of canonical life "sui generis" approved by the Pope.

The method adopted to carry out this biographical work may surprise us a little: permission first from the bishop was sought; a notary, not a writer, was approached; the interrogations, we shall see, took place in the presence of witnesses

and were written down in a notarial act, signed and sealed after verification by the notary himself. These interrogations form what is called the "Processo Nazari", after the family name of the judge-notary, Giovan Battista Nazari, called de Sayani.

On the depositions of the witnesses consulted, Nazari then constructed the "Life of the reverend and almost blessed Mother Sister Angela, foundress... ". This "almost blessed" ("quasi beata"), which brings a smile to the lips of those who are not conversant with the situation, may help us to understand better what could have been the purpose of this process.

The purpose of this process. It was hoped, of course, that this first biography would be a worthy, serious work, supported by really good evidence. But there was no need for a duly recognised notarial act for that! Nor a request for the local Ordinary's permission for a handwritten composition, of a private nature! So, what was really behind this "Process"? I think that it was seen as the first step of a path that could have led to the canonisation of Angela, or, at least, attract a kind of ratification for the title of "beata" that was already being conferred on her.

The witnesses. The four witnesses questioned were Giovan Antonio (called Antonio) Romano, Bertolino Boscoli, Giacomo Chizzola and Agostino Gallo. The criteria behind the choice of Romano and Gallo are obvious: both one and the other had given shelter to Angela over a period of time, so they must have known her very well. Less obvious, on the other hand, are the reasons why Boscoli and Chizzola had been called upon.

We know a little about these four men.

Zoan Antonio Romano came from a village not far from Brescia; he seems to have started work as a hatter; he had subsequently become a rich merchant. At the time when he first knew Angela at the home of Caterina Patengola, he

was about 22 years old. A few months after this meeting, when the lady Caterina had recovered her peace of mind and Angela's presence was no longer required in the house, Romano begged her to go and live in his house, and Angela accepted. Was there some mission there to carry out? For the time being, we do not know.

Aged 82 years, Romano was summoned by Nazari to give a statement about all he knew about Angela. He was the grandfather of a little girl of 19 months, who had been given the name of Angela.

Witness of Angela's daily life for almost fourteen years, he had also been her travelling companion to the Holy Land and to Mantua. Angela had recounted some of her childhood souvenirs to him; he had seen for himself how often visitors had recourse to her — for her advice, her mediation and prayers; he had known about her austere and penitential way of life, and the ever-increasing renown that she enjoyed.

Romano must have managed his business affairs very well, judging from the way his economic situation improved; on the other hand he was a good simple man and he did not have the same expertise in expressing himself as he did in his business. He gives his account with a kind of breathlessness, recalling one memory after the other without stopping. He seems to have been a down-to-earth man, incapable of reasoning anything out; what he recounts rings true, but he narrates badly, using popular speech. Nor must it be forgotten that the Italian language in Angela's day was in its early stages, especially for the ordinary folk; and the punctuation used by the recorder does not help the narrative. One senses that the person recording has been faithful to Romano's account.

Master Bertolino Boscoli is also a simple man, a carpenter, 50 years old at the time of the Processo Nazari. His two sons are present as witnesses for the depositions of both Romano and their father.

As a young man, Bertolino Boscoli used to live not far from St Afra, and sometimes went to visit Angela - out of respect, curiosity or general custom? He affirms that he used to go there on account of her renown for holiness, but he says quite simply that he knows nothing about her way of life. He recounts however that he had seen Angela one day raised from the ground during the celebration of Mass at St Barnabas. This memory goes back 34 years earlier, when he was a very young man. The distance of time, however, and the extraordinary nature of the event do not lead him into exaggeration. He speaks of an elevation of about 9" from the ground; he does not say that she was floating between the ground and the church roof, as can be seen in a certain 18th century engraving! This episode caused no little stir in the city, states Bertolino; but he openly admits that he does not remember anything else.

The third testimony comes from the Knight *Giacomo Chizzola*, a Brescian nobleman, aged 66 years, quite often entrusted with diplomatic missions, and also protector of the Company of Saint Ursula.

We must first make it clear that his name is Giacomo (James), and during the same period we often meet in public administration a Giovanni (John) Chizzola; later, these two men have sometimes been confused: mention is made of a Giovan-Giacomo Chizzola, cofounder of the Hospital for Incurables, who never existed.

Giacomo admits quite openly that he is relying on hearsay for his memories about Angela's childhood and youth: "I heard say... ", "I remember having heard say... ". From personal experience he noted that no defect could be seen in her, because — here we find a man attentive to behaviour and its causes — she was stranger to ambition, pride and anger, and took pleasure only in humility and contemplation. He also noted that Angela understood Latin and that she knew how to

give learned talks on spiritual matters, even quite long ones. She had given him one, just before her death.

Chizzola's testimony is short, synthesised and well ordered; it comes from a man accustomed to giving clear and concise accounts.

The fourth witness is *Agostino Gallo*, member of an Academy in Brescia, author of a work on agriculture in which he evoked with tranquil enthusiasm the satisfactions and advantages of the rural life: this work had met with great success and had even been translated into French. The success of this work, though, was due, not so much to its intrinsic merit, as to a deep-seated desire for a return to agricultural activities in contrast to those of war.

It was largely due to his sister, *Ippolita*, that Gallo had met Angela. When the imperial army was threatening Brescia in 1529, Agostino Gallo sought refuge in Cremona with his wife Cecilia and offered hospitality to Angela. On their return to Brescia, he invited her to stay in his house, at San Clemente.

In Cremona, as in Brescia, he had the opportunity of seeing close at hand how Angela lived. He also accompanied her on pilgrimage to Varallo, with his sister, Ippolita. His wife, this time, had stayed at home, which is understandable because the previous month she had given birth to a baby-girl...

Gallo expressed his devotion towards the Madre by giving the name Angela to his fourth daughter, baptised at San Clemente in September 1539 — the highest homage he could pay to the ageing Mother at the end of her days.

Gallo has acquired the habit of reflection and knows how to express his own thoughts and feelings. As he came to know the real Angela better, he remained fascinated by her. He recalls the efficacy of her words, the radiance of her wisdom, her spiritual capacity in converting people; he was struck by the number of persons, from every social background, who knocked on her door, including theologians and preachers. He

is well-informed about the reasons which brought all these people to Angela: to ask for good advice, to seek courage and comfort, to draw up a will, to get married or their children, to be a peacemaker to families; and all this was so suffused with a supernatural quality that Gallo cannot prevent himself from repeating that there was something more divine than human about the Madre.

He had been present at Angela's instantaneous cure, and his account has all the vividness and clarity of an eyewitness, giving us a glimpse of the emotional side of Angela's character.

Gallo states that Angela entered the Third Order so that she could go to communion more frequently than was the custom at that time; he thinks that during her illnesses she allowed herself to be treated because she did not want to trouble the people looking after her, rather than because the medicines were really beneficial to her. Above all, he penetrated the great secret of her perseverance in such an austere life and the efficacy of her word, namely that it resided in her life of prayer and contemplation.

It was to him that Angela had confided that she had seen Satan disguised as an angel, and how difficult discernment is in the realm of extraordinary phenomena. The memory of this vision of Angela, as well as the confidence of her immediate and humble reaction, represents for Gallo the touchstone of her holiness. He is thus the most perceptive witness, one who does not stop with outward events, but reflects on the reasons for them and fathoms their meaning.

The procedure followed in this process is strict: each witness has to promise under oath to tell the truth about what he knows about the life of Angela, the Madre Suor Angela, as she was called in Brescia.

Each testimony is made in front of witnesses: Romano and Boscoli are assisted by the latter's two sons, and the inter-

rogation takes place in Isabetta Prato's room, in the Cathedral Square, where Angela earlier had instructed her first followers. It was Monday, the 21st June 1568. Two months later, on Wednesday the 18th August, under the porch of Chizzola's house, the nobleman Giacomo was questioned. Present as witnesses were the eldest of his sons, the most excellent doctor Ludivico, aged 34 years, and Agostino Gallo. The latter was questioned another two months later, on the 29th October, in the workshop of master Paulo Uberti and master Vincenzo Boioli, smiths.

The first three witnesses questioned end their deposition in the same way: "I do not remember anything else". Gallo, on the other hand, will add: "I could still go on, but it would be too long; I have said the most important..."

What jumps to the eye is that these witnesses have had no previous contact with each other; each recounts his own memories; and one senses the sincerity of each one through their testimonies. Moreover, at that time, the oath was taken very seriously; it carried with it the whole weight of a sacred act, calling on God as a witness.

This Processo Nazari represents the most important document upon which depend the processes of Angela's beatification and canonisation in the 18th century.

The "Vita" that Nazari wrote following the interrogations is a compilation of the information provided by the witnesses, all arranged in chronological order; no mention is made of the historical background of the period and the political situation. The account follows a certain pattern that makes it easy to read. Sometimes Nazari adds or clarifies some little detail. Is it something he thought should be added? Or perhaps something he had learnt about through further questioning? He does not throw any light on his method of working; but these additions have only a certain relative importance.

He adds, however, a passage about the foundation of the Company, which the sworn witnesses must have thought unnecessary to mention, seeing that this institution was visible to everyone. He imparts the information that at Angela's death the members of the Company already numbered about 150.

It has to be recognised that Nazari had no skill whatsoever as a writer, as is clearly shown in his introduction to the "Vita".

It is clear that if one has to choose between the "Vita" and what Nazari calls the "Justificazioni" — in other words the "quasi verbatim" account of the interrogations — it is definitely the latter that carries the day.

LUCIANA MARIANI, oSU
Enlarged General Council
May 1985

Translated by
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**TESTIMONIES OF THE LIFE
OF THE REVEREND MOTHER SISTER ANGELA,
FRANCISCAN TERTIATY**

[ANTONIO ROMANO]

- *On Monday, the 21st of June, in the eleventh "indizione ",*
- *in the bed-chamber of the under-mentioned honourable lady Isabetta, situated in the city of Brescia, in the district of the Cathedral Square,*
- *in the presence of master Giovanni Battista, son of master Bertolino, and of master Giovanni Maria, all being of the Boscoldi family from Ottalengo, (today Gottolengo), living in Brescia, summoned as witnesses, etc.,²*
- *at the request of the magnificent and noble dowagers Bianca Porcelaga, Isabetta Prato, Veronica Buzzi, and the other directresses and governesses of all the Company of Saint Ursula in Brescia,*
- *Signor Antonio Romano, merchant and citizen of Brescia, was summoned and interrogated, ad perpetuam rei memoriam, so that he might tell the truth about the whole life of the late and almost blessed Madre Suor Angela, who was the foundress of the aforementioned Company of Saint Ursula.*
- *Having sworn before me, in my capacity of notary, and in the presence of the above-mentioned witnesses, and having been asked about the truth he had the duty to state, he said: **

¹ Indizione: period of 15 years. Within the "inditional" cycle, every year is distinguished by the ordinal number: Indition I, II, etc, up to XV. Indition XI means that the year 1568 is the 11th of the inditional cycle, which includes the years from 1558 to 1572

² Etc.: an official abridged expression commonly used.

*The passages in italics are in Latin in the original.

"About the year 1517, I used to go occasionally to the house of the lady Caterina, widow of the late Giovanni Battista Patengola, where there was a certain Madre Suor Angela of [space], from Desenzano, a consecrated member of the Third Order of the Friars Minor of Saint Francis., She was living in this house by the order of the superiors of the said Friars, to console the aforesaid lady Caterina for the loss of her dear children.

And so, as I used to pay several visits there, I became very attached to Madre Suor Angela and she agreed to come and live in my house.

At that time, insofar as I could see and know, and according to what she told me herself, she lived and led her life as follows.

First of all, according to what she told me, having heard from the age of five her father read spiritual books about the Saints and the Virgins, she began to lead a sober, pious and contemplative life. And while she was persevering ever more eagerly in this way of life, a sister of hers died. And after that, wishing to know if her sister's soul had risen to the joy of everlasting glory, she prayed every day to God. Then one day, whilst she was in a small field belonging to her near Desenzano and was praying for her sister [937v] with her usual prayers, it happened that, about the middle of the day, she saw in the sky a procession of angels, in the midst of whom was the soul of her beloved sister, happy and triumphant. And suddenly, this army of angels swiftly disappeared; but the vision of the soul that had appeared to her 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 took the habit of the Third Order of the Friars Minor of Saint Francis."

Being questioned, [Antonio Romano] replied:

"She did not tell me where she had been received into the aforesaid Order; but I can affirm that at the time of her stay in the house of the said lady Caterina Patengola, she was wearing that habit."

Being questioned [about Angela's life], he said:

"During all the time that she remained in my house (and that is about fourteen years) she slept on a small mat, using a piece of wood as a pillow. I do not remember ever seeing her eat meat, but only fruit and vegetables. She drank only water."

Being questioned, [Antonio Romano] replied:

"I know this: from day to day, as her holiness was increasing, the fame of her very pious life spread among the people, so that many people from the city of Brescia hastened to her, some in order to obtain a particular grace from the Lord through her devout prayers, [938r] others to settle some dispute among the citizens or nobles of the city. I remember, among other things, the discord between messer Filippo Sala and messer Francesco Martinengo, whose quarrel could never be settled, not even by the intervention of the Duke of Urbino, nor by the officials and nobles of the city. And this Madre Suor Angela, at the plea of the wives of those two, with very few words, managed to have them make peace, to the satisfaction of both of them.

Her renown was spreading in the surrounding places in such a way that the lords used to grant her requests. I tell you this, because I remember that once she and I left Brescia, and we had gone to Mantua to pay a visit to the Madre Suor Osanna; on our return journey we passed through Solferino, where messer Aloisio de Castiglione and his wife lived. It so happened that messer Aloisio had outlawed one of his entou-

rage, a friend of Madre Suor Angela, and had confiscated his property. She went to see messer Aloisio, who received her kindly, and she had the banishment of her friend set aside, with a restoration of his goods. And then she returned to Brescia."

Being questioned about her journey [Angela's] to Jerusalem in the Holy Land, he said:

"Having wanted for many years to visit the Holy Places of Jerusalem, I told this to the reverend Madre Suor Angela, who begged me earnestly not to leave without her, because she also wanted to go and visit the Holy Places. So in the year 1524 (if I remember well) I had decided to make this journey; but then news came to Brescia that the journey on board the Venetian ships would not take place that year. And so, I left Brescia to go to the fair at Lanciano and went through [938v] Venice. Seeing there the standards flying on the ships for the said voyage, I at once sent word to Madre Suor Angela, and she immediately came to Venice with a certain Bartolomeo Biancosi from Salò, her first cousin. And thus, on the following day, the feast of Corpus Christi, all the pilgrims, accompanied by the Magnificent Signor Aloisio Giustiniani, we all embarked and we made a very good voyage. During the voyage, when we reached Canea, Madre Suor Angela lost her sight almost entirely.

On the return journey, we stopped in the city of Rama for eight days because of some armed Muslims who were lying in ambush to take us prisoners. After this we sailed to Cyprus where we stayed several days as the ship had to take on cargo; and then we sailed to Candia, where we stayed a few days. On the evening of the feast of Saint Francis, we left in the company of two other ships. The Vice-Duke of Candia, who was going to Venice, boarded our ship. We had barely left the port when a violent storm arose that lasted nine days. We were three ships, but after three days, two of them sank, together

with their cargo and the noble Venetians on board. One of the ships, which was nearest to ours, belonged to a nobleman of the Dolfini house. I must add that if we had not lightened the cargo on our ship and decreased the weight caused, by artillery, man and merchandise, our ship would have sunk also.

Despite all this, we drifted towards Barberia, which we left immediately lest we be taken prisoners; we reached Durazzo, where [939r] the Turkish fleet was stationed; the following morning, there came towards us a galley and two fuste³ that we greeted in the customary way. The master of our ship was conducted on board of one of the fuste to the captain of the Turkish fleet. After being questioned, he was dismissed; moreover, the Turkish captain came to greet the Vice-Duke who was on our ship, because he had already met him when he was an ambassador at the court of the Great Turk.

The Turkish fleet secretly left the port before us in order to reach certain straits, so that they could take us prisoners once we had left. But God, because of the continual prayers of the Madre Suor Angela, wanted to save us from the hands of these dogs; and so, as soon as we left the port, he sent such favourable and propitious wind that we found ourselves opposite Cittanova in Schiavonie.⁴

Then, having left there, we reached Venice where we stayed for several days. During that time, while Madre Suor Angela was staying with the nuns in the convent of the Holy Sepulchre, many religious, noble men and women and other spiritual persons used to visit her. Then she was taken from there by some pious nobles and lodged in the Hospital for the Incurables where these same nobles often came to see her. And then some Lords of the Signoria came to visit her, to listen to her and to ask her questions about her life, her wisdom and her holiness. Recognising in Angela an ardent love of

³ "Fusta": swift warship with oars and one sail, used about the 15th and the 16th century

⁴ Cittanova in Schiavonia: today: Novigrad, in Croatia.

the Lord, as they had been told, these nobles begged her to stay in Venice, for the good of all the `Luoghi Pii'⁵ of that most illustrious city. Wishing to return to her beloved homeland, she did not want to wait for the following day (for fear that [939v] these nobles would come back, perhaps with the Patriarch whom she would have had to obey). So, that very evening, we left Venice and returned to Brescia."

Being questioned whether [Angela] had remained in Brescia after that, [Antonio Romano] replied:

"I must tell you that, some time later, wanting to visit the sacred relics which are in Rome, she departed on this journey with two priests. On her return, in addition to the many things about those sacred relics, she told me that while she was visiting them she was noticed by a certain Piero della Puglia, chamberlain to His Holiness, who had been with us during the journey to Jerusalem. Besides greeting her with very kind words, he took her to kiss the foot of His Holiness. The Holy Father begged her to stay in the Luoghi Pii of Rome, but excusing herself very humbly, she took her leave. That very evening, she left Rome for fear that His Holiness might oblige her by virtue of holy obedience to remain in the city, and she returned to Brescia."

Being questioned whether he had anything more to say [about Angela], he replied:

"I also remember that, several days after her return from Rome, the Duke of Milan was in Brescia and lodging in San Barnaba. The Duke, who was a devout person, as soon as he heard about her holiness and life, sent for Madre Suor Angela. She went to see him, and was welcomed and greeted with

⁵ "Luoghi Pii": was the name given to the welfare institutes which had usually been initiated by the Church and were largely maintained at public expenses, through legacies and gifts: hospitals, orphanages and the like (cf. MTS, note 22, p. 15).

very respectful words. The Duke begged her to accept him as her son, together with his entire [940r] duchy:- She thanked him very much and left. Several days later, having gone to visit Mount Varallo, she passed through Milan on the return journey and paid a visit to His Excellency the Duke. He received her with very kind words, and earnestly begged her to stay in Milan; but she, wisely excusing herself, left him and returned to Brescia. And I remember nothing else."

[BERTOLINO BOSCOLI]

- *On the same day, in the same year in the same place,*
- *in the presence of the witnesses already mentioned,*
- *and at the request of the above-mentioned,*
- *master Bertolino Boscoli from Ottalengo (today Gottolengo), carpenter, resident of Brescia, having been questioned as above about the truth he had the duty to tell,*
- *affirmed and declared:*

"Perhaps about thirty four years ago, if I remember well, the said Madre Suor Angela was living in one of the houses of Sant'Afra, beyond the fountain, where (since, I lived quite near) I used to go and visit her, because she was held in great esteem for her spiritual life. As to the kind of life she really led, however, I would not know what to say. But what I can tell you is that throughout the city, it was said that she led a sober, pious and very holy life.

As to what I saw myself, I can tell you that one week-day, being in the nearby church of San Barnaba to hear Mass at the altar of San Nicolò de Tolentino, I saw many people there and among them Madre Suor Angela. And if I remember correctly, while the Friar [40v] was reading the Gospel, I saw

(and I was not the only one but also many of those who were present at the Mass), I saw the said Madre Suor Angela standing and raised about a hand-width [about 9"] from the ground, and she stayed like this for a stretch of time, to the great astonishment of all present. As for myself, it seemed to me that I had seen a miracle. The rumour of it spread throughout the city, so that everyone there knew about her holiness and her pious life. I have nothing further to say and I do not remember anything else to tell you about the said Madre Suor Angela."

[GIACOMO CHIZZOLA]

- *In the same year; on Wednesday, the 18th of August,*
- *under the porch of the house of the Magnificent Knight Giacomo Chizzola, situated in the city of Brescia, in the district of Saints Peter and Marcellinus,*
- *in the presence of the Most Excellent Doctor messer Ludovico, son of the said Magnificent Knight, and of messer Agostino Gallo, witnesses, etc.,*
- *having affirmed, etc.,*
- *and on request as above,*
- *being requested by me, undersigned rotary, to tell the truth, as above, the Magnificent Lord Knight Giacomo Chizzola, nobleman living in Brescia, answered as follows:*

"At the time when the reverend Madre Suor Angela lived, I remember having heard trustworthy people say that she had begun from her childhood to devote herself to a sober life, to fasting and to prayer; and then she had taken and worn the habit of the Minors of the Third Order. I also heard say that she never ate meat, unless she was ill; and moreover that during the whole of Lent she only ate on Sundays, and even

then she ate only simple foods like fruit and vegetables. In truth, no one could [941r] find any defect in her person, because she was a stranger to ambition, vanity and anger. She only took pleasure in humility, in a life of contemplation and devotion, persevering in this kind of life and in the ways of the Lord by fasting, abstinence, prayer and vigils.

It also seemed extraordinary to me that she, without ever having studied Latin letters, understood Latin as well as if she had; and even more than that, without ever having studied the Holy Scriptures, she was able to give such beautiful sermons, so learned and so spiritual, which sometimes lasted an hour.

And I remember also that when she had reached the end of her life and was about to die, I went to visit her. Sitting up in bed, she gave me a fine exhortation on the Christian way of life. Just as I was about to leave, messer Tomaso Gavardo (who had come with me) begged her to give him some spiritual advice; she said this to him: "Do in this life what you would wish to have done at the moment of your death. " *And these are, etc.* And I remember nothing more".

[AGOSTINO GALLO]

- *In the same year, Friday, the 29th of October,*
- *in the workshop of the under-mentioned master Paulo, situated within the jurisdiction of [space], in the city of Brescia, near the Cathedral,*
- *in the presence of master Paulo Uberti and master Vincenzo Boioli, smiths, both residents of Brescia, witnesses, etc.,*
- *at the request of the above,*
- *Signor Agostino Gallo, citizen and resident of Brescia, having sworn to tell the whole truth about everything he knew about the said reverend Madre Suor Angela, stated that he knew the following:*

[941v] "Although I, Agostino Gallo, had for several years known by reputation the reverend Madre Suor Angela, Franciscan tertiary, and although I had spoken to her a few times, I nonetheless began to know her better when I took her from Brescia to Cremona, to my house near San Vittore, together with my widowed sister, Ippolita. That was in the year 1529. In that year, Emperor Charles V had come to Piacenza to be crowned — as he was — and people feared that he might set siege to Brescia, because he was an enemy of our most Illustrious Lords.

Well, she spoke to me with such kindness during the journey that I was immediately captivated by her, to such a point that I could no longer live without her, and not only I, but also my wife and my whole family. My sister, in fact, already used to visit her when her husband was alive; but she became even closer to her after she lost her husband in 1528.

And so, during the time she was living with us, the said Mother was visited every day from morning to night, not only by many religious and pious people, but also by noble women and men, and many other people from Cremona and Milan, because a great number of people had followed their Duke who was staying there [in Cremona] at that time. Well, everyone marvelled at her great wisdom, because they saw that she persuaded many of them to change their way of life; I myself knew many of them who are now dead and a few others who [942r] are still alive, both in Milan and Cremona. She remained in Cremona until the aforesaid Emperor, after his coronation, had made peace with our Lords. She then returned to Brescia with messer Girolamo Patengola, and she lived in Brescia until her death, which occurred on the 12th March 1540.⁶

But coming to the subject of her life, I can tell you from what I have heard several times, that from the age of five

⁶ Gallo was wrong about the date. According to several written documents, Angela died on the 27th of January, 1540.

or six she began to lead a life of abstinence (thanks to her father's good instruction), and to shun company in order to give herself more to prayer and devotions. And the more she advanced in age, the more she devoted herself to prayer and the contemplative life. She eventually took the habit of the Third Order so that it would be easier to go to mass, confession and communion. In those days, in fact, laypersons were not allowed to receive frequent communion, as was the case later when gradually it became possible to receive communion more frequently because the priests, holding communion in greater esteem than before, became more open-minded.

Well. From what I have heard, she had come to live in Brescia about 1516. And she lived in the house of messer Giovanni Antonio Romano, a merchant, until, as I have just told you, I took her to Cremona in 1529. On her return to Brescia, she stayed for a few months in San Clemente, in two rooms that belonged to me [942v] which I had had prepared for her; she also lived for some time near San Barnaba. Then, for the rest of her life, she lived in the house of the reverend Brothers of Sant'Afra, near the public fountain.

During those years, she made the journey to Jerusalem, and on the outward voyage she lost her sight. She told me, however, that being guided from one to another of these Holy Places, she saw them always with the eyes of the soul, just as if she had seen them with her bodily eyes. And then, having recovered her sight in Brescia, she went to Rome with two reverend spiritual priests. Soon after her return to Brescia, she went to the sacred place of Varallo; but as the constructions there had only just started, she returned there in 1532, in the month of August, with me and my sister; there were fourteen of us, all dead now except for myself. Well, on Monte Varallo, she found many chapels and places made to resemble those that were and still are in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and other places in the Holy Land. They are objects of great devotion and they can be seen and looked at without having to cross the sea.

During the many years of her life, this reverend Mother was always a great help to numerous people; they came to her seeking her advice about changing their way of life, or how to support trials, to draw up a will; to get married, or to marry off their daughters and sons. In addition, no opportunity was ever lost [943r] of making peace between husband and wife, father and son, brother and brother, and similarly between many other persons related in different ways. She gave advice and consolation to each one to the best of her ability, so that her works seemed to have more of the divine about them than human.

She continued to lead an austere life, putting up with scorching heat, bitter cold, extreme hunger, even depriving herself of sleep, because for the short rest she had, she took a bare mat, with a piece of wood under her head, and before daybreak she would roll up her mat. No other bedding or pallet was to be seen. Nor did one see any jug of wine, for she never drank wine or any other drinks but only water. It is true, however, that for the big feasts of Christmas and Easter she used to drink a little drop of wine to mark the solemn occasion. She used to eat only a little bread, preferring fruit and vegetables, and again very sparingly.

It is with just reason that the doctors who looked after her during her illnesses used to say that she had acquired a constitution different from that of ordinary folk; they noticed, in fact, that the medicines that she took nearly always nourished her instead of purging or [943v] curing her, as normally happens with the rest of us. Indeed it can be said that she allowed herself to be looked after because she did not want to upset the people who were taking care of her, rather than because the medicines were doing her any good. The fact is that most of the time, she healed herself by eating onions, leeks or the like which agreed with her constitution; and sometimes, after being ill for several days, she might recover also by washing her head.

But this is nothing compared with what happened to her in Cremona (in accordance with the fact that she only recovered through unusual means); she had been ill for several days and her condition deteriorated so rapidly that we all expected, at any moment, that she would pass away from this life. The aforesaid Patengola thus composed the following lines:

Epitaph

Here lies buried one who in name,
In deed and in word, was an Angel.
She lived a virginal life in a silent cell.
Enjoying there true interior peace.
The beloved and obedient handmaid of God,
She spurned all that was pleasing to the senses.
And now, in heavenly bliss, with a crown of palm,
She lives in happiness among the Angels.

[944r] Patengola, having read these lines to her, said: "Rejoice, Mother, for tomorrow we shall inscribe them on your tomb." But she, sitting up suddenly, and believing that this would truly be the case, spoke for at least half an hour about the happiness of the heavenly kingdom, and with so much animation that her face shone throughout as if she had been a cherub. It seemed to her that she was already in heaven, owing to the number of people in the bedroom (and it was indeed full!). Not only because of this, but also because of the extreme joy she felt at leaving this world as she had always desired, she recovered her physical strength to such an extent that, realising her illness had totally disappeared, she suddenly began crying and to berate the said Patengola, accusing him of having composed the lines only to deceive her, and not because he thought she was dying. But he protested that he had done it because he was firmly convinced that she would die before daybreak, and never would he do anything that might displease her.

How many really astonishing things I could say about her! One of the most astonishing is this: she had never been taught the alphabet; and yet, not only did she read a great number of spiritual books, but I very often saw many religious, especially preachers [944v] and theologians, visiting her to seek explanations of many passages in the Psalms, the Prophets, the Apocalypse and the whole Testament, New and Old, and hearing from her own lips such expositions that they were filled with wonder. From this we may infer that there was more of the divine in her than human. And it is no small wonder that she led such an austere life and so ardently praised virginity, chastity, fasting, confession, communion and prayer, since she received communion every day she could, remaining before the Blessed Sacrament for several hours each morning to hear masses; and, because she slept very little, one has reason to believe that she spent the greater part of the night praying, contemplating and reflecting over those divine things that are granted to few people to see. Afterwards, she used to spend the whole day in various good works for her neighbours, or in prayers for herself and for sinners. Shy was not short of spiritual books to read when there was no one around to take up her time with some good work.

And then again, the reverend Mother was always very wary of visions, and strongly opposed to those who boasted of having some of different kinds; she considered such people as being more lost than the infidels, because she knew that some of them would not allow themselves to be saved as they were completely deceived by the devil who changes himself into an angel [945r] of light, as Saint Paul tells us in his second letter to the Corinthians. And it is true, in those days, there were many people who delighted in having visions, especially on Friday and Wednesday, standing with arms outstretched for several hours on end; and there were some who boasted of having had stigmata on their hands, no longer visible; and there is practically no doubt that these unfortunate souls are now buried in hell.

Well. This blessed Mother helped me to understand the extent of these abominable errors by a personal example: when she was young, Satan appeared to her in the form of an angel of such beauty that no one could possibly believe or imagine it; but God had pity on the purity of this innocent soul and he showed her the truth in such a way that she promptly threw herself face downward on the ground crying: "Go to hell, enemy of the Cross, for I know I am not worthy to see an angel of God"; and so Satan disappeared immediately. This account really confirmed for me that she was a great servant of God, much more than all the other holy works I had seen in her. As a matter of fact, she always showed deep humility, which is the true crown of all the other virtues, because these are worth nothing when the foundation of holy humility is missing.

It seems to me that there is only one other exterior fact that I ought to mention. This, together with the other things I have told you, gives us [945v] good reason to believe that this exemplary Mother was in truth a great servant of the Lord throughout her life. The fact is that, after her death, almost the entire city observed this extraordinary thing: her body fully clothed was kept in the open coffin for thirty days, in the place where the bodies of the blessed are buried in the chapels under the church of Sant'Afra; now, not only did it not give off any unpleasant odour during all this time, but also her arms and hands remained so flexible that whenever and wherever they were touched or pressed, the flesh returned to its original state, as in any living person."

Being asked if he knew anything else [about Angela], [Agostino Gallo] replied:

"I could tell you many other things that would edify us, but because it would take me too long, I think I had better end, after having recalled the most important things. And so, giving thanks to the Lord God who has allowed me to tell these truths, I will say no more, and these are, etc."

Locus Sigilli.

I, the undersigned, Giovanni Battista, son of the late Giovanni Faustino Nazari, known as de Sayani, notary by imperial authority, citizen and resident of Brescia, attest that I have been present during the presentation of all these testimonies, and have drawn up the minutes for them. And since I was otherwise occupied, I had them transcribed by someone else. After listening to the transcription and finding it conforms to the original, on the strength of the preceding, I therefore sign it after affixing my usual seal.

