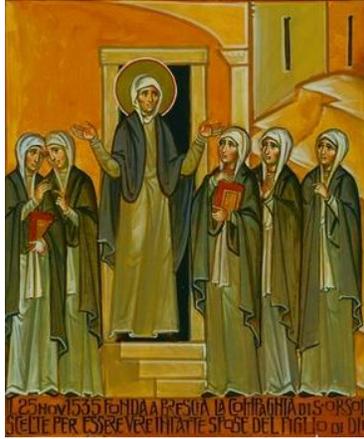


## Dialogue and shared responsibility according to Saint Angela



During the Last Supper, the Lord said to His disciples, *I do not speak of you any more as my servants... I have made known to you all that my Father has told me; and so I have called you my friends (John 15, 15)* In the same way, Angela has called “friends” the *Colonelle* who were superiors and formators: *You will recognize me to be your faithful friend (Last Couns. 25)*, and, like a real friend, she shared with them her experience, her knowledge and her responsibilities.

Gabriel Cozzano has a beautiful example of this, when he recalls how Angela prepared the writing up of her Rule: *Whatever she taught to others, she gave the sisters the opportunity to put it into practice. Then she consulted them and encouraged them to act in this way; finally she said that it was not she alone, but her daughters who did it together with her.*

This example, as well as her writings, reveal how much she was a woman of dialogue, communicating with her Sisters and asking the formators or local superiors (the *Colonelle*), and Lady governors (the *Matrone*) to work together in collaboration and co-responsibility.

### **I. Communication and Dialogue**

Angela lived this intensely, as she encouraged **communication and dialogue** with the families and the sisters, and between the formators and superiors: Before entering, the young girl was to acquire the consent of her parents, and *the lady-governors and governors of the Company speak with them. (R 1, 6)*. It is important to know and visit the family of those who want to enter the institute, in order to create good relationship with them and learn from them some information about the candidates.

She also encouraged dialogue between the sisters themselves: *coming together from time to time, so that together they might also meet each other as loving sisters, and thus talking over spiritual matters, rejoice together, and encourage one another. (Leg. 8, 1-6).*

Furthermore, she invites the sisters to dialogue with their superiors, particularly if they encounter obstacles in their surroundings: *If their mothers or other secular superiors should want to lead them into dangers or want to prevent them from fasting, or prayer, or confession, or any other kind of good, they should immediately refer the matter to the lady-governors of the Company, so that they may see to it. (R 3, 8-10).*

Most of all, she expected the formators to dialogue with their sisters during their frequent visits to them, so as to *comfort them and help them if they should happen to be in some situation of disagreement or other trouble of body as much as of mind (R 11, 8-12)*

Formators are invited to give counsels according to the state of mind of the sisters: *If you see one faint-hearted and inclined to despondency, comfort her, encourage her, promise her the blessing of the mercy of God; lift her heart with every consolation. And on the contrary, if you see another presumptuous and who has a lax conscience and little fear of anything, into this one instill some fear, remind her of the rigor of the justice of God. (Couns. 2, 8)*

The formators are also expected to dialogue with their superiors and provide with them for the welfare of the sisters: *If you yourselves cannot provide for them (for their spiritual and temporal needs), go to the principal mothers, and quickly, and without any hesitation explain to them the needs of your lambs. (Couns. 4, 3)*

## **II. Collaboration and co-responsibility**

In the Gospel, Jesus Christ himself sent his apostles out to help him in his mission, and shared with them the responsibilities He received from the Father: *He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to cast out unclean spirits, and to heal every kind of disease and infirmity (Matt. 10, 1). Preach as you go, telling them: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand'. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils: give as you have received the gift, without payment. (Matt. 10, 7-8).*

Before sharing responsibility with her superiors, Angela herself acknowledged that she has received this responsibility as a gift from God and that her personal mission consisted in collaborating with Him:

*He has been pleased in His infinite goodness to use me as his instrument for this great work of his, even though, for my part, I am a most inadequate and useless servant... He has also, in his usual goodness, given and granted me such a grace and gift as to be able to govern them according to his will, and to provide for their needs and wants (Leg. Prol. 4, 6-9)*

As the Lord shared his authority with His disciples, Angela shared it with her superiors: *As I am now about to let go of this life, I leave you in my place as my heirs (Leg. Prol. 28-29).*

Angela invited the superiors to adopt specific inner attitudes, much like her own:

*How much you have to thank him for this, and at the same time to pray to him, that, as he has deigned to place you at the head of so noble a flock... so he would deign also to give you such knowledge and capacity that you may be able to do work worthy of praise in his sight, and to put all your zeal and strength into carrying out your duty. (Leg. Prol. 17-21).*

Even while working whole-heartedly for the good of the Company, the superiors were reminded that their responsibility is a shared one, and that the final issue is in the hands of the Lord: *As for you, do your duty... and after that, leave it to God; He will do marvelous things in His own time and when it pleases him. (Couns. 8, 7,9).* Furthermore, Angela promised to continue her collaboration with the Superiors in their shared responsibility, even in her eternal life: *Now, even more, I want and am able to help and to do you good in every way. I shall always be in your midst, helping your prayers. (Couns. Prol. 23, 25)*

In several different recommendations Angela stresses how much superiors and formators are invited to collaborate with one another. She addressed specifically to the formators the counsel to *be bound to one another... helping each other, supporting each other in Jesus Christ (Last Couns. 2).* And the superiors are requested to share their responsibility with the formators:

*Make sure that you all meet with them twice, or at least once a month, and thus confer together, and make a careful examination of the government, and especially of what they will report to you about the behavior of your dear daughters, and about their necessities and needs, both spiritual and material. And provide for everything as the Holy Spirit inspires you. (Leg. 7, 1-7).*

In a very modern way, Angela thus specifies the different steps to be followed together : mutual information, evaluation in common, decisions to be made together according to needs.

*Collaboration with other members of the formation team guarantees the unity and continuity of the process of formation in its various states...Regular opportunity for dialogue and sharing of information of formators with the provincial superior and vice versa is also indispensable, considering that the provincial is ultimately responsible for formation in the province.*

In Angela's mind, even outside advice is not to be neglected, for *if they cannot set things right either, let the four men also be called in so that all together, they can concur to find a remedy (R 11, 14).*

Angela's recommendations are even more surprising since her epoch is not particularly conducive to dialogue and collaboration. Her insight and vision spring from a deep consciousness of our Lord Jesus Christ's love and trust in His disciples and in us, by sharing His mission and power. May He continue to inspire and help us in our work of leading our Sisters to Him.

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