NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

Jan. 27, St. Angela Merici, Founder

Gerelyn Hollingsworth | Jan. 27, 2010 NCR Today

Today is the feast of St. Angela Merici, [1] founder of the Ursulines. [2] She was born c. 1474 and died on Jan. 27, 1540.

In 1535, "Angela founded her company in Brescia . . . to enable women to live consecrated lives in their own homes and keeping their occupations. At a time when women were expected to choose between a husband or a cloistered life, it was a daring move! As the company required no dowry, it was open to women of all social backgrounds."

-- Ursuline Sisters of Youngstown, Ohio [3]

Click here [4] to read Angela's Counsels, Legacies, and Rule. Chapters II and III of the Rule are interesting: "How they should be dressed" (no "silk, or velvet, or silver, or gold"), and "On the manner of behaving in public" (no "weddings, or balls or jousts" and no "standing about on balconies").

--Angela's Writings from the web site of the Ursuline Sisters of Mount Saint Joseph, Maple Mount, Kentucky

"The most striking aspect of Angela's rule is that, like mystic women, the Ursulines were in direct contact with God without the mediation of the clergy. Angela outlined this radical position in the chapter on obedience. In her rule obedience was chiefly due to God and to the advice he sends continuously and directly to the Ursuline's heart: 'above all: to obey the counsels and inspirations which the Holy Spirit unceasingly sends into our hears' (Reg. VIII)."

--from [5]*Spirituality, Gender, and the Self in Renaissance Italy: Angela Merici and the Company of St. Ursula (1474-1540)* [6] by Querciolo Mazzonis, Catholic University of America Press, 2007.

But the Archbishop of Milan, Charles Borromeo, rewrote Angela's Rule in 1582 and "inserted the confessor as mediator between God and the Ursuline's heart."

Mazzonis also provides a clear explanation of Angela's reasons for founding her Company.

"As far as teaching activities were concerned, the image of the Company of St. Ursula as devoted to the catechization of its members cannot stand. The Colonelle were not *teachers*, and the virgins under their responsibility were not their *pupils*. . . .

"To ignore her theology and focus on her teaching method is rather reductive. . . . It is probably that the successive development of the company as a teaching order has induced historians to assume that Angela herself started the educational project."

Even though Angela Merici did not specify what work the members of her Company should undertake, the

Ursuline Order after her death became well-known for educating girls.

Ursulines were the first nuns to come to the new world. Ven. Marie de l'Incarnation led Ursulines from Tours to Quebec in 1639, and in 1727 Mere Marie Tranchepain and eleven other Ursulines traveled from Rouen to New Orleans. The schools the Ursulines established at both sites are still operating.

Click here [7] to see the Founder Statue of St. Angela Merici by Pietro Galli in St. Peter's Basilica.

A very happy feast day to all Ursulines, to all students at their schools all over the world, to all alumnae and alumni of Ursuline schools, to all Associates, and to all friends of the Order of St. Ursula!

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