

**THE
PROMOTION
OF THE LAITY
TODAY
IN THE CHURCH
AND
IN THE INSTITUTE**

**ACT OF THE XI GENERAL CHAPTER
1984**

PRESENTATION

The Capitular Act "THE PROMOTION OF THE LAITY TODAY IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE INSTITUTE" answers the twofold purpose indicated by the XI General Chapter celebrated in Rome from 25th January to 2nd March 1984:

- *to inform all the Daughters of Charity about the contents of today's ecclesiology, particularly with regard to the promotion of the laity and the various possibilities of collaboration with religious life, even through forms of association;*
- *to single out the prospects opened to our Institute by the Holy Spirit who has granted us to re-read the prophetic insights of our Foundress and the progress made by our Religious Family in the light of the Magisterium of the Church and of the signs of the times.*

The Capitular Act takes up again, expands and deepens the contents of the Capitular Deliberation on the same theme. It is meant to be used for the animation of all the Daughters of Charity, in particular of the Sisters called to work more directly in the field of the animation of the laity and of vocational guidance.

This formation will be carried out through seminars planned at international or provincial level, but also in the local Communities.

The document contains some practical guidelines along which the Institute intends to move to bring to realization the prospects which the Spirit opens before us: the grace of God and the power of our charism will give us light and guide our discernment.

The structure of the Act, the contents, the style and the methodology show clearly its pastoral end. The outline, approved by the Capitular Assembly, has been deepened and completed by the Committee appointed by the Chapter in close collaboration with the General Council.

*It integrates also the rich material offered by the preceding General Council in the *pre-chapter Document*, by the individual Organisms through the specially appointed Committees or their respective Provincial Chapters and by the Capitular Sisters themselves with their group work reports.*

The document has been accurately reviewed by experts particularly interested in the theme who have offered us their competence, especially in the theological, juridical and pastoral fields.

We express our gratitude to Fr. Tarcisio Piccari, Fr. Anastasio Gutierrez, Fr. Carlo Rocchetta and Fr. Franco Costa for their cordial collaboration. Our thanks also to Fr. Augusto Boscardin for his fraternal remarks on our charism.

I hope that this Capitular Act will fulfill effectively the aim for which it has been drawn up: to make each Sister aware of the prophetic value of the insights of our Mother Foundress and to arouse a concrete commitment to bring them to realization in our Religious Family today.

The Holy Spirit granted to Magdalene of Canossa a clear insight with regard to the presence and the importance of the Laity within the apostolic project entrusted to her by Divine Providence. May she enable us also today to value the laity as a genuine expression of the dynamic charism of the Church and of the Institute.

May the Blessed Virgin grant us the grace to move forward with enlightened courage, in communion of heart and will.

M. Elide Testa
Superior General

PART TWO

THE PROPHETIC INSIGHT

OF MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA

FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE LAITY

Introduction

We have set forth what the Church teaches and proposes about the vocation and the mission of the laity and the possibility of their renewed presence in the Church and in the world. We intend now to read again and to rediscover, with a filial heart, how Magdalene of Canossa promoted, by thought and action, the lay ministry.

By approaching the original sources of the charism and tradition of the Institute we are able to single out the very core of the prophetic institutions of our Foundress, the methods of formation and the types of commitment she adopted in order to adequately value the laity in her environment and in her time, and to make them evangelizers in an apostolate of charity, at the service of God and of man, within the local Church.

Lastly, we show how the laity have been present and active in the history of the Institute, in order to try to find what is helpful to us today.

On purpose we omit interpretations and evaluations, so as to entrust ourselves to the action of the Spirit.

Chapter I

THE ACTIVE PRESENCE OF THE LAITY IN THE CHARISM OF MAGDALENE

RETURN TO THE SOURCES

To return to Magdalene of Canossa means for us to be bound to that Charity which seeks, like fire, to embrace everything. It means to become aware and to be filled with marvel at what this charity, moved by ardent zeal for God's glory and by a burning passion for the brother, has been able to achieve and to inspire.

We do not take into consideration here the "perennial and continuous branches"¹ of the charity schools, the teaching of Christian doctrine in the parishes, of the visits to the hospitals, through which Magdalene and her Daughters have tried, and still try, to make the Lord known and loved.

We wish to give our attention to what Magdalene, in her creativity and motivated by her one and only constant aim of spreading as much as possible and by every means, the divine glory, brought to realisation with regard to the laity. We refer to the "branches" of the country- teachers and of the Spiritual Exercises for the Ladies, to the "plans" of the Tertiaries, both internal and external, of the apostolic friendships with individual lay persons.

While the "perennial and continuous branches of work" are directed to the beneficiaries of the charity of the Daughters, the others become their support. In the latter, the laity, inspired by the example and the zeal of Magdalene, become protagonists and apostles of evangelisation and of love towards those who cannot be reached by the Daughters.

We shall mention briefly the concrete methods adopted by Magdalene. Besides this, we intend to highlight those valuable prophetic insights which retain their full validity even today in the Post-Conciliar Church and which remain the basic and charismatic criteria in our activity of promotion of the laity.

The kindness of God our Father who was pleased to make use of Magdalene of Canossa to spread his glory and to reveal to men the love with which he loves us is at the origin of "this least of all the Institutes"², which has grown into a tree with strong branches and which in the course of history has given abundant fruits of charity.

To this "weakest instrument", as our Mother Foundress used to call herself, the Spirit has given a most compassionate and generous heart, which is in a constant attitude of listening to the Word of God and to the needs of the brothers, especially the poorest.

Our Foundress sees in Jesus, the Crucified God-Man, not only the expression of the greatest love towards the Father, but also a passionate love for man who is marked by evil in its manifold expressions: ignorance, fragility, oppression, moral and material misery.

Thus at the same time attentive to God and man, Magdalene's heart is penetrated by the fire of the Spirit which enkindles it with zeal for the cause of the kingdom. In her, compassion soon becomes action, determination to cooperate in the redemption of the world "endeavouring to prevent sins"³ and to make the infinite mercy of God known. This is her charism.

¹ C.A.R. L5, MS, B 42, pg. 4.

² cf. U.R. pg. 18

³ U.R. pg.21

The Daughters of Magdalene of Canossa learn from their Mother and commit themselves with enthusiasm to that active charity that becomes a caring presence and spiritual comfort in the hospital, untiring availability to break the bread of truth in the schools of Christian doctrine, motherly and unlimited dedication in the education of youth.

But even the most generous dedication of the Daughters of Charity, can only reach a very small part of the immense needs which Magdalene discovers everywhere in the city, in the country-side, in the towns and in the remotest villages.

New labourers are needed in the vineyard of the Lord, more numerous volunteers at the service of the kingdom, more zealous apostles of Charity.

Magdalene, urged by the needs of the places where her Daughters cannot reach, looks for collaboration among the girls of the middle -classes, among the ladies of the cities, among young women more open to the apostolate, among friends and benefactors. To them she offers the charism she has received. For them she holds formation courses, retreats, invents particular ways of life for single persons or for groups with the aim of transforming these persons into ardent apostles.

a. The “branch” of the country Teachers

The formation of country Teachers is considered by Magdalene as a “branch” of the Institute of the Daughters of Charity, even if it is carried out in short periods and developed only where it is necessary and possible. What matters is to create an effective presence of charity in the Church.

It springs from the apostolic zeal of the Foundress, eager to “help in many places” especially the people of the countryside and of the small villages⁴, not less in need than those in the cities.

The country Teachers, “almost Daughters of Charity” animated by the same spirit, are called to take the place of the Daughters, carrying on the “perennial and continuous branches” of the Institute in their native villages.⁵

As for their being accepted, the Mother Foundress sets definite conditions: they must be of impeccable conduct, and enjoy the reputation of being persons of honest habits, called to the virginal state, or widows who are living their state in a holy way and are determined not to remarry⁶; they should have the inclination to carry out works of charity, ready to dedicate their whole life to the divine glory, to the divine service and to the good of their neighbour.⁷

Convinced that the apostolic vocation requires to be taken care of and cultivated, Magdalene starts the “seminary”, an intensive course of study and of integral education.

It takes place in the house of the Institute, in the city nearest the native village, in quarters separated from the community.

The seminary lasts for seven months⁸, without giving any burden to the family except for the expenses for food, and has as specific object the *formation* of the girls and in particular the formation of the heart⁹.

⁴ cf. U.R. pg. 175

⁵ cf. U.R. pg. 176

⁶ cf. U.R. pg. 178

⁷ cf. U.R. pg. 193 — 194

⁸ If one considers that until after mid-XIX century the Austrian Government gave a three-month training to teachers, one is struck by the seriousness with which the Foundress used to form the girls destined for the rural areas.

⁹ cf. U.R. pg. 143

The Foundress intends to form the future teachers so as to enable them to teach the girls of their own villages (receiving small contributions from them) “reading, writing and arithmetic” and in particular those works proper to women, according to the needs of the time. But above all she desires to lead them to fall in love with the Lord Jesus and to be well-rooted in the spirit of charity, of sacrifice and of generous self-giving ¹⁰ .

What matters to Magdalene is that the young country girls strive for a sound holiness based on faith, search for God and the practice of virtue.

She desires that they cultivate an apostolic spirituality, always aiming at the divine glory and the salvation of souls. They should get used to a prayer centred in Jesus and on the mystery of his Incarnation. She wishes them to know Jesus even through an assiduous catechetical instruction, so that it becomes almost natural for them to act, think and love like Him ¹¹ .

The practices of piety which Magdalene proposes, besides the frequent attendance at Mass and the reception of the Sacraments, are the meditated Rosary, spiritual reading, the examination of conscience and frequent ejaculations.

The formation of the heart is, therefore, directed to the personal sanctification of the country teachers in view of the apostolic mission awaiting them.

For such a delicate task Magdalene wants the Superior of the House to choose a Sister with the zeal, the fervour and the generosity of a real educator. She desires also that this Sister be helped by another Sister, possibly from the country-side, as an assistant for the teaching of handwork.

Both the Sisters are encouraged to devote themselves with all their heart to this service, not minding sacrifice but all given to seek God’s kingdom. ¹²

They should be diligent and take advantage of every bit of time so that the intensity of their self-giving and of their commitment as educators make up for the shortness of the course.

Experienced in the knowledge of the human person, Magdalene outlines for the Daughters in charge of the education of the country teachers, the method she considers most suited to the objective to be attained.

She sets as a preliminary condition for an effective education, the personal knowledge of trainees, of their spiritual needs and the extent of their instruction. This knowledge is to be attained through a familiar dialogue and a serene acceptance of everything that transpires from them in the formal encounters as well as in the casual conversations . ¹³

This is made easier by the fact that the education is imparted in small groups.

Once “their inclination, temperament, talents, abilities, the condition in which their families live” have been discovered ¹⁴, the Mistress and her assistant may proceed to personalised formation, which respects the person and her particular rhythm of growth.

After the first month dedicated to knowing the girls and to allowing them to adjust to the difficult kind of life, Magdalene offers them the Spiritual Exercises, to remind them of the spirit with which they are to undertake their formation.

Renewed in fervour, the trainees begin their formative programme, constantly guided by the educator and her assistant, following a very intensive daily schedule. It includes well-defined moments of prayer, study,

¹⁰ cf. U.R. pg. 189 — 190

¹¹ cf. U.R. pg. 189

¹² cf. U.R. pg. 202

¹³ cf. U.R. pg. 180

¹⁴ cf. U.R. pg. 180

work, catechism, practical training. Some moments are to be spent in the common room, others outdoors. Magdalene, attentive also to the health of the girls, has particular suggestions concerning food, rest, recreation.

The Sunday time-table has a more specific apostolic emphasis. On Sundays, especially after the first four months, the young women are led to assist the children during Mass, catechism and Vespers in the Parish so as to learn to do the same once they are back in the villages.

Magdalene urges her Daughters to instil in their pupils a true spirit of sacrifice so that they be able to give up their freedom to work for the divine glory and the good of souls. Our Mother wants to form apostles of charity who must not seek God only in the quiet of the retreat, but in the exercise of the works of the apostolate, living contemplation in action.

With the same spirit the trainees under the guidance of the Mistress and her Assistant get ready for their future apostolate by the practical training they undergo in the parish as well as in the charity schools and in the hospitals.

Magdalene, a practical woman and apostle, gives detailed suggestions about the different modalities to be adopted by the country teachers in carrying out the three branches of charitable works in the villages.

SEMINARIES FOR THE COUNTRY TEACHERS

held in the Institute from 1817 to 1835¹⁵

1817	Verona	(n. 2)
1821	Bergamo	(n.?)
1822 ¹⁶	Bergamo	(n. 9)
1823	Bergamo	(n. 12)
1824	Bergamo	(n. 13)
1826	Bergamo	(n. 11)
1827	Verona	(n.?)
1828	Bergamo	(n.?)
	Verona	(n. 8)
1829	Verona	(n. 3)
1830	Bergamo	(n.7)
	Trent	(n. ?)
1831	Bergamo	(n. 9)
	Verona	(n.?)
1832	Bergamo	(n. 12)
1834	Verona	(n.?)
1835	Verona	(n. 10)

¹⁵ C.A.R.

¹⁶ C.A.R. "From 1822 to 1835 the number of Country Teachers was never larger than 14. In some years the number was much smaller." (from the Chronicle of Bergamo pg.9)

b. The “branch” of Spiritual Exercises for Ladies

Magdalene, always with the aim of sharing the charism of charity and of multiplying the active presence of lay apostles for the up-building of the Kingdom, starts the “branch” of Spiritual Exercises for Ladies, in order to embrace everyone, without excluding any category of people. This branch of the Institute is considered by the Foundress as the fifth apostolic work of the Daughters of Charity¹⁷ and “besides cooperating in the salvation of those persons who will benefit from it,” it aims at “improving what is being done for the poor”.¹⁸

Constant and unchanged is the ultimate purpose which Magdalene sets for herself, as in all her other undertakings, “the honour and the pleasure of God and His glory”.¹⁹

The motivations of her ardent and untiring zeal are always the same. The Spiritual Exercises in fact, are such “an important matter” as to require, in case of need, the services of the Superior herself.²⁰ They are for Magdalene the appropriate means to cooperate in the sanctification of the Ladies²¹, to animate them to a “greater service of God”²², to awake in them the spirit of charity”.²³ They are “in addition, the completion and extension of the other branches.”²⁴

In fact, the involvement of the Ladies “in the Hospital and in the Christian Doctrine Schools”²⁵, will contribute to the spread of the Divine Glory²⁶, ultimate aim of all the charitable activity of the Daughters of Charity, and will support and sustain also, “the good which the country girls trained to be teachers will try to do”²⁷ in the Institute.

Magdalene embraces with enthusiasm the work of the Spiritual Exercises and rejoices in foreseeing the good effects that will be felt in the families of the ladies of the nobility to the advantage of their servants, farmers, dependents and of the very beneficiaries of the charitable works of the Daughters.

But in asking her Daughters to dedicate themselves to this work, she does it in “fear and trembling”²⁸ for this is the only branch “in which the Sisters can be blinded and attracted by worldly appearances”.²⁹ She invites them to undertake it willingly “out of pure love and honour of God”, keeping the heart free from every human interest and from any form of subservience to power.

The Kingdom of God and his justice: this is the only reward that the Daughters of Charity are to expect for the Institute and for themselves in this work of charity.

In order that this should appear clearly even in practice, Magdalene entrusts the economic administration of the Spiritual Exercises to the Ladies. If however, these do not want to be bothered or distracted by it,

¹⁷ Ep. 11/2 pg. 1429, 1438

¹⁸ Ep. 11/2 pg. 1407

¹⁹ cf U.R. pg. 223

²⁰ cf U.R. pg. 207

²¹ cf U.R. pg. 206

²² cf U.R. pg. 203

²³ Ep. 11/2 pg. 1430

²⁴ U.R. pg. 206

²⁵ cf U.R. pg. 203

²⁶ cf U.R. pg. 203

²⁷ cf U.R. pg. 206

²⁸ Ph. 2:12

²⁹ cf U.R. pg. 224

she permits the Superior to take the charge herself. But at the end of the course, “she will render an exact account of everything to the Ladies. She will not accept the least thing above what is spent”.³⁰

With this style of detachment, Magdalene offers to the Ladies the possibility to make their Spiritual Exercises in two different times of the year. The last ten days and are made in the houses of the Institute, in a place separated from the community. She puts at their disposal suitable rooms, careful to provide decent furnishings but with “some sign of poverty”.³¹

She wants the same style of simplicity and moderation even in the preparation of the food and the dining table. In order not to give in to compromises she specifies: “... if there were anyone who did not feel able to adapt to this system, then she will not be accepted”.³²

Everything in the house must lead the Ladies to recollection, meditation and prayer.

The direction of the course is entrusted to “some gifted, zealous, prudent priest who is approved by the Bishop”³³, while the Sisters in charge have the task of spiritual assistance and of service for any other need.

If the Spiritual Exercises are an important and delicate moment in the Christian life of any person, they are in a very special way so, for the ladies of the nobility. Magdalene is fully aware of it and wants the Sisters assigned to help to be the most “capable on account of their piety, prudence, culture, dexterity”.³⁴ They should have “gentle manners” and show “by their external appearance the happiness of those whom God in His divine mercy has called to his service”.³⁵

Cooperating with grace, they help “in a nice way” the Ladies to benefit from the meditations given by the priest and to become aware of their Christian duties, especially with regard to the education of the children and the care of their servants.

Magdalene knows very well the habits, the dangers, the moral poverty proper to the life of the nobility and wisely advises the Daughters so that they may enkindle in the Ladies the desire to change their life and to help to prevent sin and to foster a more authentic Christian life among those who, in a way or another, come in contact with them.

The Sisters should encourage the Ladies to fulfil their duties of justice with regard to their servants and the farmers in their estates; and to make them feel they are called to open themselves to the apostolate not only by assisting the poor materially, but by becoming themselves evangelisers and witnesses to the love of God for men, in the schools, in the teaching of catechism and in the hospital and supporting the good which the teachers educated by the Daughters of Charity try to do in the countryside.

The final stage which Magdalene aims at in instituting this “branch of charity” is “to make it easier for these ladies to have the means by which they can gain a place in the midst of the poor in the Heavenly Kingdom”.

³⁰ cf U.R. pg. 220

³¹ cf U.R. pg. 218

³² cf U.R. pg. 220

³³ cf U.R. pg. 203

³⁴ cf U.R. pg.207

³⁵ cf U.R. pg.207

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES HELD IN THE INSTITUTE

FROM 1809 TO 1835

Year	Ladies	Teachers	Maids	Servants women girls	Hairdressers	Boatmen	Servants
1809					Milan		Milan
1820	Venice						
1823		Bergamo	Trent				
1824	Venice						
1825	Bergamo	Bergamo	Trent	Bergamo			
	Milan						
	Venice						
1826	Milan						
	Venice						
1827	Milan						
	Venice						
1828	Milan	Verona		Trent			
	Venice			(retreat)			
	Bergamo				Bergamo		
1829	Milan	Verona		Trent			
	Bergamo			(retreat)			
	Venice						
1830	Bergamo	Milan					
	Milan						
	Trent						
	Venice						
1831	Venice					Venice	Venice
	Trent						
	Bergamo	Bergamo					
	Verona	Trent	Trent	Trent			
1832	Bergamo						
	Milan						
	Trent						
	Venice					Venice	
1833	Verona						

1834	Venice	Trent	Trent				
	Bergamo						
	Milan						
	Trent						
1835	Verona	Trent	Trent				
	Venice						
	Bergamo						
	Trent						
	Verona	Trent	Trent				
	Bergamo						
	Trent						
	Trent						

N.B. From a survey of the Letters, and the unpublished Chronicles of the C.A.R.

c. External and Internal Tertiaries

Even the institution of the Tertiaries of the Daughters of Charity confirms the insight Magdalene had to make use of the laity to spread God's glory, involving in the dynamism of her charity persons of different states of life and social standing.

1. External Tertiaries

Initially³⁶ Tertiaries, in the mind of Canossa, are a lay institution of virgins, widows or married women who live in their families and aim at their personal sanctification in the fulfilment of the duties of their state and, as far as these allow, in the exercise of the "holy works of charity", with the specific end of preventing sins.

They are lay vocations to the apostolate arising among the young girls who frequent the Institute or among the country Teachers trained in it. They are young girls who distinguish themselves because of sound judgement and piety and who are genuinely desirous of leading a truly Christian life."³⁷ Their vocation, before being recognised, is to undergo a serious and cordial discernment.

The external Tertiaries are united to the Institute by a reciprocal bond of love. They find in the Daughters comfort and spiritual assistance and the Daughters find in them "persons who take care, replace them and do whatever work whenever and wherever they are impeded by obligations of their state".³⁸

Magdalene draws up for the external Tertiaries a "Plan" or programme of life in which prayer is the foundation of the apostolic commitment to which they are called. The Mother entrusts these lay apostles to Our Lady of Sorrows whose devotion they have to spread and who remains their model in the practice of

³⁶ The first document dealing with the Tertiaries is a manuscript "Plan" of 1823.

³⁷ C.A.R. MS T I bis

³⁸ C.A.R. MS. A

virtue, particularly of patience, docility, meekness and gentleness. Magdalene wants the Tertiaries to “be rooted and in love with true virtue”.³⁹

As support and nourishment to their striving after holiness in the world, Magdalene of Canossa proposes a serious life of piety, with the frequent reception of the Sacraments, times of meditation, of vocal prayer and verification of their conduct in the light of the Gospel.

Animated by the same spirit of the Daughters of Charity, the Tertiaries carry on in their villages the three “branches” embraced by the Institute, exercising their apostolic service according to their different state of life. The virgins, in fact, take care preferably of the education of the girls, assist them in the school of Christian doctrine and prepare them for the Sacraments. The widows, instead dedicate themselves particularly to the sick in the families, while the married women engage, as far as their family duties allow, in the teaching of Christian doctrine to the women in the Parish.

In order to keep alive their spiritual and apostolic fervour, the Tertiaries meet once a month in the nearest house of the Daughters of Charity for a formative encounter held by the Superior. When it is not possible for some to attend, a Tertiary, acting as the leader, gathers them in their respective towns. The Tertiary called to fulfil this task is invited to attend the annual Retreats organised for the country Teachers.

Magdalene advises her Daughters to proceed gradually and in a simple way with the institution of the Tertiaries, trying above all, to root them in the spirit of piety and charity, so that they be authentic witnesses in their environment.

2. Internal Tertiaries

The characteristics of the internal Tertiaries, a “simple congregation” which exists alongside, and completes the Institute of the Daughters of Charity, are more and more clearly specified in the successive Plans drawn up by Magdalene.⁴⁰

In the first plan they are called “Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Mary Most Sorrowful”.⁴¹ Later they are “dedicated to honouring particularly the shedding of the most precious Blood of the Divine Redeemer and to compassionate the most Sacred Heart of Mary”.⁴²

The Tertiaries of the Daughters of Charity are virgins or widows of upright conduct, with a clear apostolic vocation and make profession of the temporary vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. They offer all their activities “for the exaltation of Holy Mother Church”⁴³ and strive after their personal sanctification “with a well-ordered life” of prayer, mortification and dedication to the apostolate.

The institution of the Tertiaries has as its specific end “that of forming labourers who work in the vineyard of the Lord and help the Institute of the Daughters of Charity in these charitable undertakings which they are not able to carry out”.⁴⁴

The Tertiaries are animated by a deep spirit of love, of service, of abnegation and resolve “to seek God Alone in the midst of humiliation and suffering”.⁴⁵

³⁹ Ep. 111/4 pg. 2957

⁴⁰ There are Plans dated: 1823, 1827, 1832, 1835.

⁴¹ C.A.R. MS E

⁴² C.A.R. MS T 5

⁴³ C.A.R. MS T 5

⁴⁴ C.A.R. MS T 5

⁴⁵ C.A.R. MS C

They depend on the parish priest of the place where the house is situated for the spiritual assistance and on the Superior of the Daughters of Charity for their external discipline. It is the Superior of the Daughters of Charity who appoints their Directress and admits their postulants.

Magdalene entrusts to the Tertiaries five branches of charity:

- the education of the deaf and dumb “to enable them to come to know God”;
- the Christian and civil education of girls of the merchant class;
- the formation of directresses of orphanages;
- the preparation of nurses for the hospitals;
- the hospitality and care of girls who come out from other hostels because they cannot remain there and have no one to take charge of them.

The internal Tertiaries are divided into two “bodies” one “permanent” and the other “active”.

The task of the “*permanent*” body is mainly to prepare apostolically and professionally the members of the “*active*” body such as nurses, directresses of orphanages, and to provide food and clothing for both groups.

They all live in the same house, but in two distinct apartments. The apartment of the *active body* is then subdivided into five departments according to the works of charity in which the aspirants are trained.

Two Tertiaries of the *permanent body*, chosen by the Superior of the Daughters of Charity, preside over each department as Mistress.

A careful vocational discernment is made in the case of those who aspire to be teachers in the orphanages or nurses in the hospitals. The aspirants, in fact, “must be carefully tested in their vocation, well-instructed and trained before being assigned to their duties.”⁴⁶

Acceptance is preceded by a period during which the aspirants live in their homes and attend only the instructions.

A period of probation follows, when the postulant live as boarders and are trained in the work. When they are found to have a firm vocation they are accepted.

They still continue their formation for three years After that they become Tertiaries, bound by temporary vows, taken in the hands of the Superior of the Daughter of Charity. From that moment they depend on the congregation of the Tertiaries which can dispose of them according to the needs.

The bond uniting the institution of the Tertiaries to the Institute of the Daughters of Charity is much deeper than a simple bond of charity.

Though dedicating themselves to their own work, the Tertiaries depend ultimately on the Superior of the Daughters, whose duty it is to decide on the more important matters. Magdalene speaks of them as “sisters” united to the Daughters in spirit, in the devotion to the Sorrowful Mother in the common search for God’s greater glory, in a style of charity and humility.

(d) Apostolic animation and involvement of individual lay persons

The charism of Magdalene of Canossa knows no limit of time and space and is open to all needs, even occasional ones.

⁴⁶ C.A.R. MS C

Each one of them requires an answer, but often this is beyond her personal possibilities.

It is typical of Magdalene then, to communicate her prophetic insight to persons she knows and make their hearts vibrate with Christian love.

She presents the need and suggests a solution, then she leaves ample space to the others' goodwill on which she trustfully counts.

She is not afraid to bother or to ask too much; she is in fact convinced that by offering some people occasions of apostolate and of charity she is showing them her appreciation in the best possible way.

She thus becomes a promoter of the laity, entrusting to them particular cases to be solved.

Her "dear Durini" is often the friend of Providence, from whom she can ask for anything: information, the settlement of girls in moral danger, recommendations for people in need, material help for others.

Magdalene knows well that if Carolina cannot act directly she in turn will rely on her friends, thus the sphere of her own charity extends more and more.

Everywhere Magdalene of Canossa calls forth men and women, co-operators for the Kingdom.

Relatives, simple "coachmen", gentlemen, professionals, friends and ladies: all are mobilised and involved in services of charity and evangelisation.

Her own coachman is invited to learn the deaf-and-dumb alphabet to teach it to a Daughter of Charity who needs it to educate a girl

Boniface of Canossa, already tried by many crosses, can even take to himself the misery of others and thus open himself to a greater charity.⁴⁷

Raymond who had begun to visit a mentally sick person at the hospital is encouraged to do so regularly once a week.⁴⁸ He does it faithfully for ten years following.

It is impossible to resist Magdalene, friends, benefactors, sympathisers are transformed into apostles of charity by her convincing ways and discover the joy of gratuitous self-giving.

If her Institute could develop within a few years, it is also thanks to the generous collaboration of many lay people challenged to action by her persuasive influence of zeal and love.

Conclusion

The charism of Magdalene is received by the Companions of the five houses which form the Institute of the Daughters of Charity in 1835, year of the death of the Foundress.

The Chronicles and correspondence of that time are a witness to the growth of the Works, to the intense apostolic activity of the first generation of Canossians even though the historic documents at our disposal do not always allow us to have a complete view of the concrete work of each house.

The documents available, however, enable us to see the continuity in time particularly of the fourth and fifth "branch" of charity codified by the Foundress in the plans of the Institute and of singling out some of the interesting data which can shed light on various experiences made subsequently, relative to the promotion of individual lay persons.

⁴⁷ Ep. 111/5 pg. 3914 -3915

⁴⁸ Ep. 111/2 pg. 1531

Outline

- The Canossian charism
- Involvement of the laity in the works of charity
- The “branch” of the country Teachers
 - who they are
 - purpose of the “branch”
 - criteria for acceptance
 - formation
- The “branch” of the Spiritual Exercises
 - purpose of the “branch”
 - practical modalities
- The external and internal Tertiaries
 - who they are
 - the external Tertiaries
 - the internal Tertiaries
 - purpose of the institution
- Apostolic animation and involvement of the laity
 - ways of involvement
 - indicative examples

Chapter II

ACTIVE PRESENCE OF THE LAITY IN THE HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTE

a. “Seminaries “ for Country Teachers

These are held regularly for several years at Bergamo, the first house where Magdalene started this work ⁴⁹, but also in Venice, Trent and, after 1845, in Brescia.

The number of “trainees” is constant enough: a maximum of 20, at least during the first decades.

They come usually from the villages around the cities. The length of the period of transformation remains the same: seven months; even if here and there the need to keep the girls a little bit longer begins to appear.

There are no documents concerning the contents, the methods, the programmes. We presume that the Daughters followed the indications given by the Mother.

Fidelity to the mind of the Foundress, which characterised the first Daughters, suggests that in spite of the possible variation of contents and methods, the original motivations and aims remain the same: to prepare “good country girls eager to engage in the Christian education and instruction of the poor girls in the schools and parishes of the areas and villages . . . with a true spirit of Charity out of love for the Lord”.⁵⁰

The young women received and formed by the Daughters of Charity “well-instructed in the Religion, trained in hand work and in the ability to teach others, above all inspired “with true spirit of Charity”⁵¹ return to the villages well-prepared, even if all do not take public examinations.

The primary aim is that of giving the young teachers a solid spiritual formation to enable them to become the “longa manus” of the Daughters of Charity in the three “branches” proper to the Institute.

In the course of the years some external factors contribute to modify gradually the physiognomy of the seminary for country Teachers.

In 1846 a government law of the Lombard-Venetian state imposes the obligation of examinations to qualify women for elementary teaching. The Daughters of Charity, after some individual requests to their respective Bishops, send an official petition in 1853 to the Holy See for a “modification of the Rule on the point concerning *Education*” for “the aim would be frustrated if the period of formation were limited to seven months as determine in the Rule”.⁵²

On the other hand the petitioner stresses that “only those who have been approved are allowed to teach and the approval is granted only after strict examination on many compulsory subjects”.

⁴⁹ “The training of country-Teachers begins in Bergamo in 1822. It is directed for some years by Mother Cristina Pilotti, secretary of the Foundress, then by M.Lazzaroni, M.Romelli and M. Luca. From 1822 to 1835 the number of girls is never higher than 14, in fact in some years it is much smaller. From 1835 to 1842 the girls received were about 20, under the care first of M.Lazzaroni, then of M.Grassi.” (Early information on the Institute of the Daughters of Charity in Italy, MS.)

⁵⁰ Ep.11/2 B10 – 9 pg.1427

⁵¹ cf Talk of Mgr. Zoppi, Milan 14.9.1823

⁵² C.A.R. C.Rossetti to His Holiness the Pope, Verona 25.4. 1854.

Ten years later a new request is put forward by the Sisters of Milan. “The present regulations on education are so advanced that very few (country girls) succeed in one year. The proposal is to lower the age of acceptance of those aspiring to be teachers so that they may attain their aim in the course of the three or four years.”⁵³

The permission granted for six years “ad experimentum” by the Curia of the Bishop of Milan in July 1864, is confirmed, or rather recommended six years later in November 1870⁵⁴ by the Archbishop of Milan, following another petition by the Superior of Milan. “In order, then, to extend that Christian education seldom imparted in the city colleges, to a larger number of country girls who do not aspire to a refined and brilliant education, we would like to accept even those girls who do not aspire to a teaching career.”⁵⁵

The Chronicle of Bergamo also documents the progressive change: in 1861 younger boarders who form a second group of aspirant-teachers in the new house opened in Borgo Pignolo (Via S. Tommaso 13) are received. In 1868 the Chronicle records that some students take public examinations. From then on, the number of “boarders” who sit for examinations for a teacher’s diploma increases.

In 1875 there is a significant change. In November “a school called ‘School for the Training of Teachers’ ” is opened, since “the provincial School Council has authorized us to train our own boarders.”⁵⁶

The reading of the documents brings some elements to our notice.

Side by side with the formative-apostolic aim which in the mind of Magdalene has to permeate every moment and every initiative of the “seminary”, there emerges ever clearer the need for an adequate professional preparation of the students, in answer to government requirements and to the necessity of sitting for examinations in public schools.

The small group of “country pupils” of 18 years and above, called to virginity and to the apostolate, is replaced by classes of “young country girls even of an age lower than the usual” some of them aspiring to become teachers, “but many who do not intend to undertake a teaching career.”

The short period of formation so conceived in order to prevent “the girls from falling in love with the quiet of retreat” and from “being separated from their families for too long”⁵⁷ is very much extended.

The “temporary” branch takes on a permanent character in the varying structures of our Teacher Training Colleges.

b. Spiritual Exercises for Ladies

The few pages of the Chronicle that refer to the Spiritual Exercises offer valuable elements which shed light on the importance given by Magdalene and successive generations of her Daughters to this “branch”.

The fundamental attitude of Magdalene of Canossa and of the Canossian Sisters to be spiritual mothers and formators, teachers and animators of the lay apostles, appears in a very clear way in this intensely pastoral and promotional work.

⁵³ C.A.R. E.GADDA to the Bishop of Milan, 1864

⁵⁴ C.A.R. Archbishop of Milan to the Superior of the Daughters of Charity, 26.11.1870.

⁵⁵ C.A.R. A. SORMANI to the Archbishop of Milan, 9.11.1870.

⁵⁶ C.A.R. A. SORMANI to the Archbishop of Milan, 9.11.1870.

⁵⁷ U.R. pg. 179

SEMINARIES FOR COUNTRY TEACHERS
FROM 1835— 18551⁵⁸

Year	City		Duration
1835	Bergamo n.20		months 7
1836	Bergamo n.20		months 7
1837	Bergamo n.20	Venice ⁶⁰	months 7
1838	Bergamo n.20	Venice	months 7
1839	Bergamo n.20	Venice	months 7
1840	Bergamo n.20	Venice	months 7
1841	Bergamo n.20	Venice	months 7
1842	Bergamo n.20	Venice	months 7
1843	Bergamo n.20	Venice	months 7
1844	Bergamo n.20	Venice	
		Trent	
		n.18 apostles	
		n.12 graduate teachers	months 7
1845	Bergamo n.20	Venice	
		Trent n. 24	months 7
1846	Bergamo n.19	Venice	
		Trent n. 28	months 7
1847	Bergamo n.19	Venice	
		Trent n. 33	months 7
1848	Interruption due to 1st Independence war		
1849	Bergamo n. 14	Venice	
	Brescia n. 8		
		Trent	months 7
1850	Bergamo n.32	Cholera	months 7
1851			
1852 ⁵⁹		Venice ⁶¹	
		Milan (months 10)	months 11
1853		Milan (months 10)	
1854		Milan (months 10)	
1855	Interruption due to cholera		
1860			

⁵⁸ The following is what appears in the Chronicles of the C.A.R.

¹¹ The Chronicle of Venice does not record yearly the number of participants.

¹² From 1850 the Chronicle of Trent is assigned to another Sister who does not record anymore the annual Seminaries. She mentions the dismissal of the Teachers in February 1884 due to smallpox: they are still seminaries according to the spirit of Magdalene.

Magdalene begins the activity of the Spiritual Exercises for Ladies because she understands that they are the most suitable channel “to do good even to the ladies of the upper class so as to help them to be more committed to the greater service of God.”

But the choice of this social class does not exclude all the other classes of women which can be reached by hearts vibrating with zeal and free from human ties.

Historic documents dated before and after 1835 show this very clearly. In Trent, for instance, already in 1831, side by side with the Spiritual Exercises for the Ladies, one for country teachers is also held, “with great benefit especially for their own souls and for those of others. For when they return to their villages they can become examples of piety and charity, particularly in the education of the girls and in promoting the real good of others”⁶² In the following year, again in Trent, there are altogether three courses. The first for the Ladies soon after the octave of Easter; the second for maids, servants, young girls and other persons, up to a number of about three to four hundred, held immediately after the first course. Lastly the third one for country teachers in the month of July, right after the end of their teaching practice in the Elementary Schools.”⁶³

The possibility of Spiritual Exercises in the Canossian houses is offered to hundreds of women of every age and social standing. Only a small number of them can stay for the night in the convent, but many spend the day in spiritual recollection and return to their homes in the evenings.

The choice of the priest is always made with great care. In Milan the Daughters of Charity may avail themselves of the Oblates of the Diocese, dedicated to this specific ministry. In the other places, highly commendable priests ready to move from one city to another, lend themselves for this delicate mission.

The Spiritual Exercises, even when more than one course is held in the same year, are no obstacle to the charity schools, also because only two Sisters are entrusted with the spiritual assistance of the retreatants. If there are no “really suitable”⁶⁴ Sisters available in the house, helpers may come from the Mother House.⁶⁵

The work of the Spiritual Exercises is harmoniously inserted in the pastoral programme of the local Church, even though they preserve their own typical originality.

The Bishops are involved both in the choice of the retreat Master and with their own presence in some significant moments. The Spiritual Exercises are suspended in the year when a Jubilee is celebrated “because of popular Missions held everywhere.” The ladies, after the annual Retreat, engage concretely in initiatives in favour of the “poor Churches of the Diocese.”

When the initiative is organised by others, the Daughters of Charity give their collaboration in an attitude of service and work for its success. For instance, during the Spiritual Exercises for the nurses of the Major Hospital, they offer themselves to replace them. They “offer the house and their own services” to the secular Ursulines who organised a retreat for themselves.

⁶¹ In the Chronicle of Venice it is briefly stated that from 1852 to 1905 the Seminaries last 11 months.

⁶² U.R. pg. 203

⁶³ Chronicle of Trent pg. II

⁶⁴ U.R.pg.203

⁶⁵ The Marchioness sent three other Sisters to help with the Spiritual Exercises (1830) since she was not able to come personally as she had wished. (Chronicle of Trent pg.70) “on 9 April (1839) M.Angela Bragato came with M.Anna Rizzi to help with the Spiritual Exercises, since the Superior has not yet recovered. They left for Verona immediately afterwards. (ibid. pg. 59 - 60)

The fruits are always plentiful as “the Lord showers ... his most special graces and mercies”⁶⁶ The Daughters of Charity who assist the retreatants become witnesses of radical conversions⁶⁷ and of the maturing of good vocations.⁶⁸

c. Tertiaries and other various associations

Even during the time when Magdalene was alive and working in the newly born Institute, but more so later on, one sees in the small Canossian world, a springing up of typically lay initiatives: Tertiaries, Societies, Unions, Associations, Groups.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES FROM 1836 to 1850⁶⁹

Year	Ladies	Teachers ⁷⁰	Maids	Women Servants
1836	Trent		Trent	
1837	Trent	Trent	Trent	
1838	Trent	Trent	Trent	
1839	Trent	Trent	Trent	
		Brescia ⁷³		
1840	Trent	Trent	Trent	
1841	Trent	Trent	Trent	
1842	Trent ⁷¹	Trent	Trent	
1843	Trent	Trent	Trent ⁷⁴	
1844	Trent	Trent	Trent	
1845	Trent	Trent	Trent	
	Brescia			
1846	Trent	Trent	Trent	
		Brescia		
1847	Trent	Trent	Trent	
1848	Brescia ⁷²		Trent	
1849	Trent	Trent		
	Brescia		Trent	
1850	Trent	Trent		
1855				Milan

⁶⁶ Chronicle of Trent pg. 12

⁶⁷ “... one was deeply touched during the sermon . . . it was 30 years she did not go to confession ... On the following morning she decided to make a general confession, and she did it with the surest signs of a real conversion” (Chronicle of Milan-notebook II, pg. 170)

⁶⁸ “... one of the retreatants whose name was Lucia Cupis, unmarried, 25 years of age, of Pontevico, after the Retreat joined our Novitiate as a postulant. (Chronicle of Brescia, C. IX)

⁶⁹ The following is what appears in the Chronicles. In 1850 with the change of the Sister in charge of the Chronicle, Spiritual Exercises and Seminaries are no longer recorded. Dismissal of Teachers in February 1884 due to smallpox is mentioned.

⁷⁰ Up to 1884 the term “Teachers” indicates the so-called “Maestre di villa”. From this date onwards the term refers to the Country Teachers. Milan does not appear because from 1823 to 1852 there is a blank in the Chronicle.

There are names, some clearly defined, others less so, with different growth and destiny. But there is one common unifying element: the deep consciousness in Magdalene and in the first generation of her Daughters of the duty to enkindle in the heart of many lay people the same apostolic zeal coming from the Spirit of the Institute. And we find this not only through the pastoral initiatives of the Seminaries and of the Spiritual Exercises but also with other more autonomous and, under some aspects, more stable forms.

The most definite form, which takes the shape of a Tertiaries lay “Congregation”, is that of the Tertiaries, so dear to Magdalene who often mentions it in her letters. It is a reality which keeps her in continuous dialogue, search, verification in order to discover the most appropriate “form”, both with regard to its structure and to the answer to be given according to the needs of the different places where the institution is or could be established.

Nearly two months after the death of Magdalene Cristina Pilotti, who has received the mandate to take on the direction of the Institute, writes about the Tertiaries to the Superior in Rome, clearly to ask for enlightenment as to how to proceed in continuing and spreading that initiative:

“I have been asked by various persons to spread the Work of the Tertiaries, so useful to society since it can take up many branches which the Institute cannot embrace because it is limited, and rightly so, to its own works...”

The Work is divided into two classes, that is, the Tertiaries who live in their own homes and those who live in fraternities. Here in Verona, as I think you know, we have started the second work, which so far enjoys the approval and the esteem of everyone because of the good they find in it.

The above-mentioned institutions are united by a bond of charity to the Institute as far as the spirit is concerned, but they are in any other regard completely autonomous from the institute which does not take upon itself any new obligation...

This year three young girls from Chioggia have been here for their education and they succeeded very well. Since there is no possibility to start the Institute in the own town, when they will go back - as it had been agreed also with the Marchioness- they will tell that worthy of prelate of their desire to be able to embrace as Teachers the work of the Tertiaries. . . .

I wish it to be, if it is God’s pleasure to establish it, the Work is all dedicated to God’s glory in the exercise of the holy works of charity, that all the prayers and undertakings be directed to obtaining the general forgiveness of sins, and continuous prayer be offered for the Holy Church and for her needs.

With this letter I enclose also the said Plan, because I desire to have the blessing of the Superior in order to be sure of doing the Divine Will”⁷⁵

From this important document as well as from some other later historical data, one can deduce that the Tertiaries, especially those of the *permanent body*, have a specific vocation. As a result of the formation given by Magdalene of Canossa and later by the first Daughters of Charity to Country Teachers, and to young girls attending retreats or frequenting the Institute, new lay apostles, besides the Canossian Sisters, are ready for a more radical and definitive commitment to Christ for the benefit of the brothers.

Their presence and above all the “union of charity” which binds them to the Institute make, M. Pilotti first and M. Bragato later, feel responsible and also a bit apprehensive to define their rule of life and the spheres of their apostolate⁷⁶.

⁷¹ In Trent a Retreat was held every first Friday of the month.

⁷² The Retreat were interrupted because of the 1st Independence War

⁷³ The house of Brescia was founded in 1838.

⁷⁴ A Retreat of three days for maids was also held.

⁷⁵ C.A.R. C. Pilotti to Mgr. Traversi, 6.6.1835

⁷⁶ C.A.R. A. Bragato to Mgr. Traversi, Verona 1.3.1836

Mgr. Traversi who well remembers the spirit with which Magdalene of Canossa has begun the lay institution, invites the disciples to proceed “with simplicity”, as suggested by their Mother. “Let the Tertiaries of Verona remain in the state they are at present. As for the other places, it is better to be contented, as of now, to have here and there a few of them who, without leaving their own home, dedicate themselves to the exercise of the works of charity proper to the Institute. If God will ask for something more, He will make it known. That will be the moment to draw up a Rule for all of them”⁷⁷.

The moment for the Sisters to draw up some normative element to interpret and define the original “plans” seems to have come in 1861 in Milan. On 4 March “the Superior, the Vice Superior and three other Sisters of common accord to draw up the Rules of the Tertiary Sisters, deduced from the spirit of our Holy Rule and from the experience of the past six years”⁷⁸.

The experience referred to, is the one made by a small community of Tertiaries begun just a few years before in Milan. It is autonomous, with a member responsible for it, a novitiate, an internal set of regulations, a well defined apostolate, complementary to that of Daughters of Charity, a school and a boarding house for girls of a higher social standing.

The Sisters of Monza, Como and Verona, the centres where the lay institution exists, also like the Rule of Tertiaries, drawn up by the small group of Sisters of Milan.

On 10 April 1861, Sormani asks for the approval of the said Rule, but the Holy See gives a negative answer.

The contents of the answer of the Roman Curia lead one to deduce that the request had not been clear, since we read even the following motivation “. . . it introduces the novelty that an Institute of Sisters, especially of simple vows, should have another Institute dependent on it”⁷⁹.

Perhaps the reply refers, even if not in an explicit way, to the ecclesiastical norm which reserves to a very few Orders of ancient tradition the privilege of having “Third Orders” attached to them.

In fact, after 1864, the institution of the internal Tertiaries - in Italy - is dissolved gradually, so as to “avoid publicity”⁸⁰.

Some of the Tertiaries form a new religious Institute - the Precious Blood Sisters of Monza - others join the Canossian Sisters.

The initiative of the deaf-and-dumb Tertiaries in S. Alvise, Venice, remains as an isolated case. They have been formed “to sanctify and to be of help in the School for the deaf-and-dumb”⁸¹. The unpublished document of 1894 refers to them.

Soon after the beginning of missionary activity in the Far East, the intelligent zeal of M. Lucia Cupis gives life to a fervent group of Chinese Tertiaries, approved by Pius X himself. The institution flourishes and spreads till the beginning of the XX century. In 1923, however, it develops almost completely into the new religious Congregation of Chinese Sisters, directly dependent on the apostolic Vicariate of Hong Kong.

⁷⁷ C.A.R. Mgr. Traversi to A. Bragato, Rome 22.4.1836

⁷⁸ C.A.R. Chronicle of Milan - notebook IV, pg. 269

⁷⁹ C.A.R. Card. Paraccini to the Capitular Vicar of Milan, Rome 28.4.1862

⁸⁰ C.A.R. E. Nespoli to E. Gadda, Verona 29.5.1862

⁸¹ C.A.R. MS Venice, pg.1

The few Tertiaries left in Italy and abroad, are absorbed into the Institute of the Daughters of Charity. They are called “Canossian Aggregates” (Rule of 1927) and “Sister Collaborators” (Rule of 1935). In 1954 the General Government of the Institute obtains with a Rescript of the Holy See⁸² to eliminate every distinction of names and positions within the one Canossian Religious Family.

The documents of the archives consulted do not mention explicitly the external Tertiaries. The last mention is in the letter of Cristina Pilotti of 6 June 1835. She writes, “the Work is divided into two classes, that is, the Tertiaries who live in their own home and those who live in fraternities”.

Chronicles, statutes, regulations, simple notes make use of other terms. We recognize in these initiatives other shoots of lay apostolic vitality which “spring from the Canossian tree”. They draw their original inspiration from the project of Magdalene to multiply “the labourers for the vineyard of the Lord”.

The “Pious union of the most holy and sorrowful Mother, is formed only of virgins” while that of the “Christian Mothers” is open to married women. The “Congregation of the Verona Ladies named after the most holy and sorrowful Mother” is characterized mainly by periodical meetings for prayer and the Eucharistic celebration. The “Society of the Sorrows of Mary most holy” instead is oriented especially to the sanctification of the members and of neighbour through apostolic works. Some associations stress mainly personal obligations, others emphasize the social dimension with the aim of promoting piety among the members and of supporting one another in living a Christian life.

From this variety of associations, some common and constant elements emerge, which express their fidelity to the initial “Plan” of the Tertiaries. All these initiatives spring up from the expansive power of the founding charism, from the will of Magdalene of Canossa and of her Daughters to awaken in lay women the consciousness of their potentialities for good and of the resulting responsibility to live, witness and proclaim the Gospel according to their state of life, but with a common passion and zeal.

One of the regulations says, “Another purpose why the Pious Union was started, was . . . that there be many lighted lamps, shining in the world through their conduct . . .” (Brescia, 1889). And another one, “Each of the aggregates will have the greatest diligence to become the example and the union of her own family . . . she will exercise all the works of charity towards the members of her family . . . all will engage in following up young girls . . . in assisting with zeal the parish catechism classes . . . The widows especially will visit the sick” (Rovereto, 1887).

The style suggested is unmistakable, “They will speak in a gentle and meek way . . . striving to earn souls for God with their gentleness and meekness, thus imitating Jesus Christ” (Brescia, 1889).

What nourishes this apostolic zeal lived “in imitation of the holy Apostles” is a “truly solid . . . piety” which awakens in the heart of those who see them “the memory of the bitter Passion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ”. The soundness of their spiritual life is guaranteed by the centrality of the sacramental life, by “mental prayer”, by filial devotion to the Sorrowful Mother and by the attendance at monthly recollection days and annual Retreats. Some passages from the Chronicles of the second half of the XIX century bear witness to the faithfulness with which these last initiatives, specifically Canossian, are taken to heart by the Daughters of Charity and by the members of the associations themselves.

An initiative created by Magdalene still continues during that period. It is the “Pious Union of the noble Ladies of the Spiritual Exercises”. It aims “at extending ever more the sphere of apostolic fruitfulness and has as its main purpose to organize an annual Retreat, to be held in the House of the Institute both for its own members and for all the other ladies to whom they think it is suitable to extend the invitation”. (Brescia, 1843).

⁸² Prot. 2386/54

The bond of the different Unions and Associations with the Daughters of Charity is variously expressed in the documents of the archives. One mentions a “List of the aggregates kept by the local Superior of the Daughters of Charity” (Venice, 1841). It is stated that “the Daughters of Charity... opened their house to the noble ladies and offered them their service... Every first Friday the Ladies are gathered in one of the chapels of the House” (Verona, no date).

But in some regulations a deeper relationship can be discovered: “the members will possibly try to carry on all those works of charity suggested to them by the Superior of the Daughters of Charity . . . They will then report to her . . . with her they will find the way to overcome difficulties. . . Once a month they will meet with the Superior who will suggest suitable means to extend their work and to make it more fruitful with the help of God” (Rovereto, 1887).

One finds also a spiritual share in the merits of the Institute: “. . . let the Virgins of the Union be assured of the protection of Mary most holy both in life and in death . . . and of sharing in all the good done by the Institute of the Daughters of Charity, according to a promise which the Foundress made personally to them” (Brescia, 1889).

It is difficult to find out with historical precision how these initiatives of promotion of the laity have developed in the Institute during this present century. The documents available are too few and do not allow us to see whether they have been preserved and with what spirit and vitality.

It is possible, however, to single out some significant steps in the Canossian commitment to be faithful to a charismatic heritage. These steps lead to its marvellous re-launching aroused by the Spirit today.

In 1917, in Italy, a Canossian Sister of the “casa primaria” of Pavia, M. Orsolina Grillo, conceives the idea of a lay union of virgins “similar to the Christian virgins of the primitive Church . . . united by the ideal of purity and love”⁸³

The idea matures during long years of silence and seeking of advice. A very small group of young women, of refined education, forms around M. Grillo to deepen the ideal project of “Virginitas” in conferences and prayer meetings.

They think also of trying to initiate a model school of catechetical pedagogy and methodology, from which members for the Union could come.

Everything remains at the planning stage, until, after 1936, the Superior General M.A. Monzoni entrusts M. Grillo with the task of forming groups of “Canossian Co-workers” to assist the Daughters in their apostolic activities.

The first “Catechist Co-workers of the Holy Angels”, virgins dedicated to do good in general and to works of charity”⁸⁴, appear at Bergamo in 1943.

Three lay teachers - Zanolini, Galbusera and Ambrosioni - after a short ceremony of initiation become deeply interested in their new mission, trying also to develop the rising association. The Superior General of the Daughters of Charity encourages the initiatives; the Bishop of Como approves it for his Diocese.

⁸³ C.A.R. O. Grillo, from the idea of Virginitas to the constituting

⁸⁴ of the Canossian Co-workers, from 1917 to 1950, MS
ibid.

The small group of women, “called to the virginal state and to the apostolate”, sustained by the Sisters, feels the need to open the association to “mothers, wives, girls, ex-pupils devoted to the Institute”. To this end it opens new spheres of apostolic action: Co-workers of charity, of the missions, for the teaching of catechism, of suffering, of the deaf and of the blind. It draws up the regulations and defines the tasks.

In 1950 the General Government of the Institute submits the association to the judgement of Fr. L. D’Arbonne, consultant of the Sacred Congregation of Religious and of the Council. He remarks that since these Co-workers “are according to the mind of the Foundress”, they are to be “established according to the needs of time, to carry out certain activities which cannot be done by the Canossian Sisters”. But “it must be something very flexible, in the line of lay associations”⁸⁵.

The Consultant advises to submit the main points of the Statute to the Holy See, which approves it on 1 May 1950⁸⁶.

The Statute composed of six articles, states briefly the nature, the purpose, the mission, the organization of the Canossian Co-workers, their norms of life and the spiritual benefits of belonging to the Association.

Concise by its very nature, the statute is developed into explanatory norms, included in the Manual of Canossian Co-workers printed in Brescia in 1953. The regulations describe the various groups, their spirituality, their structure of government, the role of those responsible for the association and of the Canossian delegate, the criteria of admission, etc.

After 1953⁸⁷, the local groups of Co-workers multiply and dedicate themselves zealously to the works of mercy and to helping the Canossian Sisters even in auxiliary services. Due also to the conciliar teachings, here and there the need to clarify further the relations between the Co-workers and the Institute of the Daughters of Charity is felt. It is above all the small group of the section “Holy Angels” dating back to the initial nucleus of the work, that is in need of a clearer identity.

Meanwhile groups and movements, which express a new sensitivity and a new culture, arise in the Church. This phenomenon causes us to question and re-examine the methods, criteria, forms of life and of apostolate of the Co-workers.

In 1975 a small “spiritual family” called “Secular Missionaries of Magdalene of Canossa is formed. In 1978 the first members take their vows in the hands of Miss Marisa Gini, elected Superior of the group. They intend to assume in themselves the secularity of the country teachers, the consecration of the Tertiaries and the apostolic spirit of both. With a letter of October 1983 the Bishop of Verona accepts them in his Diocese.

The Institute of the Daughters of Charity, particularly during their General Chapter of 1978, takes to heart the problem of the lay Canossian movement and entrusts to a Sister delegated by the General Council the task to study, animate, suggest new ways more suitable to the present time in fidelity to the charism.

⁸⁵ Reports of the General Council, 1950 - 53, pg. 2

⁸⁶ cf R.o.L. pg. 119

⁸⁷ We refer, for this last part, to the Acts of the Study Meeting for Animators: “History, identity, actuality of the Canossian lay groups and movements”, Costermano, 1982.

In Italy and abroad attempts at renewal begin. Small groups and lay movements spring up around the nucleus of the Co-workers. They are unified by the common purpose of “collaborating in the apostolate of the Church according to the inspiration of Magdalene of Canossa”, in the catechetical, educational and assistential spheres. They are attentive also to the new generations in order to form them to an evangelical mentality, foundation of ever apostolate.

The research work of all the Organisms of the Institute, brought up for examination and study by the XI General Chapter (1984) makes known the various initiatives taken at the local level during the last years to keep alive the original seed of the external Tertiaries⁸⁸.

d. General Involvement of the Laity in the Apostolate of Charity

This is perhaps the most widespread aspect in the history of the Institute and at the same time the one that can be less documented.

Magdalene of Canossa avails herself from the very beginnings of the assistance of lay people. She involves them with sagacity and cordial daring in the project of the new religious institution and in the expansion of communities and activities. In the course of the years the presence of lay people who love the institute and contribute in different ways and levels to its growth and apostolic vitality, becomes even more significant.

Almost every foundation, even after 1835, has at its origin, besides the zeal of the Daughters of Charity and of Bishops or Priests, generous benefactors, men and women, who make premises available, provide sometimes furniture or equipment, contribute maintenance fees for aspirants and novices.

Even the works of charity, especially the most onerous ones, are often sponsored by the generosity of well-off persons or families. In Milan for instance, Cav. Vimercati involves the wealthiest and most influential persons in a vast network of charity to the benefit of the deaf-and-dumb educated by the Canossian Sisters⁸⁹

But it is above all in the directly pastoral field that in the course of time the Daughters of Charity avail themselves of lay cooperators who make present and active the Canossian apostolic zeal. They are educators who follow-up school-leaving girls in their first impact with the world of work, wives and mothers who teach catechism, widows who dedicate themselves to the assistance of the poor and the sick, politicians and professionals who take to heart the most desperate situations and cases.

It is interesting to note that even the missionary in the expansion of the Institute (1860) bears the sign of the providential presence of the Lord in the person of a layman. In the correspondence of the first missionaries⁹⁰ the name and personality of a certain Count Colleoni of Bergamo is often mentioned. A “most kind and considerate travelling companion” from Cairo to Hong Kong, he becomes subsequently a thoughtful benefactor during his trips to the East. He becomes also a link with Italy, helping to transmit new and direct requests to the communities and the families of the Sisters.

In spite of this incomplete exemplification, we can still point out that the actual involvement of the laity in the apostolic and charitable activity of the Daughter of Charity shows that the will to involve lay forces has always been present in our Canossian history. Besides contributing to the growth of the Institute, it enables to value the call, given to every baptized person, to serve the Kingdom of God in the forms and ways most suitable to his state of life.

⁸⁸ cf Study and research documents of the Organisms, for the preparation of the General Chapter, 1984

⁸⁹ cf Chronicle of Milan, notebook 11

⁹⁰ cf C.A.R. Correspondence L. Cupis, 1860

Outline

- The Daughters of Charity, heirs of the work of Magdalene

- “Seminaries” for Country Teachers
 - primary end
 - historical documentation
 - progressive modifications

- Spiritual Exercises for Ladies
 - primary end
 - historical documentation
 - progressive modifications

- The Tertiaries and other various associations
 - unifying element of the manifold lay initiatives
 - internal Tertiaries
 - from the internal Tertiaries to the “Aggregates”, the “Collaborators” and their subsequent dissolution
 - External Tertiaries
 - Unions and Congregations
 - relations between the lay associations and the Institute
 - historical development
 - the Canossian “Co-workers”
 - the “Secular Missionaries of Magdalene of Canossa”
 - attempts at research and renewal

- Involvement of the laity in the apostolate of Charity
 - multiform presence
 - in the foundation of the houses
 - in the pastoral field
 - in missionary expansion

PART THREE

CHAPTER I

RE-READING OF THE PROPHETIC INSIGHTS

OF MAGDALENE

TODAY

IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE INSTITUTE

What Magdalene of Canossa has offered to the laity and has done for their promotion, in her brief and intense history as Foundress, arouses in our heart sentiments of wonder, admiration and enthusiasm.

We find ourselves in front of a “great” woman, deeply in love with God, most sensitive to the needs of man, eager to multiply the energies to spread the Kingdom and to save souls. A woman of poor health, conscious of her nothingness, but courageously creative in inventing and establishing forms of promotion of the Catholic laity, she is nearly two centuries ahead in what the Church encourages us to do today.

Magdalene humbly recognizes that she is the depository of “a great Gift”⁹¹, of a charism too vast to be contained within the Institute of the Daughters of Charity.

She soon discovers its diffusive and irradiating power and the possibility of its being lived in different, even lay, modalities.

a. Promotion of the Laity in a vocational perspective

The promotion of the laity, even under the vocational aspect, seems to us to be a constitutive part of the charism of Magdalene of Canossa.

Magdalene looks at the laity with esteem, with trust, with respect, and appreciates and values their rich apostolic potentialities.

She well knows, even from her providential experience at Canossa Palace, how much the Lord can be known, loved and served also in the world.

For her, each lay person is called and sent to proclaim God’s love to men. He becomes a generous apostle of Christ once he is able to know and meet Him through one of His authentic witnesses who enlightens him on his baptismal vocation and encourages him to spend his life for Christ in the gift of self to the brothers, at the service of the Church.

We may perhaps sum up the fundamental prophetic insight of Magdalene in these words: the laity too, are called to the apostolate in the Church.

The Daughters of Charity, in their zeal, involve them in the works of evangelization and of charity. They form them in the spirit of the Christ Crucified and sustain them so that they be true apostles of the kingdom and leaven of Christian life in their environment.

⁹¹ U.R. pg. 17

b. Formation of the Laity

To appreciate the laity and to form them is the fundamental purpose of all the different initiatives of Magdalene: the Seminaries, the Spiritual Exercises, the Plans for the Tertiaries, the Associations and the Pious Unions.

Our Mother is convinced that no one can be an apostle without being prepared, because the apostolate is the expression of a heart in love with Christ, burning with zeal for God and for the salvation of souls.

1. Objectives

The central objective of the formation to the apostolate is clearly perceived by Magdalene: to form the heart of everyone called, by leading it to encounter the Heart of Christ and that of his Sorrowful Mother, to open it to the Spirit so that He may purify, free and mould it and set it ablaze with the fire of his Charity. Christ is the only Teacher and true Preacher not only of the Daughters of Charity, but also of all those who are prepared by them for the apostolate.

Once the heart, which is vital seat of the deepest aspirations, of the sentiments and the will, is formed, the preparation for the apostolate has already its foundation. Knowledge of Christian doctrine and practical training complete it.

With Jesus Crucified well rooted in his heart, the apostle can proclaim to others the great Love he has discovered and by whom he feels loved.⁹²

Each lives according to his own vocation and his state of life.

Magdalene, respectful of God's plan for each person, knows that not all are called to work in the same way in His one vineyard.

Every vocation has holiness as its goal, and our Foundress shows appreciation both for the virginal state and for that of the widow, for the religious and the lay condition, for consecration to God and for marriage.

The apostolate is a duty common to all vocations. Magdalene urges all those whom she meets towards it and she carries all along in her zeal.

Her attention is particularly directed to discovering and picking out those who can give more, and to discerning in persons God's call to a form of life with greater spiritual and apostolic commitment, even in a secular way.

Moreover, she perceives the power of witness coming from a group moved by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, gathers, animates and encourages associations of various kinds, with personal bonds and different relations with the Institute of the Daughters of Charity.

2. Modalities

The Spirit, who has given Magdalene the call to form apostles for the Kingdom, guides her to choose concrete modalities of formation which hide the most brilliant insights that have lasting validity.

Apostolic formation, so the Foundress seems to caution, is very different from merely simple instruction, necessary as it may be. It consists in assimilating a spirit, in becoming grounded in the love of God, in going right to the heart of the person and leading him to opt for Christ.

⁹² cf. U.R. pg. 316

Repeated live-in experiences, formative periods varying in length, but intensely lived, are therefore necessary.

For it is in the sharing of life, in mutual trust and listening, in personal relationship, in community prayer that the heart of each person opens up more easily to the gift of self with boundless generosity.

The formation of those called to the apostolate cannot be done en masse, for it needs interpersonal relationship and attention to the individual person.

Magdalene recognizes the validity and the effectiveness of the small group and adopts it as a means to achieve greater incisiveness and a more accurate discernment.

C. Criteria of apostolic formation

Magdalene, in the specific formation to the apostolate, follows criteria which we recognize, with admiration and surprise to be very much up-to-date.

-1. **Service to the local Church:** Our Mother has a constant attention to the local Church.

She collaborates with the Parish Priests and in the course of formation, keeps in mind the context of the local Church where the future apostles will be working. Moreover, in her apostolic undertakings she moves always in agreement with the Bishop of the Diocese;

-2. **Secularity:** the lay apostle must not “fall in love with the peace and quiet of the retreat”, but engage in temporal realities as Christian leaven in their midst.

Magdalene educates him to a “secular” spirituality aiming at reconciling a life of piety and dedication to others with the fulfillment of the duties of his state.

-3. **Sensitization of the Laity to their responsibility:** Magdalene strives to form lay people who take up the apostolate conscientiously as a personal responsibility. They should also be able to assume leading roles particularly in the schools of Christian doctrine and in the work of the Hospital. What our Foundress writes with regard to the Ladies is significant: the Daughters are called “to collaborate with them”⁹³ in the branches of charity.

-4. **Choice of places where the need is greatest:** the field of apostolate which Magdalene prefers is that of the villages most in need. For them she has at heart the formation of lay apostles and evangelizers.

-5. **Inculturation:** there is no rigidity in our Foundress. On the contrary she adjusts to the various categories of persons, to the varying cultural environment and to their different necessities.

An authentic need of incarnating the Christian message makes her adaptable, flexible, ready to modify plans and modalities for the greater glory of God.

On the subject of formation, again, our Mother stresses frequently the duty of choosing the formators carefully, be they the Priests and Sisters for the Ladies’ retreat or the Mistress and her assistant for the country Teachers.

A successful education depends to a great extent on the personality of the educator.

This is even more true in the case of spiritual and apostolic formation.

Magdalene is so convinced of this that she advises her Daughters to postpone a Retreat until a priest with the necessary requirements be found.⁹⁴

⁹³ U.R. pg. 203

⁹⁴ cf. Ep. 111/4 pg. 2667.2749

Spiritual discernment is necessary also in the choice of the Sisters who will animate the laity. Not all are equally suitable and gifted.

Magdalene of Canossa is attentive to select a few on whom she can rely for the various initiatives. She asks of them availability to move from one House to another to fulfill specific services of animation.

Our Mother insists that “ the most suitable” Sisters be chosen, Sisters who have, besides the necessary competence, gifts of piety, prudence and enthusiasm; Sisters in love with the Lord, who devote themselves to the work of formation “with all their heart”, in seeking the one good of the Daughters of Charity: the Glory of God.

Outline

- Re-reading of the prophetic insights of Magdalene

- Promotion of the Laity
 - vocational perspective
 - conscientization of the role of the Laity in the Church

- Formation of the Laity
 - objectives
 - formation of the heart
 - apostolic preparation in the respect of the personal vocation and a particular gifts
 - modalities
 - personalized formation in community life

- Criteria of apostolic formation
 - service to the local Church
 - secularity
 - sensitization of the laity to their responsibility
 - choice of the greatest needs
 - inculturation

- Choice of formators

CHAPTER II
DIRECTIVES
AND GENERAL ORIENTATIONS

The return to the sources of our charism, that is to the heart of our Mother, has allowed us to appreciate with admiration and gratitude how fresh and up-to-date are the prophetic insights given to Magdalene by the Spirit.

They make us feel fully in harmony with the post-conciliar Church, which is vigorously re-launching the Christian laity, also through the most recent propositions of the Code of Canon Law.

And this is in two directions: rendering the layman co-responsible for the salvation of the brethren and involving him in the Christian animation of temporal realities, in the midst of which he lives by vocation.

Today the Church needs more committed lay people, to act as leaven in the mass without being distinct from it. She needs lay person, working individually or associated in a great variety of ways or sharing in the life and apostolate of religious Institutes, becoming to a certain degree, their members, without, however, committing themselves to the religious family totally and forever.

The projects conceived and in part realized by Magdalene, which aim at giving life to a new flourishing of lay energies, find ample space for growth in the spring time of the Church today.

The General Chapter has become aware through prayer and discernment, of the new impulse which the Spirit is giving to the Institute in the sphere of the promotion of the laity. It indicates here the directives and the general orientations already announced in the Capitular Deliberation.

If we wish to re-launch this constitutive and vital dimension of our charism, it is necessary first of all that we take as the true starting-point that of Magdalene herself: a passionate love for Jesus Crucified, from which alone can spring an authentic apostolic zeal.

Trustful and convinced of the diffusive power and strong vitality of the charism handed down to us, in obedience to the Spirit who speaks to us through the Church, we want to move along a twofold path:

1. the animation and the promotion of the laity in general
2. the discernment and formation of lay Canossian vocations.

They are two complementary thrusts, the second of which presupposes, and is in function of the first. We distinguish between them for the sake of clarity, but it is necessary that in their practical realization we keep them both in mind.

a. Promotion of the laity in general

It is not a new idea of the Chapter. It is in fact an activity contemplated by our charism which calls us to be every-where animators of apostles.

We find an authoritative confirmation of it in the new Rule of Life which, in art. 69 reminds us that “we are called to devote ourselves . . . to the animation of lay catechists” and to promote initiatives for the formation of “our collaborators in the apostolic activities.”

The “new” that the Chapter asks the Institute to implement concerns the mentality, the spirit, the active presence with which we intend to devote ourselves to the promotion of the laity so as to share with them the grace of the Canossian charism.

In dutiful fidelity to the Church we are called to renew ourselves in our way of considering the laity: no longer as “substitutes”, but as protagonists of the apostolate; and to see that our relations with them are based on the mutual awareness of our equal dignity as baptized persons and on our common sharing in the salvific mission of the Church.

A more open, more enthusiastic, more ecclesial spirit must animate us with regard to them.

We must discover and adopt more charismatic modalities, which better respond to today’s needs.

The laity themselves expect from us today the encouraging stimuli and the concrete help which enable them to commit themselves to an authentically Christian life in the midst of temporal affairs and to assume in their ecclesial context the role that is theirs by vocation.

We cannot disappoint them in their expectations. Moreover, it is necessary that, according to the various cultural contexts we single out those particular spheres where our action of promotion of the laity is more needed and requested.

1. Spheres of promotion of the laity

The General Chapter, drawing from the Rule of Life⁹⁵ indicates the following as spheres which are more specifically Canossian:

The local Church. This is the widest field that open to our zeal.

It includes the parish, youth groups, Church movements committed to Christian life and to the apostolate, parish, interparochial and diocesan bodies.

The School. This offers many possibilities of lay animation the importance of which perhaps has not been sufficiently realized so far.

We refer to its adult components: students of senior classes, pupils, parents, teachers, non-teaching staff.

The field of work. Today it is the area most in need of being permeated by Christian values. It is enough to think of the factory and office-workers, of all the various categories of workers and their families.

The world of suffering, for which Magdalene used to say that she felt a special attraction. The sick in hospitals or in their families, old people in the homes or the aged or in their own houses, those who are alone or afflicted by other kinds of sufferings — all these offer us infinite possibilities of animation.

Influential persons. We include in this category all those who have an influence in Church organizations or in the educational, cultural and social spheres.

Our Foundress, too, tried to animate these persons in a Christian way. She has always urged them to bear witness to Christ in their secular undertakings and to be apostles of charity among the needy.

The spheres of action listed above are not new in the tradition of our Institute.

But, we feel it is necessary to repeat, what is “new” lies in our enthusiasm and our apostolic zeal and our way of being present in the midst of the laity.

Magdalene encourages us to be creative in a holy way, in the choice of modalities for the animation of the laity.

⁹⁵ cf. R.L. art. 69,70,71

When the apostolic objective is clearly present in the exercise of our zeal, we must not be afraid of trying out more up-to-date initiatives and experiences, verifying them of course with the Superiors of the Organisms.

Prudence and common sense are virtues which Magdalene constantly looks for in her Daughters. But with her enterprising zeal and her untiring search for what is better, she teaches us also to leave nothing untried, provided everything has the greater Glory of God as its goal.

2. Modalities of lay promotion

The Chapter, bearing in mind the directives of the post-conciliar Church and the prophetic insights of our Mother Foundress, warmly supports within the traditional modalities, some which it considers to be “more charismatic” and answering better the needs of modern man.

They are:

Catechesis to youth and to adults, in collaboration with the initiatives of the local Church.

We are all very much convinced of the importance and the need of catechesis, an activity which Magdalene had very much at heart.

The history of our Institute has always seen Mothers and Sisters deeply involved in catechetical activity.

But perhaps, as the General Chapter has recognized, we have directed our attention more to children and pre-adolescents, neglecting the youth and the adults.

Today the Church urges us to turn to the adult world, demanding, of course, of us a serious and updated preparation.

Formation of persons for ecclesial ministries, in particular the formation of catechists.

Our charism calls us to be animators and formators of apostles, in particular of those who are called to the catechetical and liturgical ministry.

Our Rule of Life states it clearly in art. 69 (b– d).

The Church herself appeals to this particular vocation of ours, in order that we collaborate in the wider diffusion of the Gospel in today’s world.

We are not called simply to “teach” the truths of faith, but to “form” those who will proclaim the Kingdom, according to the directives of “Apostolicam Actuositatem”.⁹⁶

The formation of catechists as well as formation for the ecclesial ministries, must be integral and specific and be based, as our Mother wanted, on the formation of the Heart.

Obviously, even for this task, suitable and prepared Sisters are needed.

Spiritual Exercises and Retreats for various categories of youth and adults.

The General Chapter is convinced that the apostolate of the Retreats must be re-launched by the Institute with new enthusiasm, greater generosity and deeper conviction.

We are asked to remember the zeal of Magdalene even with regard to this “branch”.

⁹⁶ cf. A.A. 28-29

Our Foundress strongly believed in the apostolic in the efficacy of Retreats and has courageously proposed them to every category of people: to the ladies, to the country teachers, to ordinary women, to maids, to the members of the various “unions”.

She undertook heavy personal sacrifices in order to offer to the greatest number of people this rich experience of grace, of conversion, of Christian renewal.

We, her Daughters, cannot fail to imitate the holy enthusiasm of our Mother, and more so because our Rule of Life asks it of us very clearly. In fact, in art. 69 (c) of the Rule of Life we read:

“According to the genuine Canossian tradition, the Sisters should promote, at suitable times during the year, in our own houses or at other convenient venues, courses of spiritual exercises, retreats, prayer meetings and Christian formation programmes, especially for youth, women, family groups, our collaborators in apostolic activities and for those who are influential in ecclesial organizations and at the social level.”

Our Rule asks us also to support similar initiatives promoted by the local Church and to collaborate with her making available prepared personnel and suitable premises.

We know through experience how hungry for God the world is today.

Spiritual Exercises are perhaps the best answer to this need.

They often mark also the beginning of a new life for the persons who attend them and bear fruit in a radiant witness of life in various environments, leading others to open themselves to Christ and to his Gospel.

With zeal and apostolic concern, the Chapter asks the Institute to take to heart anew this fruitful “branch” which is typically Canossian and to renew it for the spiritual benefit of the many categories of persons whom we meet in our pastoral activities: catechists, teachers, helpers, workers, parents.

A category of persons united to us by a particular bond of love is that of the parents of our Sisters.

The parents of our young Sisters, in particular, involved in the vocation of their daughters often become the best collaborators and supporters of our apostolic activities.

More than anybody else they have the right to attend days of spirituality, moments of formation and of prayer, short retreats so that, they too may grow in the Christian life.

Magdalene used to do the same with her sisters and nieces. We resolve to do the same with equal fervour and enthusiasm.

“**Live-in**” experiences. They are on the same level as the Spiritual Exercises, and are proposed as the modern version of the “seminaries” for country Teachers, which Magdalene’s prophetic insight led her to create.

The General Chapter, recognizing their spiritual and apostolic fruitfulness, warmly recommends them.

The “live-in” experiences are experiences of life in common, which may have different, specific objectives, but all for a formative purpose.

They may be planned as programs of prayer and vocational guidance, as “seminars” or courses to deepen particular spiritual themes, as places of meeting and deepening of the Word of God, as intensive periods of formation to a specific apostolate.

The merit and value of these live-in experiences consist in offering the possibility to pray, meditate and reflect for a longer time in a serene and quiet environment; to have a more relaxed atmosphere for dialogue and meeting with the sister animators, to allow the participants to experience the joy of encountering God and of fraternal living.

Often these “live-in experiences” offer the most ideal situation for vocational discernment and can become a place for cultivating religious or lay apostolic vocations.

These experiences can be offered to our ex-pupils, catechists, groups of committed lay people.

In sustaining and encouraging this form of apostolate, the Chapter cannot but stress the importance of the choice of the animators, both of the Sisters and of the Priest or of other persons involved with particular tasks in this initiative.

The preparation and formation of lay teachers and non-teaching staff in our schools. In the footsteps of Magdalene, we must have at heart the Christian and apostolic formation of those who collaborate with us in the School.

For it is our duty to involve responsibly all those who work in our educational project and to create particular modalities for growing together as a true educative community, in a spirit of evangelical service.

An effective pastoral action in the school requires the presence of well-prepared and zealous Sisters, even few, but capable of arousing in the lay collaborators the sense of the duty of evangelization and of giving Christian witness. These Sisters should become promoters of spiritual and apostolic initiatives in favour of the educators themselves, as well as of the parents and the students of senior classes.

Involvement of lay persons in charitable-assistential activities and encouraging forms of voluntary service.

Charitable activity is perhaps the easiest and most immediate means of involving and promoting the laity in the apostolate.

As Magdalene has done, we also should stimulate the persons we meet in various occasions to feel responsible for the needs of our brothers, entrusting to them personally the cases which are beyond our possibilities.

At the same time it is necessary to animate them with the Gospel spirit so that they learn to serve Christ himself in the needs of our neighbour.

Today, especially among the youth, voluntary service is becoming quite common.

When it is well organized, even in collaboration with some national or international charitable association, and with the help of capable Sisters, it can become a very good opportunity to prepare for the apostolate and for a more generous commitment of Christian life.

The Daughters of Charity in the ecclesial groups and movements, recognized by the local Church.

It is according to Magdalene’s style to participate in groups and movements, not with roles of direction, but of animation.

The Rule of Life considers this participation “as pastoral activity which can contribute to the growth of the Christian life of the laity” as stated in art. 69 (g).

The Sisters allowed to participate are called to bring to them the witness of their Canossian religious life and to be present as a radiant reminder of the primacy of God

b. Discernment and formation of lay Canossian vocations

Even the second path suggested by the General Chapter is a new way of re-proposing an article of the Rule of Life, a call to responsible implementation.

For the Rule urges us, “In order to spread the Kingdom of Christ in every possible way and to extend the range of our apostolic activity, it is an act of fidelity to our charism to involve lay persons and groups who find in our spirituality the impetus to live their Christian vocation to the full.”⁹⁷

This “act of fidelity to our charism” challenges us to walk again courageously along the path marked out by our Mother Foundress.

This means—it is helpful to repeat it—to let ourselves burn with an impassioned love for Jesus Crucified, to irradiate with untiring zeal the ardour of charity, to arouse, almost contagiously, generous lay apostolic vocations, animating them all with the spirit of the “Greatest Love”.

Fidelity to our charism is once again fidelity to the Church.

The post-conciliar Magisterium, in fact, not only asks for our collaboration in the promotion of the laity, but approves of our commitment in the formation of the laity, directing those who wish to lead a life according to the character and purposes proper to the Institute⁹⁸ and to share with them the same apostolic spirituality.

With the new Code of Canon Law, the Church today offers to religious Institutes possibilities of aggregation which in the past has been unthinkable or reserved only to a few Orders.

It is enough to examine the contents of Can. 30 to become aware of the “new” that is being open to us:

“Associations whose members live in the world but share in the spirit of some religious institute, under the overall direction of the same institute and who lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection, are known as third orders or are called by some other suitable title.”

The Spirit, therefore, who with his life-giving breath always precedes every new creation, is levelling before us a “new” way of returning to the sources.

He urges us to draw out from our charism and from the sound tradition of the Institute “things both new and old”⁹⁹ and to re-evaluate today those prophetic insights that have led Magdalene and the first generations of Daughters of Charity to multiply apostles for the Kingdom.

The wealth of our charism is so vast that it cannot be exhausted neither by the Institute of the Daughters of Charity alone, nor by just a single expression of lay vocation which blossoms around it.

The awareness of this inexhaustible wealth has led the General Chapter to propose and encourage a vast “Canossian Lay Movement” which, drawing its life from the same source, can take up two essentially different forms:

- persons who have a friendly attitude towards the Institute
- persons united to the Institute by various bond, even by vows.

The first category includes the many persons who, in differing degrees, are attracted by the irradiating power of the apostolic charity of the Institute.

The bond which unites these people to the Institute is a bond of friendship, motivated by a more or less explicit feeling of kinship with the Canossian spirituality.

These people may be:

⁹⁷ R.L. 73

⁹⁸ cf can. 611,1

⁹⁹ Mt. 13:52

- friends, benefactors, persons without specific obligations of life and action who, occasionally, spontaneously or requested by us, help in some way the Institute and its works of charity;
- influential persons in the ecclesial and social field spiritually encouraged and animated by us to support apostolic works, especially catechetical, educational and promotional activities;
- families, in particular the parents of our Sisters and of the pupils of our schools and of our various activities, teachers, catechists, auxiliary personnels;
- lay people, youth and adults, involved in charitable and missionary groups.

In the second category we may include:

- individual lay persons
- lay persons united in associations of various types.
- individuals or groups who, moved interiorly by the Spirit, ask the Institute of the Daughters of Charity to participate in the Canossian charism according to their particular state in life, while living in the world with one or more dimensions of our apostolate.

These persons may, if they wish, bind themselves before God with one or more private vows, made in the hands of the Major Superior of the Organism.

With regard to this second category, the Chapter does not find it necessary to define in detail the specific modality of each and every possible form.

It is convinced that the specification of structures and regulations is a task to be taken into consideration in due time by the Government of the Institute, when the “Canossian Lay Movement” will be a living reality with many vocations.

The foremost task asked by the General Chapter is trustful and filial **prayer** raised up daily by our communities to the Father through the intercession of Mary most holy, our Mother and our Hope.

For it is only through the gift of the Spirit that we shall be able to revive the charism of Magdalene in those lay people whom God calls to participate in her prophetic insight.

With the trustful certainty of one who knows that “everything is possible for him who has faith”¹⁰⁰, the Chapter encourages all the Organisms to be creative in the Spirit and to experiment with evangelical daring some new form of Canossian lay commitment, in a constant dialogue of research and verification with the General Council.

The extraordinary creative capacity of Magdalene is for us a stimulus and an encouragement.

It does not seem impossible, for instance, to revive today the modality of the external Tertiaries of the Daughters of Charity: they may be young girls, widows, married women who, cultivating the devotion to our Sorrowful Mother, mature the desire of living a more authentic Christian life and who, while respecting the duties of their state, dedicate themselves to some form of collaboration in the apostolate of the Institute.

The modality of the aggregated Tertiaries is also possible all the more that the Code of Canon Law itself contemplates the possibility of a third order even for institutes like ours.

The documentation at our disposal shows ‘that persons willing to live the Canossian charism and spirituality, supporting one another fraternally as a group, living in the same house or remaining in their families are not lacking. They are persons eager to work for the Glory of God by means of a particular apostolic service and who bind themselves to the Institute through one or more vows (vow of apostolate, of chastity, of charity, etc.)

¹⁰⁰ Mk.9:23

In the same way it does not seem difficult to group in some “union” - as Magdalene used to do - the suffering, who offer all their pains with the purpose of comforting Mary at the foot of the Cross and of preventing sins. They could constitute themselves as “**Oblates of Magdalene**” and support the Institute and its apostolate with their prayer and precious sacrifice.

What matters, we wish to repeat once again, is to be courageous and zealous in charity, to be so enthusiastic of the wealth of our charism as to arouse even in others the desire to participate in it.

e. Tasks of the Organisms of the Institute

In undertaking any experiment, the General Chapter considers it suitable that the Organisms keep in mind some general directives, valid for the different cultural contexts and such that they guarantee the unity of direction amidst the diversity of concrete realizations.

Criteria of Vocational Discernment

We are invited to cultivate constantly the vocational dimension in our task of promotion of the laity.

Every person has received from the Spirit a particular vocation for a specific mission to fulfil in the Church.

It is our duty, therefore, to remain in docile listening to the Spirit to discover those whom He is calling to give a typically lay response to the charism which has manifested itself in Magdalene.

In asking us to take care of the various vocations whom the Spirit raises up among the laity, the Chapter offers also some criteria which allow us to discern the budding forth of lay Canonical vocations.

The most indicative “signs” of a lay vocation to serve the Church in the spirit of our Institute are:

- a great love for God and a great passion for souls united to a clear attraction for Jesus Crucified and for his Sorrowful Mother;
- love for the Church, spirit of prayer;
- generosity, spirit of sacrifice, simplicity;
- will to devote oneself to a form of apostolate in a style of humble service;
- explicit resolution to commit oneself to God, but in the secular state.

To carry out a serious vocational discernment it is necessary that the animators establish a cordial interpersonal relationship with those who are possibly called, so that they may know them both in the carrying out of their apostolic activities and in particular live-in experiences as well as their daily life.

We should not be afraid to propose, rather, as it is expressed in the Rule of life, we should “encourage forms of consecration to the apostolate in the world, according to the directives of the Church.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ R.L. art. 73

Directives for Formation

The discovering of lay vocations appeals to our responsibility as formators.

It is not enough to welcome with enthusiasm the persons called. It is necessary to follow them up to form them, to support and encourage them.

The Rule of Life, in reminding us of this duty, specifies also the ultimate objectives of the programme of formation.

“We train and support these people”, art. 73 already quoted says, “so that they may become witnesses of charity in the places where they live and work, collaborating with the Daughters of Charity.”

Even with regard to the formation of persons called to the apostolate in the world, our terms of reference are always the Magisterium of the Church and the special educative geniality of Magdalene, true Mother and Teacher of many Christian apostles.

We have already noticed elsewhere the surprising coincidence between the thought of the Council and that of our Foundress.

Looking at Magdalene for inspiration we already feel at one with the Church. In obedience to her we want to assure an integral human, Christian, apostolic formation to the persons who are called.

Our programme of formation of these lay vocations, moreover, cannot leave aside what the Second Vatican Council has decreed in “Apostolicam Actuositatem” nos. 28, 29, 30, 31, 32.

The General Chapter asks the Sisters who will be assigned by their respective Major Superiors to read the above mentioned conciliar directives.

It adds some special suggestions so that the formations, the responsibility of which we assume with these lay persons, will have a clear “Canossian” connotation.

From the pedagogical experience of Magdalene come to us the primacy and fundamental indications for our suggestions. Without this we “build the house on sand”¹⁰².

Our Mother entrusts to us as an educative “legacy” the formation of the heart.

She teaches us to centre the formation of future apostles on their personal encounter with Jesus, the Saviour and Redeemer of man, and so to lead them to be enkindled with such love for Him that they want to spread it in a gift of self that knows no measure.

Magdalene of Canossa imbued with the Spirit of Jesus Crucified, guides those who are called to burn with charity and zeal, and also to work in humility and simplicity only for the glory of God.

It is the style that characterizes the Canossian spirituality, and we are invited to hand it down also to those who want to commit themselves to work in the world as Canossian lay apostles, by being ourselves the first to live it in an authentic way.

It is again our duty to educate these persons to aim at a correct balance not only between the duties of their own state, and the apostolic activities, but also between prayer and action, so that they may gradually, as Don Libera used to suggest to Magdalene, come to “live in the world with the heart of a discalced (nun)”¹⁰³.

The General Chapter entrusts these suggestions to the Superiors of the Organisms, in order that with the Sisters who will be called to engage in this activity, they may formulate a complete educative

¹⁰² cf. Mt. 7:26

¹⁰³ Ep. 111/5 pg. 4165

project. This should foresee times, places and modalities, responding to the needs of the different lay vocations and of the individual Canossian contexts.

Outline

— Charismatic re-launching of laity in two directions:

- animation and promotion
- discernment and formation

— Promotion of laity in general:

renewal of mentality

new spirit

local church

school

fields of

fields of work

lay promotion

world of suffering

influential persons

modality of

catechesis to the young and adults

formation to ecclesial ministries

Spiritual exercises and retreats

lay promotion

“Seminars”

formation of lay teachers

involvement of lay people: lay voluntary service

the Daughters of Charity and the ecclesial movements

— Discernment and formation of Canossian lay vocations

- open to the new, following the footsteps of Magdalene and in fidelity to the Church
- Supporters of the Institute
- United to the Institute: single lay persons
 associative lay persons

— Tasks of the Organisms of the Institute:

- criteria of vocational discernment
- identification of vocational “signs”
- formative directives