



Spirituality, Gender, and the Self in Renaissance Italy: Angela Merici and the Company of St. Ursula (1474-1540)

Mazzonis Q

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Angela Merici (1474-1540), like other mystic women such as Catherine of Siena, was considered a "santa viva"--a living saint--by virtue of her mysticism, sacred knowledge, human qualities, and participation in civic life. However, Angela's originality and genius reside above all in the foundation of the Company of St. Ursula. It is there that she put her theology into practice and translated her spiritual ideas and experience into a defined model of religious life for women.

Spirituality, Gender, and the Self in Renaissance Italy places St. Angela Merici and her Company of St. Ursula in historical and religious context and examines them from a variety of perspectives: institutional, social, spiritual, and cultural. By analyzing Merici's spirituality, the book contributes to two fields of research that have been particularly rich and contentious: women's religious life and early modern Catholicism.

The Company of St. Ursula, long mistaken for a charitable or educational confraternity, proposed a form of consecration for women outside the convent, similar to that lived by late medieval women such as the beguines and the tertiaries. Merici's ideal of spiritual life--inward-looking, a-institutional, democratic, public, and transcendent--codified into a religious rule the "irregular" features of the female approach to the sacred. It offered women the possibility of living beyond the limits imposed on them. Furthermore, Merici's spirituality is compared with a vast array of religious practices promoted by important religious thinkers of her time, such as Battista da Crema, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and Ignatius Loyola.

The book seeks to understand the historical significance of spirituality by linking religious models with relevant aspects of Renaissance society and culture. In particular, the author examines the forms of relationship with God and perfection in relation to a Renaissance notion of the "self" and in connection with gender concepts. Methodologically, the application of historical, literary, cultural, and anthropological concepts to the subject leads to a rich cross-fertilization of theoretical approaches.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Querciolo Mazzonis is lecturer at the Università degli Studi di Siena.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"This is a book much broader than the story of Merici and her band of followers. It provides markers by which the student of women's history can compare many of the characteristics of other religious founders, other contemporary women and men in the culture, and the transitions in spiritual thought." -- *Magistra*

"Querciolo Mazzonis's book brings to life a detailed picture of the early Company of St. Ursula in Renaissance Italy; focusing upon the writings of Angela Merici and the documents relating to the first stages of Ursuline history.... The extensive bibliography testifies to the depth of the research undertaken for this study, and the result is a book which will be most useful to anyone interested in the history of the Ursulines but also, in a wider context, the history of the evolution of female spirituality before and after Trent." -- Dr. Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *History of Women Religious*

"This work, thus, is a significant and welcome addition to information regarding Merici's original conception of the role and purpose of her company in Brescian society.... Mazzonis's attempt to trace the evolution of premodern female spirituality is to be commended. Instead of retreating behind the "medieval" or "Renaissance" battle line, Mazzonis seeks to discover the medieval lineage of the Ursulines without undercutting the fact that the company was solidly a product of the early sixteenth-century Italian scene." -- *H-Net Reviews*

"Mazzonis provides an insightful interpretation of Merici and her innovative Company of St. Ursula, analyzed from multiple perspectives"

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