

## The General Chapter of 1956

(Generalate Archives: handwritten notes of S. Mary Abbott, SSND)

Editor's note regarding background. The General Chapter of 1956 held two major decisions for the chapter delegates: 1) the election of a general superior, 2) should the generalate move from Munich to Rome?

October 3, 1956 In summarizing some of the reasons for not moving the Generalate from Munich to Rome, sisters mentioned the following.

- To have a general headquarters with no motherhouse would be a somewhat lonely place; no young sisters entering, no educational ministry.
- To leave the founding motherhouse and the site of our foundress' burial would endanger our unity.
- Mother Almeda gave permission for property to be purchased in Rome. However, she did not necessarily mean that the move should take place soon.

In one of the few times the emotional tone of the meeting was mentioned, the secretary ended the day's minutes with a concluding note:

"With the impression that moving the generalate to Rome would be the most difficult decision of the chapter the morning session closed."

Monday, October 8, 1956 Minutes by S. Mary Abbott, SSND

His Eminence Cardinal Wendel opened the Election Day with Pontifical Mass in the school chapel. Then he assumed the chair in the chapter room. He clarified that he was ready to answer questions and to clarify doubts.

His Eminence asked the American Sisters their reasons for advocating that the generalate be moved to Rome.

M. Ambrosia (Roeklein) replied:

Since we are an international congregation it should contribute to unity if we had our generalate in an international city. We hope that then the congregation could spread even further because Rome is neutral and the center of the church.

- We think it is the wish of the Holy Father, [Pius XII] ... Because we are a congregation of pontifical right we think Rome is especially appropriate for the location of the generalate.

- We think we could carry on business with CRIS [Congregation for Religious Institutes] better in Rome and so questions which occur could be more speedily handled.
- We consider the next as far from the most important reason, but very many American bishops and priests wish and advise that we move the generalate to Rome.
- If advice is given about the danger of communism in Italy, I think that the same situation is possible in every other land.

His Eminence replied to some of the points immediately:

- Concerning the neutrality of Rome, you must not overlook the fact that the generalate would be not in the Vatican but in the city of Rome. Then he spoke to the essential ideas: Rome is and remains the heart of the church and the living bond with Rome is self-evident. But the heartbeat toward Rome and to the church began with the foundress who lived and worked in Munich, from here went out into the world to help all, who from here went home to God and is buried here. It seems to me to have great meaning and deep value for a congregation of Sisters when the way to Rome is from the heart of their mother.
- His Eminence gave an analogous example: a congregation which was founded in Aachen moved their motherhouse to Rome at the urging of their American Sisters. After a short time there was a sharp split in the congregation

M. Hilaria (Coleman) said she could not see where difficulty would come from, after we had lived 100 years in unity and peace.

- His Eminence saw in this a danger precisely that a hundred year tradition can be suddenly changed. He drew a comparison with a person's life. When a person 30 years old is operated on he recovers from the operation; if he is 100 years old, he dies from it.
- His Eminence pointed out another difficulty: the general superior who goes to Rome lives there in a certain isolation from the rest of the congregation. She no longer has the personal contact of the living community with the Sisters, novices and candidates as here. That brings a danger, especially in this unquiet time.

He summarized: The times are very confused and muddled as one can probably see in the New World, too. Therefore His Eminence sees it more beneficial and more fruitful for the congregation to strengthen as many bonds as possible to strive for peace rather

than to loosen bonds and arouse insecurity. Therefore His Eminence advises against a sudden change, an immediate move of the generalate to Rome.

His Eminence asked if someone wanted to speak further.

- M. Basil (Roeser) said that the congregation loses many vocations because the young girls don't want to enter a congregation whose generalate is in a foreign country. His Eminence sees in this a confirmation that in our times the national threatens to overcome the Catholic. If M. Theresa had thought in this way, there would be no School Sisters in America today. Although for the young congregation there was enough work in her homeland, she went to America to serve the Church. We are in danger in the church today that the Catholic is too little seen and national too much. It is exactly the task of Catholic education to work against this false attitude. Beyond that, it is certainly true that good vocations come from the Holy Spirit without respect of person and nation.

Because he understood from the various statements of the American Mothers and Sisters that from their viewpoint they were convinced that the only right thing to do was to move the generalate to Rome and that this was not the opinion of the European side, His Eminence advised: It is hard at the moment, practically impossible, to find a solution satisfactory to both sides. The new general superior, especially if she is an American, should first have experience here in the principal motherhouse, then she can decide whether the move is necessary and appropriate.

His Eminence thought it not possible to set a definite date.

- At this point M. Hilaria said: It is not only the American sisters who want the move. Many European Sisters are also for it. In a ballot, 45 of the 50 chapter sisters indicated their readiness to ask the new general superior to move her residence.
- At the surprised and questioning look of His Eminence, M. Erentrudis clarified the situation: "By this vote the unity of the congregation was seriously in question; that was the strong reason which we discussed for this decision. We said the greatest good for us must be unity.
- After urging from M. Callistina, M. Laurentine repeated what she had said in this difficult situation: "We submit ourselves in a spirit of faith to preserve unity. Under these conditions the vote referred to was taken."

His Eminence showed full understanding for the situation and suggested we make the final decision.

At this stage, M. Hilaria said that the American sisters with permission of the deceased superior general, M. Almeda, with the approval of CRIS (Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes) and with great sacrifice had bought a

generalate house in Rome in the hope that moving of the generalate to Rome would be decided at this general chapter.

His Eminence considers it his duty to advise and to ask the general chapter whether this decision should be left in the hands of the general superior alone. It seems best to put the question now when there is no general superior. Changes in the constitution are for the general chapter to decide and Rome to approve.

Then His Eminence conducted the election.

### **Wednesday, October 10, 1956**

The newly elected superior general, M. Ambrosia Roecklein, presided. She set as first item on the agenda is the passing of a resolution about Article 277, the residence of the superior general. It is still to be decided who makes this decision with the superior general.

After some remarks for clarification and the formulation of texts of the motions the vote was taken in writing and secretly.

Shall the general superior after listening to the generalate be able to determine her residence?

All voted NO

Shall the general superior with the consent of the generalate be able to determine her residence?

46 NO      4 YES

Shall the general chapter determine the permanent residence of the superior general?

47 YES      3 NO

Thereby the general chapter determined with an absolute majority that the current designation of Article 277 will be changed to the designation:

“The permanent residence of the superior general is determined by the general chapter.”

After a short pause M. Ambrosia then posed the question to the general chapter: Where shall the newly elected generalate have its residence, Munich or Rome?

M. Rotrudis asked again: Does the unity of the congregation depend on moving?

M. Ambrosia left the question unanswered.

M. Hilaria said again that the American half of the congregation saw in the approval of M. Almeda the purchase of land in Rome, the approval of M. Almeda for the move of the generalate to Rome. M. Bettina repeated what she had said earlier. Rev. Mother [Almeda] had for her part given the consent to purchase an appropriate piece of land, something which is very difficult in Rome. She did this in the sense of providing for the future when some day the generalate should be moved to Rome.

After longer remarks by M. Evangelista, M. Ambrosia repeated the question for voting in writing, secretly.

M. Ambrosia: Shall the generalate remain in Munich or be moved to Rome?

- And she added: "Each sister shall so vote that she can take responsibility before God and her conscience. Whatever the result we will accept it as God's will."

On 4 ballots Munich was written; on 46, Rome.

By this vote the general chapter decided by an absolute majority that the generalate be moved to Rome. M. Ambrosia announced the result and added: "Although we know that hearts are bleeding, we recognize this result as God's will."

The next topic concerned the dissolution of the American Commissariat. In brief remarks M. Basil (a member of the American Commissariat) spoke for the dissolution of the commissariat: all provinces should be alike, but delegates should be set up.

M. Ambrosia put the question for voting: "Shall the American Commissariat be dissolved?"

The vote was written and secret. 48 votes were for dissolution, 2 were against.

By this vote the general chapter determined the dissolution of the American general commissariat

So ends the minutes.