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For a Generative Animation, A reading based on the leadership experience of Maria D. Mazzarello and the early FMA

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The need to train ourselves in a leadership style in animation and governance, with a view to coordination for communion, is felt at various levels. There is increasing talk of authority and leadership in consecrated life and associative groups, knowing that there is a solid need to rediscover the meaning of this service in the context of witnessing to God, to brothers and sisters.

We will be inspired by the spiritual tradition of the FMA Institute, following in the footsteps of the Founders, particularly Mother Mazzarello and the first community in Mornese, even in their relationship with the students and ex-pupils.

1. What model and style of leadership? The leadership model follows the gospel of service, with its supreme model in Jesus Christ, who "came not to be served but to serve" (Mt 10:45). There is a growing need for leadership in the logic of service through love, with the awareness that the only authority recognized by Jesus is the authority of service, reciprocity, recognition, esteem, and inclusion of others, co-responsibility, and the only power is the power of the cross: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14).
2. Mother Mazzarello's leadership and the first community in Mornese. Maria Domenica Mazzarello, a simple, humble, and almost illiterate woman, had the gift of animating and governing. "This little, simple, poor peasant girl, who had only rudimentary training, soon demonstrates what is called a talent, one of the greatest talents: the talent of governance. This is a great thing, and she demonstrates that she possesses it to such an extent that a man like St. John Bosco, so profound in his knowledge of people and so intelligent and experienced in the governance of people and things, immediately recognizes this rare and precious talent and makes use of it" (Pius XI).

An icon: Mother Mazzarello bending down to bandage the feet of a girl suffering from frostbite (Felicina Gastini). "When suffering from frostbite in winter, she did not have the courage to take off her shoes when going to bed because her feet hurt. Mother Mazzarello, making her evening rounds in the dormitories, noticed it. She removed her shoes, picked her up, and carried her to the infirmary. She patiently treated, comforted, and took her to her bed. She loved to recount other anecdotes, pleased to highlight the goodness of the sisters who had welcomed her and surrounded her with care and affection, she, the poor child who had been deprived of her mother so early... She kept vivid ties of affection with her former educators. She still attended the oratory in Turin and gathered some companions around her. So that when the idea of the Past Pupils' union arose, thanks to her, the first nucleus was already prepared" (BENVENUTI T., A Loss, in *Unione* [January/February 1951]).

From this testimony of Mother Mazzarello, a leadership model emerges: "lowering oneself" and "bending down" to serve others. Indeed, the style of "lowering oneself" to "lift and serve" others and to generate life is the secret of the apostolic fruitfulness of Mother Mazzarello and the first community in Mornese.

Some characteristics of Mother Mazzarello's leadership and the first community in Mornese

- Spiritual and charismatic animation Mother Mazzarello was, above all, a spiritual person with a rich inner life, convinced of the primacy of the spiritual both in personal life and in building fraternal life.

She was aware that the more the love of God grows in hearts, the more hearts unite with each other. Her priority task was, therefore, spiritual, communal, and apostolic animation of the first community.

- She walks and enables others to walk, promoting individuals and walking and allowing others to walk means dealing with managing and accompanying communities, trusting and empowering people, favoring synodality, managing conflicts, and encouraging broader horizons. Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello were people of sound realism in dealing with others. At the center of everything is the person with their potential and positive resources, which must be valued and developed.
 - Witnessing life Being a credible witness to life is the hidden motivating secret of a leader. A leader attracts people not so much with words but primarily with the witness of life because there is correspondence between what they say and propose to others and what they live. It is a form of authority that is not imposed by the force of law but by the power of the heart, virtue, and testimony: "If I always set a good example for my sisters, things will go well. If I love Jesus with all my heart, I will also know how to make others love Him" (L 11,2). At other times, speaking to the FMA educators, she reminded them: "It is up to us to set a good example, to ensure that the daughters observe the Holy Rule, that they love and do not form special affections that would take them far from the Lord and the religious spirit" (L 35,2).
 - Capacity to take risks, make mistakes, and manage conflicts A leader is called to adopt a style of animation and governance to promote healthy and wise "risk-taking."
 - Continuous and ongoing formation Even a leader always needs conversion and ongoing formation, that is, to continually "construct-form" themselves to fully and authentically live the mission entrusted to them to acquire the necessary skills to carry out their mission. An attitude of "docility" is required to allow oneself to be continuously shaped and transformed. Mother Mazzarello expressed it in her language: "It is the hand of God that works in you" (L 66,2).
 - Ability to combine love and firmness In Mother Mazzarello's service of animation and governance, energy was harmonized with gentleness, goodness with firmness. "She made herself loved without frivolity and feared without oppressing or humiliating" (Enrichetta Sorbonne, in Summarium 279). "There was a maximum order in Mornese," Sister Ottavia Bussolino assures, "but the weight of authority was not felt: both because the Servant of God governed firmly, without harshness; and because the sisters were eager to advance in virtue and to fulfill the Mother's wishes" (Ottavia Bussolino, in Summarium 74).
 - Animation from a synodal perspective The relational and leadership style of the community created and animated by Maria Domenica Mazzarello is based on sharing, interpersonal relationships, reciprocity, and the involvement of all, with the awareness that the educational mission requires a collective effort: FMA, lay educators, community directors, students' families, and the girls themselves. Her way of animating the community has the character of a vigilant and benevolent presence, flexible and attentive to the needs of each one, just as in a family where coexistence is permeated by respect, gentleness, amiability, and joy.
3. Mother Mazzarello: promoter of other educational leadership. Leaders generate other leaders; this is how leadership becomes a shared community process and a real formative journey. Mother Mazzarello was able to promote and enhance the leadership talents of other sisters, contributing to preserving, developing, and expanding the charism to collaborators, benefactors, Past Pupils, and the families of young people, etc.
- Generative, educational, and authoritative leadership Maria Domenica Mazzarello embodies an "authoritative authority that acts in such a way as to enable others to continue to generate, to grow, and contributes to creating the conditions for this to happen so that others can go beyond the work of those who preceded them."

It is a matter of living in "sisterhood," "social friendship" as a mediation of love, involvement, responsibility, growth, enriching plurality, enhancing the best in others, enhancing the freedom of others, becoming companions on the journey, living the interdependence of gifts (the body of Christ) ...

The relational and leadership style inaugurated by Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello favored the emergence of other leading figures who enriched the charism of the Institute and contributed to creating an educational environment conducive to the integral growth of all. Many were recognized for their strong authority, an indispensable condition for adults to exercise effective educational leadership with young people.

Educational leadership resonates in various figures of the early community and the early generations of FMA; to give some examples: the network of relationships of Mother Emilia Mosca and Marina Coppa, as school councilors, with various school authorities, and Elisa Roncallo, especially with the oratorians, their families, and benefactors.

- The Past Pupils see the leadership of the FMA. The communicative-relational environment created in Mornese, based on generative, educational, and transformative animation of life, marked the students' lives. Many carried the relational method and model into their environment, energy, and mission in school or the family.

"In reality - as Piera Cavaglià reminds us in her well-documented study of the school in Nizza Monferrato - the majority of the students, although not choosing religious life, never ceased to consider the School as a constant reference point and an indispensable source of values and educational inspirations. This is demonstrated by the letter from Adele Laiolo Notando, Educational Director of Capriata D'Orba (Alessandria), who, recalling the period of her studies, wrote to the President of the Past Pupils' section of Nizza Monferrato: "And who could forget the sweet Sisters who made naughty little girls of us, model teachers, faithful wives, and sublime mothers in daily sacrifice? All the good in me, I owe to my Educators of Mornese and Nizza Monferrato, whose name I have engraved in my heart with that of Don Bosco and Mary Help of Christians, and from whose example I have in my heart the desire for daily acts of virtue. Oh! Let her repeat, she who has the good fortune to see the dear Sisters, that Adele Laiolo, today a happy wife, loves her Teachers, from whom she has learned the art of being happy and making others happy!"

Of particular interest in understanding the leadership relationship of teachers established between and with students are some articles written by the students on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the School's foundation (1904). They especially recall the seriousness of the school environment, the competence and authority of the teachers, the solemnity of the celebrations, the theaters, the walks, and the severe and serene atmosphere that was breathed, and of which they were all co-responsible.

It is interesting to note that already in 1881 in Nizza Monferrato, during the thirtieth anniversary of Mother Mazzarello's death, the "Past Pupils" of Mornese and Nizza participated in an act of gratitude and affection for the education they had received. They were the Past Pupils, former students who had directly known Mother Mazzarello.

These testimonies show an environment where interpersonal relationships are based on a family spirit, authority, and trust. They reflect transformative relationships experienced in Salesian environments, the proactive and missionary strength of an apostolic-educational communicative style in a family atmosphere, which former students then carried with them and sought to live and witness in their families and society according to their specific vocation in the Church.

Without wanting to conclude... From what emerges from ecclesial documents, there is currently a pressing need for leadership that is a generative and transformative presence. This is a task that "requires constant presence, capable of animating, proposing, remembering the reason for the existence of consecrated life [and associations], and helping the people entrusted to it for a continually renewed fidelity to the call of the Spirit" (RP 24).



By implementing the Preventive System, Maria Domenica, the first community in Mornese, and many Past Pupils exercised a genuine auctoritas (authority); they were women capable of fostering life in the mission. Authority does not express the idea of directive power but rather a true generative force, so it is necessary today to animate, govern, and educate future generations.

In fidelity to the charism and the Founders, the FMA and Past Pupils cannot conceive of themselves as isolated beings. They are called protagonists within the communities and the Association of Past Pupils, the Salesian Family, and the Church.

For Past Pupils, it is a matter of living generative leadership that brings together members, promotes unity and communion, recalls the reason for the Association's existence, and promotes the development of Salesian values on which the Association is based. Therefore, charismatic leadership based on values characterizes the Past Pupils as "Salesian."