

FMA AT THE ORIGINS OF OTHER RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES,
IN FORMATION AND GOVERNANCE
Sr. Piera Cavaglia

On this last Salesian Thursday of the year 2022, we open an unpublished page in the history of the Institute, a page that fragrances of synodality.

The horizon in which the research is located is twofold:

1. The ecclesial horizon, that is, the Synod in progress inter-congregationality is a precious experience of synodality in the perspective of the ecclesiology of communion.

In his address to the Chapter members on 22 October 2021, among other things, the Pope invited: "I encourage you to carry on the commitment to work in relationship with other Congregations, trying to live relationships of reciprocity and co-responsibility."

The appointment of Mother Yvonne Reungoat as President of USMI in 2018 is one of the eloquent signs, indeed the culmination of a path of effective collaboration between religious Congregations in the Church and in society. Today this is a sign of the times to be accepted and deciphered from the perspective of synodality.

2. Don Bosco's experience - He has built up a dense network of relationships with other religious institutes, with founders and foundresses. Not only did he influence others in terms of spirituality and educational method, but he went to the school of many teachers. On several occasions, he said, for example, that he had used the Constitutions of other religious institutes to draw up those of the Salesian Society.

The theme is divided into three parts:

1. In Mornese: an interesting synergy between religious institutes
2. Congregations accompanied by FMA
3. Collaborations sui generis (incorporations, mergers, aggregations)

1. IN MORNESE

It is interesting to note that the FMA, in the short period of time in which the first community lived in Mornese, established relationships with 4 religious institutes with different purposes:

a. **The Sisters of St. Anna of Providence** exercised a directive and formative role in the first community.

b. **The Missionary Daughters of Mary** founded by Don Giacinto Bianchi on February 11, 1875 "Before sending them [for Bethlehem] he considered it right and prudent to send them to Mornese (diocese of Acqui) for a period of immediate preparation together with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians."

c. **Congregation of the Sisters of Charity** (Sisters of Mary Child) In Mornese and Nizza, the 14 educational principles for teachers written by a religious sister of this Institute were used: Sister Giuseppa Rosa di Lovere (1814-1865).

d. Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis of Toulon - In 1878 two Tertiary Sisters of Toulon, who were in the orphanage of St. Cyr-sur-Mer asked Don Bosco to join the FMA.

2. CONGREGATIONS ACCOMPANIED BY FMA

Throughout history, it has been noted that, from 1925 until 2018, 20 religious Institutes asked the FMA, through the Holy See, for formative and / or government support.

Accompanied by an FMA or by several FMA, these Institutes:

7 in Asia: China (1), India (4), Thailand (2); 1 in Africa: Equatorial Guinea (1); 8 in Latin America: Brazil (3), Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela 4 in Italy.

14 Institutes are of diocesan right and 6 of pontifical right.

Six belong to groups of the Salesian Family.

With one exception of a Benedictine Vallombrosian Monastery (India), all the other Institutes have an apostolic purpose.

The type of accompaniment of the FMA

Generally, it is a formative accompaniment for future candidates especially when the Congregation is in its infancy. Some FMA, after having offered this type of formation, as novice mistresses, was appointed general superiors.

There is the case of a request for formation and guidance in situations of crisis or institutional turning points, as happened for the Consolata Sisters.

The FMA resided in other religious institutes from a few months up to 50 years! as is the case with the Handmaids Sisters of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, founded in Thailand by the Salesian Bishop Msgr. Gaetano Pasotti (Sister De Giorgio Luigia was Superior General for 20 years, then she remained as a formative reference point without any institutional role until her death).

Some FMA remained as Superiors General for six years, others for about 10 years, others for a maximum of 20 years.

Some Institutes asked the FMA for the possibility of a more in-depth cultural or even academic formation in Rome for some sisters at our Faculty or the Salesian University.

Conditions required of the FMA

- formative competence, animation skills, personal and religious integrity. The Mother General chooses reliable and capable sisters, good religious and also valid animators and formators;
- study and deepening of the charism of the Institute and its Rules in order to inform candidates to that spirit, guaranteeing fidelity to the charism;
- live in the Institute that you must accompany. This involves the indult of absence from the religious house granted by the Holy See for a three-year period and then it could be renewed.

3. COLLABORATIONS ON THE GENERIS

These are first of all incorporations or mergers of religious institutes, moreover a specific form of accompaniment of a diocesan religious institute in extinction, entrusted as a spiritual aggregation to

the FMA, and lastly to the foundation of a religious institute in India by an ex FMA (Sister Marykutty Puthuparambil 1937-2014)

Conclusion

A clear mutual enrichment

Helping someone is largely helping ourselves and therefore being shaped by life and experiences. Even when the experience of help was not satisfactory or even unsuccessful - as in some cases - the FMA returned to its own Institute richer not only with a new experience but with a new opportunity to consolidate its own vocational experience.

A journey of missionary synodality. There was an effective journey together in the reciprocity of collaboration and interaction between the sisters.

In the exchange of gifts and charisms shines the action of the Holy Spirit who gradually unifies the Church in communion and in the service of evangelization.

With realism, we recognize that this collaboration has perhaps sometimes involved moments of darkness and fatigue, but the experience of inter-congregationality has helped to develop in religious institutes, starting with the FMA, the attitudes of synodality: listening, discernment, obedience, and docility. to the Holy Spirit, fraternity, exchange of gifts, participation, openness to allow oneself to be enriched and to give with humility and discretion.

As St. Basil says: "Nothing is so much proper to human nature as needing one another". This is the case with religious institutes raised up by the Holy Spirit to enrich the Church and humanity with ever new lymph of hope.