

“CITIZENS OF THE WORLD.”
POINTS ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE FMA
TO THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG WOMEN¹

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The resources of woman for education

However possibly “the most unknown land in the history of formative processes,” as Egle Becchi affirms, the binomial education of women-education of society is a very fertile topic to be explored.² In 1870, the pedagogist Aristide Gabelli stated: “The renewal of a people begins with the education of women.”³ Indeed, the contribution that women can give to the community and to society, in general, is of indubitable importance.

In woman, says Eleonora Barbieri Masini, “there are resources that make her suitable for society in continuous and ever more rapid change.”⁴ Still, it seems that women have “very often different resources, in most cases preserved over time, which appears, on the one hand, more human and on the other more suitable for the society of the future. It is capable of being flexible in work and lifestyles, as well as doing different things at the same time. Furthermore, it does not necessarily prioritize the economic aspect of life, but rather the human one. For centuries she has taken care of children, the sick, the elderly, and also in the present society, in which these functions seem to have been delegated to the state and are exercised in a bureaucratic and aseptic way, she continues to take care of people. Furthermore, women are capable of solidarity in moments of emergency in a society, such as wars, conflicts, ecological disasters, or extreme poverty, capacities that are able to reconstruct in some way the social fabric that has been broken up by human and natural causes. The push for these forms of solidarity is almost always dictated by love for the little ones or the weak.”⁵

It is perhaps also for these reasons that it is plausible to assume a sort of harmony on the part of women. Because they are for a long time have been or are still marginalized by history or discriminated against, with those without a voice, with those who are unable to assert their rights and cannot have citizenship in society.

Starting from these assumptions, it is not surprising that the knowledge of the cultural and social work carried out by religious institutes, especially those dedicated to the education of women, is one of the chapters still to be written. Also for the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, founded by St John Bosco and St Mary Domenica Mazzarello for the education of young women from the working class, it must be recognized that reflection and study on the educational method are still in its infancy. It can certainly be said that the vitality of the works and educational practice is inversely proportional to such insights.

¹ The text is a summary and adaptation of a study published in LOPARCO Grazia – SPIGA Maria Teresa (a cura di), *Le Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice in Italia (1872-2010). Donne nell'educazione. Documentazione e saggi*, Roma, LAS 2011, 47-65.

² BECCHI Egle, *Storia dell'educazione*, Scandicci (FI), La Nuova Italia 1987, 22.

³ GABELLI Aristide, *L'Italia e l'istruzione femminile*, in *Nuova Antologia* 5(1870) vol. XV, 148.

⁴ BARBIERI MASINI Eleonora, *Il contributo della donna alla umanizzazione della cultura: analisi del presente e prospettive future*, in CAVAGLIÀ Piera – CHANG Hiang-Chu Ausilia – FARINA Marcella – ROSANNA Enrica (a cura di), *Donna e umanizzazione della cultura alle soglie del terzo millennio. La via dell'educazione. Atti del Convegno Internazionale e Interculturale promosso dalla Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione “Auxilium” Collevaenza, 1°-10 ottobre 1997*, Roma, LAS 1998, 53.

⁵ *L. cit*

In these brief reflections, in a limited and concise form, I will offer some ideas for reflecting on the contribution of the FMA to the education of young people over the 150 years of the life of the Institute. I will therefore use some data from the mission –the fruit of the choices with which the Preventive System was made concrete - intertwined with the orientations of the Founder and of the General Chapters, in the light of the ecclesial historical and cultural context.

To understand the style with which the FMA educate it is necessary to place their action within the horizon of the Christian pedagogical humanism of the Founder from which they are inspired in order to then bring out some aspects that throughout history characterize their commitment in favour of the education of new generations in constant attention to combining the “good Christian” with the “honest citizen.”

1. The foundation of the FMA Institute for the education of women

Writing to the Bishop of Acqui in August 1876 to obtain the diocesan approval of the FMA Institute founded four years earlier, Don Bosco explains its purpose: “To educate in Christian way girls who are not well-off, or poor and abandoned in order to lead them to morality, to science and religion under the direction of the sisters called the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.”⁶ The aim does not differ from the now consolidated practice of the saint: it is a question of educating young women to be good Christians and honest citizens by combining the Salesian educational system with female resources and with the needs of education for women and children, with an active presence especially in the field of education and evangelization. Convinced that the religious educators, in particular the co-founder Maria D. Mazzarello, will know how to elaborate the common charism in creative fidelity, Don Bosco does not care for an explicit female version of his Preventive System, rather, he follows the origins of the Institute with wisdom and discretion without imposing special educational methods for the formation of women.⁷

Reporting to the Holy See on the situation of the Pious Salesian Society on the occasion of the approval of the Constitutions of the same, Don Bosco also included the house in Mornese whose purpose is to do “for the poor girls what the Salesians do for the boys.”⁸ With an important margin of flexibility and creativity, the FMA respond to the necessary and urgent cultural and religious formation of the people and of women. In this way it is possible to offer girls not a generic female education program, as is used in other contemporary boarding schools run by religious sisters, but a real elementary school with an adjoining boarding school.⁹ This is not insignificant if we keep in mind that the dominant opinion at the end of the nineteenth century was that for women education - and by this we meant Christian formation - had to matter much more than education which on the contrary, it could even appear harmful because it risked favouring the vanity in the girls or inculcating in them the disgust of the humble and hidden life that must have been typical of them.¹⁰

If, due to the historical situation, it is not possible to speak of a real and proper exercise of citizenship by the first FMA, it is nevertheless legitimate to affirm that, precisely starting from the educational

⁶ MB XII 285.

⁷ Cf RUFFINATTO Piera, *La fedeltà allo “spirito di don Bosco” chiave interpretativa della metodologia educativa delle FMA*, in ID. – SÉÏDE (a cura di), *L’arte di educare nello stile del Sistema preventivo* 19-87

⁸ Cf *Relazione di don Bosco alla Santa Sede*, Torino 23-2-1874, in CAVAGLIÀ – COSTA Anna (a cura di), *Orme di vita tracce di futuro. Fonti e testimonianze sulla prima comunità delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (1870-1881)*, Roma, LAS 1996, doc. n. 35, 107.

⁹ Cf ROCCA, *Regolamenti di educandati e istituti religiosi in Italia dagli inizi dell’Ottocento al 1861*, in *Rivista di Scienze dell’Educazione* 36(1998)2, 161-342.

¹⁰ Cf VIGO Giovanni, *Gli italiani alla conquista del sapere*, in SOLDANI Simonetta – TURI Gabriele (a cura di), *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell’Italia contemporanea I. La nascita dello Stato nazionale*, Bologna, Il Mulino 1993, 51-55.

mission that characterizes them, they actively participated in the construction of the society, without prolonged over archaic melancholy. Being “free citizens” vis-à-vis the State, which Don Bosco wanted to legally guarantee to the FMA,¹¹ opens their action towards the commitment to embody a female model not under the banner of intimism and unfamiliarity, but of solidarity with the most disadvantaged working classes. In fact, although aware of the real difficulties inherent in the education of women, the religious educators are not renouncing and passive, but creative and enterprising, rooted in the territory and serving the territory, not prisoners of localism, in a singular dialectic between proximity and universality.

Inspired by the Founder’s preventive system, they too avoid a welfare model, favouring an intentionally educational one, which involves acting in favour of young people so that they can develop and improve their skills, become active and responsible protagonists of their growth and that of the people entrusted to them. This purpose is evident from the reading of the educational-didactic program of the houses of Mornese and Nizza.¹²

The purpose of the “house of education” is to “give moral and scientific teaching so that nothing remains to be desired for a young girl from an honest and Christian family.” This purpose is then divided into three areas: literary teaching, housework, and religious teaching. The woman who intends to train must not abandon the traditional task of housewife; however, in this formation, the moral and religious dimensions are harmoniously integrated with the cultural ones, necessary to be able to actively insert oneself in the family and in society. The aim is to help girls, generally from poor rural families with no culture, to switch more easily from dialect to Italian and to overcome forms of inhibition in dealing with the public.

The Institute, from its origins, is therefore clearly oriented towards promoting the condition of women through education. In this way, the FMA is inserted in the movement of pedagogical reformism of the century.

2. The FMA is present and active within a formative system in change

Italy in the first half of the twentieth century is strongly marked by significant changes in the economic, social, and political fields directly attributable to the increasingly marked presence of the popular masses on the scene of public life. The need for popular education previously felt above all as overcoming illiteracy, is now being transformed into a more organic effort to create a formative system suited to the needs of productive modernization, the prospects of gradual democratization of the state, and the preparation of new generations to be citizens.¹³

Popular education and technical and vocational schools are therefore considered by the liberal-democratic ruling class to be two of the most important tools for involving the poorer classes in the liberal political system and forming in them a new mentality based on resourcefulness and the ability to build a better future.¹⁴

Catholics, for their part, show particular attention to elementary and secondary schools by multiplying the establishment of schools, colleges, and professional education centres to ensure the preparation of a ruling class formed in a climate of full religious orthodoxy and capable of opposing

¹¹ Cf *Lettera a madre Enrichetta Dominici del 24-04-1871*, in CAVAGLIÀ – COSTA (a cura di), *Orme di vita*, doc. n. 3, 23-24.

¹² Cf *Regolamento per l’educandato di Mornese (1873) e Programma dell’educandato di Nizza Monferrato (1878)*, in *ivi* n. 24, 81-85; n. 95, 246-249; cf anche n. 98, 254-256.

¹³ Cf ROSSI Lino, *Cultura, istruzione e socialismo nell’età giolittiana*, Milano, Franco Angeli 1991, 147-157.

¹⁴ Cf DE FORT Giacomo, *La scuola elementare dall’Unità alla caduta del fascismo*, Bologna, Il Mulino 1996, 199-309.

the prevailing positivist and Masonic mentality that triumphs in public schools. Compared to the idea of female protagonism, the Catholic women's movement, unlike the secular and socialist one, which opposes the image of women mediated by the culture of the time, demonstrates a more conciliatory attitude whereby, rather than claiming rights, it thinks to make women grow from a cultural point of view, so as to promote in them the skills to achieve participation in social evolution that is constructive and relevant.¹⁵

On the horizon of these important movements, the Institute of the FMA is starting to expand rapidly both in Italy and abroad. The concern of educators to intervene in a timely manner in a preventive manner translates into the multiplication of *educational and promotional works*. Variety and innovation characterize this first part of history aimed at creating culture, mentality, customs in order to progressively promote the condition of women and the education of childhood. In particular, the interventions of the FMA are oriented to the opening of *schools of all types and levels*, for many years also municipal, of colleges and normal schools for the preparation of teachers, of schools for the learning of old and new professions, but also of non-formal education works such as *oratories*.

The need to reinterpret the preventive system in the evolving pedagogical landscape points towards an action innervated by ever greater pedagogical competence. In particular, thanks to the sensitivity and intelligence of the General Councillor for Schools, the Institute makes an important effort in order to form teachers and update those in service.

This attention is part of the education movement that characterized the first part of the twentieth century. Inside the school, conceived as a valid tool oriented to the training of new protagonists and architects of social change, the “teacher” is a figure charged with a strong ethical and symbolic meaning, she is entrusted with the young and that is the most precious resources of the nation. The first Normal school for the training of teachers was opened by the FMA in Nizza Monferrato and obtained government equalization on 7 June 1900. It was followed by the Normal Schools of Ali Marina (Messina) and Vallecrosia (Imperia) which obtained the same recognition in 1916 and 1917.

In addition to their commitment to school, the FMA is also sensitive to young immigrant workers in cities or in places suitable for the functioning of establishments to work in factories. The boarding schools were set up to offer them assistance and help according to a clear educational intention, despite some problematic aspects in the interpretation of the trade unions and socialists of the time.

The commitment to this type of recipient reveals the attention present in the Institute in the face of changing educational challenges and clear preventive intentionality. They are, in fact, particularly needy young people who the progressive demand for labour from factories, on the one hand, and female literacy on the other, had prompted them to leave their families and to undertake a life that was not without risks and dangers. The multiplication of strikes in industries, on the other hand, caused fear of easy conquests among girls without education, experience, trustworthy companies and in need of having educators alongside who would help them to enhance the work experience in order to their human and Christian growth.¹⁶

The opening of these works, therefore, is supported by an educational and not just a welfare purpose and is particularly appropriate for supporting, guiding, and training young women in this delicate social transition. In fact, in the Regulations for boarding schools published in 1913, it is pointed out that the acceptance of these works must be subordinated to the effective possibility of pursuing

¹⁵ Cf DAU NOVELLI Cecilia, *Società, Chiesa e Associazionismo femminile. L'Unione fra le donne cattoliche d'Italia (1902-1919)*, Roma, A.V.E. 1988, 6-7.

¹⁶ Cf LOPARCO, *Orientamenti e strategie* 134.

educational and not just welfare purposes, that is the religious and moral formation that allows preparing - as the Regulations – “excellent family daughters, honest and conscientious workers, worthy and honoured citizens.”¹⁷

The commitment of the FMA in favour of the girls who attend *the festive and weekday oratories*, conceived as real places of formation, should not be overlooked. While lay-freemason and socialist recreationists multiply, in fact, we see in the oratory the necessary educational institution capable of saving the youth threatened by many parts, an ideal environment to carry out the function of mediation and connection between the parish and society: “The Salesian oratories, urged by these social, cultural and ecclesial confusions, experience a first wide evolution, bringing to maturity the social dimension of the education imparted in it and its presence in the pre-political field. The conviction is gaining ground that in this way we are responding to the phenomenon of industrialization, urbanism, the increased circulation of the press, the development of the working-class world that had exacerbated the social problem and triggered the so-called “social question.”¹⁸ Finally, the same associations of past pupils and Co-operators are not born as associations of a devotional type but have an intrinsic purpose of social solidarity in an educational key.

In conclusion, the commitment of the FMA in this period, if on the one hand, it maintains the traditional purpose of preparing girls for family responsibilities through the teaching of women’s work, on the other hand, it is also enriched with new perspectives through the formation of teachers, to gradually enable young women to offer their contribution in the social sphere, attention to women from the working class through the establishment of boarding schools for workers and commitment to oratories. The flowering of works of a social nature is therefore articulated in correspondence with the changes taking place in society, moving between new religious demands, new social needs, and new educational expectations.

3. Between the two wars with adaptability and a spirit of solidarity

The war period reveals a deep furrow in Italian history by serving as a defining moment between a country still struggling with the transition to industrialization and modernization, and another that is changing politically, socially, and culturally through a process of rapid democratization.

The FMA live the period between the two wars demonstrating the ability to grasp emerging needs and to adapt to them by reorienting the aims of traditional works with flexibility, a sense of solidarity and “*Italianness*” through assistance to the wounded in about 30 military hospitals, to orphans of war, to the children of those recalled. A few years earlier, in Briga, during the works for the Simplon tunnel (1901-1906), the FMA took care of the workers’ children, while at the port of Naples, in 1911, they directed the “*Italica gens*” secretariat at the service of transoceanic immigrants. In the XI General

¹⁷ *Regolamenti pei Convitti diretti dalle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Torino, Tip. Silvestrelli e Cappelletto 1913, 3-4. I convitti registrano una veloce diffusione concentrandosi nelle aree di maggior industrializzazione del Paese. Nel 1922, cinquantesimo anniversario della fondazione, passano a 27 rispetto ai 19 del 1908. Cf ROSANNA, *Estensione e tipologia delle opere* 170.

¹⁸ RUFFINATTO, *Il contributo di don Michele Rua allo sviluppo degli oratori festivi delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in LOPARCO – ZIMNIAK (a cura di), *Don Michele Rua primo successore di don Bosco. Trattati di personalità, governo e opere (1888-1910)*. Atti del 5° Convegno Internazionale di Storia dell’Opera salesiana Torino, 28 ottobre – 1° novembre 2009, Roma, LAS 2010, 285.

¹⁸ Nel Capitolo generale del 1947 si illustrano le diverse modalità con cui le FMA hanno risposto alle problematiche sociali causate dalla guerra. Cf *Atti del Capitolo Generale XI dell’Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice tenutosi in Torino – Casa Generalizia dal 16 al 24 luglio 1947*, Torino, Istituto FMA 1947, 187-188.

¹⁸ Cf DAU NOVELLI Cecilia, *Sorelle d’Italia. Casalinghe, impiegate e militanti nel Novecento*, Roma, A.V.E. 1996, 60.

Chapter held in Turin in 1947 it is highlighted how, in the face of the disasters caused by the war, the FMA was able to give adequate and timely responses to poor and abandoned girls.¹⁹

At the end of the Second World War, the country is grappling with a long and difficult process of social and civil reconstruction within which women become more explicitly aware of the contribution they can offer to the nation. This reality is also recognized on a social and ecclesial level. What is being urged by many, that is, is the birth of a new type of Catholic female presence. An important contribution to this purpose is offered by the magisterium of Pope Pius XII who attempts to reconcile old and new female models. The pastoral care towards which the Church directs, in fact, on the one hand, seems to want to defend and protect women from modern society, on the other, however, taking into account the transformations of the mentality and female experience, it perceives the need and urgency to educate girls in the new tasks that society assigns to them. It is an active female model that portrays the modern young woman, courageous and cultured, ready to intervene in discussions, convinced of her ideas, and able to defend them.²⁰

The Institute of the FMA, starting from the XI General Chapter, reviews its educational work in the light of the new emerging perspectives towards women and reflects on how to adapt it practically to the needs of the time.²¹ Starting from these stimuli, the educators try to re-appropriate the “spirit of Don Bosco” in a new way through a renewed vitality of charitable and educational works and with a slow and laborious process of reflection and study to ensure their practice the necessary foundation theoretical and convergence of orientations.²²

Here the tension between the innovative thrusts and the traditional approach is evident. If generally, the religious-moral vision of the time prevails which also at the pedagogical level aims to form the woman as an “angel of the hearth,” soul of the house, mother and educator,²³ nevertheless the continuous attempts to reinterpret the Salesian method in a broader and more integral perspective. The 1953 *Professional Study Project*, for example, provides for the integral formation of young women by promoting the harmonious development of all its faculties, with particular attention to the development of cultural, technical, and practical dimensions.²⁴

Thanks to above all to the experience of Catholic associations, the woman is in fact by now on the way to participate, according to the teachings of the Church, “in associated life in order to exercise on it, in the right ways, that influence that Christian charity and social justice impose.”²⁵

¹⁹ Nel Capitolo generale del 1947 si illustrano le diverse modalità con cui le FMA hanno risposto alle problematiche sociali causate dalla guerra. Cf *Atti del Capitolo Generale XI dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice tenutosi in Torino – Casa Generalizia dal 16 al 24 luglio 1947*, Torino, Istituto FMA 1947, 187-188.

²⁰ Cf DAU NOVELLI Cecilia, *Sorelle d'Italia. Casalinghe, impiegate e militanti nel Novecento*, Roma, A.V.E. 1996, 60.

²¹ Il tema del Capitolo generale XI (1947) era appunto questo: «Come adeguare praticamente alle esigenze dell'ora presente le nostre attività di Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice e di S. Giovanni Bosco». Cf *Atti del Capitolo Generale XI 1947*.

²² A tale processo concorrono figure come don Pietro Ricaldone (1870-1951), IV successore di don Bosco, il quale elabora uno dei primi tentativi di sistematizzazione organica del metodo salesiano e promuove la formazione accademica degli educatori fondando il Pontificio Ateneo Salesiano e il Centro Catechistico Salesiano. Per le FMA invece è forte l'impronta lasciata nell'Istituto da Angela Vespa, Consigliera scolastica generale dal 1937 al 1955 e in seguito Superiora generale fino al 1969. Con le sue direttive ricche di competenza pedagogica e di sensibilità educativa, propose alle FMA nuove prospettive metodologiche promuovendo l'istituzione di case di formazione per neo-professe, prima fra tutte l'Istituto Internazionale di Pedagogia e Scienze Religiose con sede a Torino che poi si trasformò nella Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium.

²³ DAU NOVELLI, *Società, Chiesa e Associazionismo* 44.

²⁴ Cf *Organico. Piano di studi professionali. Formazione personale. Formazione alunne. Edizione completa per Case di formazione*, Torino, Istituto FMA 1953, 52.

²⁵ *Ivi* 94.

Strengthening the family institution and inserting the woman in the school as educator and teacher are therefore the two directives on which the educational project of the FMA moves, thus extending, in fact, participation in social and public life.

4. Towards new perspectives for the education of women

With the Second Vatican Council, a historic event of exceptional pastoral significance, the church rethinks its identity and mission in the light of a renewed ecclesiological and cultural dimension. The rediscovery of the church as a reality of communion in critical dialogue with the contemporary world orients Christian pedagogy towards a more explicit social dimension. Church-world relations are inspired by an image of a church in solidarity with humanity in which believers integrate themselves into social life in the sign of sharing, solidarity, and development.

The cultural aspirations of the contemporary man are considered and re-evaluated as the most appropriate ways to reach him with the message of salvation. Ideals such as desires for participation, a sense of co-responsibility, solidarity, personal decision, interiorization, religious freedom, but also the ecclesial mission of the laity, the role of women, attention to young people, the universal need for justice, of peace and development for all peoples are more considered and valued. In particular, Dau Novelli points out, with regard to the female question, with the Second Vatican Council we pass from the initiation to being a mother, to education to being a woman, that is, from education to a single function, to the formation of a person as a whole.²⁶

The conciliar perspective on the education of women, therefore, opens up new promotional and social requests that the FMA welcome by placing them in dialogue with the Preventive System. If previously the participation in the political and social life of women was seen almost as a “concession”, now it is understood as a right of the “woman subject” who, aware of being a person, requires to be considered as such. The formative paths offered by the FMA to the young people, like these new perspectives of openness, are therefore more respectful of their autonomy and favour in the girls the free choice in order to realize their own identity in a social perspective.²⁷

Furthermore, the progressive emergence of the human sciences focuses attention on the community issue of education. Hence the reconsideration of the subject's role in the educational process and its relationship with educators; the enhancement of the environment as an educational factor; community development of the educational project. The community dimension, already rich in itself at a humanizing level, becomes a proposition of alternative models of social organization. It, therefore, reveals itself in the nucleus that founds the social dimension of human coexistence, which is relationships. The first experience of responsible citizenship, in fact, is realized in the reciprocity of the relationships that characterize educational activity.

The FMA is convinced of the planetary resonance of what happens in the microcosm of daily actions, in particular, the humble action of education lived together, in the community. The religious community itself, as an educating community, is already an exercise of citizenship inspired by the evangelical model as an alternative to a social system based on competition through mutual empowerment, respect for the rhythms of each person, trust in others, appreciation of differences.

²⁶ Le ricadute educative di tale svolta vanno evidentemente nella direzione di una profonda modificazione nell'educazione alla famiglia in cui, da un'esclusiva responsabilità femminile, si passa al coinvolgimento maschile e femminile. Cf DAU NOVELLI, *L'educazione femminile*, in GALLI Norberto (a cura di), *L'educazione cristiana negli insegnamenti degli ultimi Pontefici. Da Pio XI a Giovanni Paolo II*, Milano, Vita e pensiero 1992, 22.

²⁷ Cf *Atti del Capitolo Generale XIV dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice tenutosi a Torino – Casa Generalizia dal 26 agosto al 17 settembre 1964*, Torino, Istituto FMA 1965.

The community is a microcosm where we are educated to think and live in a planetary dimension, in a spirit of solidarity. Within this horizon, the FMA allow themselves to be challenged by the question of leading the young women and, in dialogue, they identify one of the privileged tools for creating an education that adapts to young people in their individual differences while aiming to make them ready to assume their responsibilities. with regard to life, the family, society, capable of living the man-woman relationship and every relationship in a style of reciprocity and of implementing a critical and creative presence that contrasts with the standardizing tendencies.

5. Educate the “citizens of the world” in the perspective of the preventive system

The new situations that open up in the last part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium present a world subject to radical transformations. What unites the different socio-cultures, in fact, is the transition, the change, the complexity. Societies are marked by interdependence and globalization, phenomena that lead to the progressive overcoming of a nationalistic vision of citizenship, orienting the “global citizen” to overcome the rigid logic of a single culture and belonging. Above all, the phenomenon of interdependence that characterizes the world situation solicits more than in the past the responsibility of civil society and, in it, of citizens as active, critical, and proactive subjects, able to influence decisions concerning the possibility of human coexistence for everyone on the planet, even severely threatened by ecological instability.²⁸

The Institute of the FMA faces these changes with the renewed awareness that its educational mission in favour of the integral promotion of young people continues to be the privileged way for the regeneration and transformation of society. In fact, education from a preventive point of view, while responding to a need for justice and solidarity towards the young people themselves, is also the most adequate way to form in their conscience of responsible citizens and citizens, protagonists / and solidarity.²⁹ In fact, in the Preventive System, there is an instance of communication and solidarity capable of making the recipients active subjects and architects of social renewal. This implies helping them to free themselves from individualism, from the slavery of having, and from consumerism to operate in justice and in view of the common good. Interpersonal relationships are the first place where the person is educated in the values of solidarity, participation, responsibility. The educational perspectives present in the Preventive System are therefore a privileged tool for encouraging young people to mature as responsible and supportive citizens.³⁰

Solidarity relationships, in particular, accept the challenge of intercultural dialogue based on welcoming and respecting the other and his expressive modalities to whatever culture belongs. Therefore, educational relationships must also be oriented towards formation in interculturality, to try to understand the values, the perspectives of life, the behaviour of others, especially if they belong to races, cultures, languages, religions different from ours, without for this giving up their own, but showing collaborative openness. This confrontation within the community stimulates critical reflection on the type of service that is offered, on educational models, on projects, verifying them as a community, and enhancing the contribution of the laity, especially women and young people. In this way the FMA to “educate themselves” and educate them to respect each person in their particular identity, to openness to all cultures, to the world as a horizon of life, and attention to minorities.³¹

²⁸ Cf COLOMBO Antonia, *Lettera di convocazione del Capitolo Generale XXI*, in ID. *In comunione su strade di speranza. Circolari di Madre Antonia Colombo*, a cura di Franca De Vietro, Milano, Paoline 2009, 374.

²⁹ Cf *Atti del Capitolo Generale XIX. Roma 19 settembre – 17 novembre 1990*, Istituto FMA, Roma 1990, 34.

³⁰ Cf *ivi* 132-134.

³¹ Cf *Atti del Capitolo Generale XIX* 80-84.

An effective means, to form solidarity are the experiences of volunteering that the FMA promotes both through service and animation in the oratories-youth centers, in sport, in cultural activities, and through the foundation of the international youth volunteer association: VIDES.

Placing themselves in this perspective, Salesian educators open themselves to networking with other members of the Salesian Family, but also with ecclesial bodies, governmental and civil institutions, non-governmental organizations, and with those who are interested in education and work to collaborate in the construction of a new company. They also undertake to offer their critical and constructive contribution in the places where youth policies are developed, in the defense of human rights with actions aimed at restoring dignity to the poorest.

Starting from the nineties, in accompaniment with the reinterpretation of a woman's identity and her vocation by the ecclesial magisterium,³² the FMA also become more aware of the importance of the female condition and of how much the education of young women and the improvement of family and society are inextricably linked.³³ In fact, the presence in society of women fully aware of their specific role can effectively contribute to involving other women either by removing them from a possible marginal position or by helping them to be transforming elements of society through forms of greater collaboration and solidarity.³⁴ Therefore, new and stimulating perspectives open up for the education of young women: they must be educated to redefine their identities within a history marked by a stronger awareness of the value of the person in the man/woman duality and therefore to the awareness of to be bearers not only of new needs but also of new resources because they are conscious protagonists in the construction of a person-friendly society.

But not only that, they must be helped to situate themselves in the world with security, valid competence, and the ability to weave relationships of reciprocity; they must be trained in the healthy enhancement of corporeality and affectivity, to become aware of the meaning of history and the changes that have taken place in it; they must be initiated into a life of faith that is committed to social issues finally, they must be helped to become a critical conscience of social coexistence and to collaborate, sometimes silently, sometimes publicly, to transform it effectively.³⁵ In this historical turning point in which male and female identity is called into question, therefore, the FMA consciously make the choice of educating women by deepening the richness of the Salesian charism in its double expression, male and female, and placing of coeducation the lines of a project that aims to build a new humanity.

At the basis of this transformation lies the choice of the category of reciprocity as an interpretative criterion of personal identity, of the very relationship between people and cultures. Through it, in fact, it is possible to express and share the diversified wealth of being a man and being a woman.

The educational paths are therefore enriched with new goals such as training in realistic self-awareness in the assumption of one's own identity, in mature interpersonal relationships, in balanced conflict management, in strengthening the sense of collaboration and solidarity between the sexes

³² Cf GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Lettera apostolica Mulieris Dignitatem*, 15 agosto 1988, in *Enchiridion Vaticanum XI. Documenti ufficiali della Santa Sede*, Bologna, Dehoniane 1991, nn. 1206-1345.

³³ L'accentuazione della questione femminile e dei suoi risvolti educativi nell'Istituto delle FMA e nei documenti da esso elaborati emerge in particolare durante il Convegno "*Verso l'educazione della donna oggi*". Cf COLOMBO Antonia (a cura di), *Verso l'educazione della donna oggi. Atti del Convegno Internazionale promosso dalla Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione "Auxilium", Frascati, 1° - 15 agosto 1988*, Roma, LAS 1989.

³⁴ Cf *Atti del Capitolo Generale XIX* 10

³⁵ Cf *ivi* 18. 40. 63. Cf anche COLOMBO, *Lettera di convocazione del Capitolo Generale XXI*, in ID., *In comunione su strade di speranza* 374.

and in the more extensive social relationships; to design existence in the line of acceptance of cultural diversity and reciprocity.³⁶ Aware that the process of re-elaborating the female "self" is intimately linked to the male one, on a pedagogical level the relationship is considered from the perspective of coeducation. The discriminating element of the man-woman difference must therefore be translated into educational paths that enable one to pass from the simple coexistence of boys and girls to an interpersonal relationship between the sexes, oriented by dialogue and confrontation that favors the integral maturation of the person and open to the gift of self in love. Co-education therefore becomes both the goal of the educational process and the content of the relationship itself, as it tends to form love as a lifestyle that helps the person to develop the capacity for self-dominance, respect for oneself and for others, and self-giving dedication.³⁷

Finally, lately, education for citizenship is inscribed, for the FMA, in a vision and a culture of formation understood as development cooperation,³⁸ thus placing itself in the line of the personalist and community cultural orientation open to transcendence proposed by Benedict XVI and continued by Pope Francis above all in his encyclicals *Laudato si e Fratelli tutti* in which we commit ourselves, as the Pontiff hopes, to contribute to building a "human ecology", that is, an action aimed at integral human development.

6. "Being there" with Mary, for a culture of life

In the current reference paradigm of citizenship education, which is multidimensional, there is a tendency to form the global citizen with multiple identities and belonging (family, social, cultural, ethnic, professional). He must be able to exercise his rights first as a person and then as a citizen of a state. We, therefore, speak of education for global citizenship that leads to the personal awareness of being part of the world system, a modification of attitudes, and an increased sense of responsibility that derives from the awareness of interdependence, and from the need to plan a "sustainable future." The tasks of citizenship education are therefore that of training in critical thinking, strengthening the social bond and inclusion, encouraging participation, and opening up to plurality. What can the contribution of women be in this sense? And we, as educators, what sensitivities should we cultivate in ourselves and in the young women?

Today, the lifetimes of women extend to a plurality of contexts, first of all, the professional ones. To describe the living conditions of adult women today, the metaphor of patchwork is used, that is, the female ability to "put together" the different resources, to "give order and meaning" to the daily organization by implementing the "transfer" of work, of care in the professional sphere and giving extreme value to care as a professional resource. Many basic skills necessary for the labour market today, currently undergoing profound transformations, are close to the characteristics of the female "mode of production," and are "transversal skills" linked to the "care" action that women possess to an extent major and that Pope Francis placed at the heart of the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* as a paradigm of the human being (e.g. paying attention, the ability to recognize oneself and the other, to listen, to cooperate, to express oneself with a language appropriate etc.).

³⁶ Cf *Atti del Capitolo Generale XIX* 60-61.

³⁷ Cf *ivi* 62.

³⁸ Cf ISTITUTO FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE, *Cooperazione allo sviluppo. Orientamenti per l'Istituto Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Bologna, EMI 2006. Il documento fa riferimento ad una antropologia solidale ispirata all'umanesimo cristiano secondo cui lo sviluppo – che non si identifica con la crescita economica – è autentico quando si promuovono tutti gli uomini e le donne, i bambini e le bambine e tutte le dimensioni della persona umana. Cf PAOLO VI, Lettera enciclica *Populorum progressio* 26 marzo 1967, in *Enchiridion Vaticanum 2. Documenti ufficiali della Santa Sede 1963-1967*, Bologna, Dehoniane 1976¹⁰, 876-955, n. 14.

The dimension of care is a resource that can be used by all and transversal to both the work of women and that of men and presents itself as a possible common meeting ground. Education can and must accompany the development of these skills to help young people mature in terms of self-knowledge and relational skills, those related to knowing how to assume responsibility, planning, decision making, and negotiation.³⁹

The essence of care, says Luigina Mortari, consists in taking life to heart. Therefore, care is the true paradigmatic core of the planning of existence. In a neoliberal culture, which reduces everything to the market by destroying life, bringing attention back to care, which by its very essence cannot be subjected to the market, is an exercise of true supportive and inclusive citizenship. Above all, the essential primacy of care work is being touched by hand, especially in this time of the pandemic.

Also according to Mortari, care is the original way of being there because it means responding in the affirmative to being called to take life to heart. And this happens when we deal with being there in all the situations of its occurrence and in all situations we seek the best (with planning):

- Care of oneself, of one's own becoming in its most proper potential.
- Care for others, because to live is to live together.
- Care of nature, because we are part of the natural world.
- Care of the world, that is, of material works, institutions, and different contexts of life, because the human artificial structure is the context where our humanity takes shape.

Care is therefore in a privileged form the work that preserves life; a work that invents strategies and paths to make being there flourish (educational practices); to repair it (therapeutic practices) and to build the human environment (the administration practices of institutions and services). Finally, care is an action that takes place in all those gestures and words that build relationships by generating community.⁴⁰ This perspective is in full harmony with the Preventive System, at the center of which are placed educational actions aimed at the defense and promotion of integral life.

Our contribution today to preventive education can and must be to work together and in a network with the Salesian Family, ecclesial and civil institutions to help identify a new training model for women, in which a positive value is recognized for the characteristics and to the qualities of women, in particular their ability to patiently weave the network of relationships, relationships that are often based on solidarity with women.

Let us strive to give a positive remark, planning importance to the female knowledge, enhancing women's other knowledge not only at a regulatory and structural level but also in the educational tradition, towards different ways of interacting and relating: if it is true that man experiences the gesture of power as an individual affirmation to the point of aggression, it is necessary that women present care and protection activities as "signs of strength" that they have always expressed. This change cannot take place except through the contribution of all educational agencies because mechanisms of subjection can be revealed there, rules and habits experienced as normal can be changed there.⁴¹

³⁹ INTONTI Lucia, *Donne e dimensione della cura tra pubblico e privato. Una lettura pedagogica*, in http://rivista.edaforum.it/numero4/tesi_intonti.html

⁴⁰ Cf MORTARI Luigina, *La politica della cura. Prendere a cuore la vita*, Milano, Cortina 2021, 47-49. 65.

⁴¹ Cf ULIVIERI Simonetta, *Educare al femminile*, Pisa, ETS 1995, 34-36.

In GC XXIV the FMA publicly declared their active presence in the processes of building the new model of human development hoped for by Pope Francis: a culture of life and peace that promotes paths capable of educating and educating themselves (young and adults, together) to develop critical thinking capable of defending the value of culture at the service of life, the courage to denounce the violations that destroy the project of brotherhood inscribed in the vocation of the human family. The commitment to sustainable development, integral ecology, justice and peace, the communion of goods, human rights. (No. 16). And this in a feminine key, that is, by choosing the "presence" that generates life, like and with Mary.

The presence of Mary challenges our feminine identity and proposes an attitude of openness and active concern. Mary gets involved directly. As a woman, she is attentive to details and as a mother, she takes care of the happiness of others. She does not remain indifferent. You have the look of the whole and do not neglect the details. Her intercession is immediate, discreet, essential. She is the woman who, in Cana, foresees, prevents, and provides. She is a model for us of maternal concern in the implementation of the preventive system. It is a presence that builds together: creative fidelity to the charisma makes it possible to enhance the riches of intergenerational, intercultural, inter-congregational, inter-religious dialogue. She fosters a network of relationships that nourishes social fraternity.⁴²

The road is therefore open, it is up to us to follow it with courage and passion, aware of the responsibility that is given to us, that of being with and like Mary of Cana: helpers, mediators, missionaries who put one in contact with Jesus, who has filled our lives with joy.

⁴² ISTITUTO FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE, *Con Maria essere "presenza" che genera vita*. Atti del Capitolo generale XXIV, Roma, 12 settembre-24 ottobre 2021, Istituto FMA, nn. 5.7.9.10.14.