

# Towards Intimacy: Beyond Power Games and Control Needs

## A Salesian Reflection on Collaborative Ministry

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“If you force people to be the same”, a saying of the Maenka West African tribe runs, “the only way left for them to be different is to try to get on top of one another”.<sup>1</sup> The wisdom within the words finds resonance with most of our life experiences. Generations before us have handed down a system where by birthright some are given more power than others. It is a system that we are moving slowly away from. We are living in times when the old paradigm is shifting. We are seeking new ways to behave. In these new ways a major change is occurring with regard to how power is viewed and managed. As with any change and shift in attitude and behavior the letting go and moving on aspects of our journeying are the most difficult to negotiate. It is crucial however that as we attempt to negotiate this part of the journey we steer clear of the fallacy that “we are all the same”. To take this road is to fail to see the need to honor the differences and allow the richness of the coming together to emerge.

To a certain extent what follows here attempts to address one of the crucial issues emerging from the changing paradigm. As one writer expresses it, “globally we are moving from a mechanistic worldview to a systemic worldview”.<sup>2</sup> A systems view of the world is characterized by complexity, chaos, wholes, turbulence, irreversibility, second order change and synthesis. The key building blocks needed in such a paradigm are listed as both/and<sup>3</sup>, synthesis and reframing. The problem arises in letting go of the mechanistic view, characterized by simplicity, parts, stability, order, predictability and analysis. The two lists already point us to the tension inherent in the shift. Order, stability, predictability are all aspects of being in control of situations and people and modes of behavior being challenged by the newly emerging paradigm. This situation is nowhere more evident than in the field of leadership and management where men and women are being called on to welcome one

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Professor Magoroh Maruyama, Southern Illinois University, in “The Magic of Magoroh Maruyama,” *The Tarrytown Letter* (New York: Tarrytown House Executive Conference Center, Tarrytown, November 1992). Newsletter no longer published.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Jo Moran, “Leadership in this age of change,” *Human Development* 20, 3 (Fall 1999): 27.

<sup>3</sup> The “both/and” paradigm refers to the move away from dualistic thinking which sought to separate and divide towards a more global and inclusive thinking pattern.

another as "equals" and "partners", offering differing perspectives and gifts as never before. Team models of ministry are now the order of the day, and men and women are being challenged to collaborate on equal terms. It is a collaboration that requires a working "with", not simply a "working for". It is a collaboration that frees up the need for control and honors the differences so that truly men and women can become for one another life, love and hope.

### A Call from the Young

For those involved in education the need is even more pertinent. Ministering to the young of today who are indeed already tomorrow's leaders we are being called to model, inspire and witness to the "both/and" paradigm that is emerging. We are being called to do this not solely because the world view is changing, but also because the relational basis of the new world view requires a new and fresh perspective on male-female relationships.

Several weeks ago I listened to a young University student relate how his parent's marriage had broken down. With a great deal of simplicity he explained to me that "the relationship was no longer working". He shared how he had accompanied his father in particular through the process of accepting the situation. This young man's concurrence with what had occurred unnerved me a little. It left me pondering. Perhaps in this day and age there is a new cry coming from the hearts and lives of our young people. In an age marked by so many fragile male-female relationships perhaps the call and challenge coming to us from the young is to be adult women and men who relate easily and lovingly to one another for the good of those we serve. What an education that would be were we to take the challenge seriously.

Are we, then, as educators of the young being called to something perhaps now more keenly needed than at any other time in human history? We are being called to model and be with one another signs of God's love and God's wisdom in making us, male and female in God's image and likeness. Such a model and such becoming demands our collaboration, our working and being together, our being a sign of communion, not only sister to sister and brother to brother, but also sister to brother and brother to sister. At different moments in the unfolding human story different relationships emerge as important. The essential need for this male-female relationship is perhaps what is emerging from present day society.

Is this not already inherent in what we have as our charism? The nature of our being Salesian family certainly seems to be a vital one for today's world for so many reasons. Within the context of that family, as FMA and SDB and lay people we are being called to be signs of God's love, and we are being called to be this together. There is a desire for this unity, and for this unity to be more explicit than it has been in the past. Most of all, it is the young who have the desire "to see us together" and they are happy when this togetherness exists.

## Our Congregations Respond

Our congregations<sup>4</sup> have in their years of existence been at pains to respond to the differing needs of the young, especially of the poor and the most needy. Right from the outset new ventures were audaciously initiated so that the young could be reached, loved into wholeness and launched into the world. This is the hallmark of our origins. One little gem that comes to us directly from the chronicle of Fr. Barberis describes the preparations for the arrival of the first sisters in Turin.<sup>5</sup> One gleans the care and concern of Don Bosco and of his Salesians for the sisters. Coming through is also the educational reason for the presence of the sisters, "the need for a girls' school is great", Don Bosco says. The image of the two schools is one of distinct separation, even to the point of proposing to schedule the school day differently. The option for education was clearly an option that divided the sexes. The sisters are not to be seen, but for the best of reasons, their own need for space and privacy.

These were different times attempting to meet differing youth needs, especially that of education and the education of young women. Today we are

<sup>4</sup> In this context I am directing my comments to the members of the Salesian Society and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

<sup>5</sup> After supper the subject of the sisters came up in the conversation. They are about to establish a house in Turin right next to the Oratory. Father Sala as financial administrator is in charge of getting their house ready. Don Bosco is concerned and plied him with questions. Father Sala assured him:

"The house is practically ready for occupancy, and it turned out better than we expected at the outset."

"Will the sisters have complete privacy and be closed off from everybody?"

"Yes, totally. The only precaution that remains to be taken is to install opaque glazing in some of the windows of the boys' school building."

"Fine. It's a necessary precaution. Let those windows be walled up if necessary, but they should not lie open to the sisters' garden, absolutely not."

"We succeeded also in making the garden plot down the middle of the courtyard cheerful and beautiful. That interior court was truly horrid; but with that improvement anybody could live there. True, the rooms inside cannot be changed. The ceilings are little more than two meters high, but the rooms are clean now. With only two beds per room, there is a fair amount of space. Each bed has good strong curtains."

"What's the possibility of putting only one sister per room?"

"Only if we convert the attic under the roof." ...

"We must also find a way of gradually moving the boys' classes from their present location. It's not good for them to be near the sisters' place. We might begin by running the boys' classes on a different schedule as soon as the sisters begin their classes. The need for a school for girls is great, as there's nothing for them in the area. I am certain this new educational effort will produce good results."

Barberis, *Autograph Little Chronicle*, March 18, 1876, Notebook V. pp. 48-50, (FDBM 839 D10-12).

asked to respond to the needs of today. The letter written by both Don Juan Vecchi and Mother Antonia Colombo is a clear statement regarding the needs of our times.<sup>6</sup> This is the first time in the history of our Congregations that both the Rector Major and the Mother General have jointly written and signed a letter. This gives the joint statement a seriousness. It is a first, for not since the FMA congregation, in 1906<sup>7</sup> was no longer juridically dependent on the Salesians, has such a joint statement ever been made.

It is outstanding on two counts. Firstly it is a reflection on the situation regarding modern collaborative ministry. Such an expression never existed in Don Bosco's day. Such a challenge is in keeping with the thinking of Vatican II in broadening the concept of ministry and the place of women within the church. In this light this letter can be seen as the single greatest advance in applied theology within our congregations since Vatican II.

On another level the seriousness of the letter must not and indeed cannot be lost. Both congregational leaders, speaking out in unison, are inviting us to a deeper communion. This is an invitation which is also a direction. It is about envisioning the way ahead and invites us to share this vision. It is the way the congregations need to go. We have left the arena of "it's nice to do things together for the young" and have entered the period of "the way forward in our educational ministry to the young is together". The implications of the direction are many. It is the task of provincial and local community leaders in both congregations to understand the seriousness of this joint statement and be visionaries in continuing, re-enforcing and in some situations, seeking ways to initiate such "being together".

### Key Issues

What then in concrete terms does this challenge to collaborative ministry mean to us? What are the issues emerging that need to be addressed within both our congregations and within our hearts for this vital of aspects of our ministry to the young to be embodied in our lives? What are the theological reasons which ground such a challenge for us? How can we, through the opportunity being presented to us, move to deeper levels of awareness regarding our own masculine and feminine consciousness? How can we, ultimately so grow in intimacy as to bring to all our relationships God's abounding love and hope? If intimacy begins with self and manifests itself in a willingness to be

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<sup>6</sup> Juan Edmundo Vecchi, and Antonia Colombo, "For a Process of Collaboration," in *Acts of the General Council* 79.365 (Oct-Dec 1998): 93-98.

<sup>7</sup> This was at the orders of Rome. At its foundation the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians depended on the Rector Major precisely according to a concept of "collaborative ministry" peculiar to Don Bosco, namely that all branches of the founding "work in unison under one Rector Major". The order from Rome, however changed this and meant that for the period between 1906 and 1917 the FMA congregation was considered a diocesan congregation. Little contact was made between the sisters and the Salesians.

transparent, then only by being true to self can any of us stay open and be aware and present to others. Intimacy is indeed the way we give up control and power and allow ourselves to be transformed. Only through intimacy will our love move from being an energy taken from us to becoming an energy for others. Collaborative ministry is challenging us to intimacy, and intimacy in turn leads us to become more and more collaborative. In this way our collective energy becomes a vibrant experience of love for the young we serve.

### **Our Communion is Gift to the Church and the Young**

In our present times the effort to come together needs to be viewed as the "primary gift" that we as FMA and SDB have to offer to the church today. Perhaps we have not spent long enough reflecting on the impact our working together can have on us and on our young people. Indeed most young people today no longer live and act according to a concept of separation of the sexes. This is a contemporary sociological reality. Young people are already forming and living by a new and more collaborative style of community. For us to do less than this is to fail to meet their needs in the context of the style of community we model for them.

What is it then that stops our creativity and audacity in creating experiences of being together for the young? All of us know that this is right deep in our Salesian hearts. We know that the young need to see this happening. On the strength of the call of our congregational leaders we need to become pro-active and avoid missing any more golden opportunities for being together. This means letting go of our fear of losing power, our need to control, our prejudices and hurts from the past and focusing on the needs of the present and of the young at this present time. This primary gift for the young and the church is crying out to be offered. Any offering means letting go, giving up something. The giving up will involve for many of us, SDB and FMA alike, a beginning again, a beginning from now. In this new beginning a new creation event is asking to be released. It is ready to do something new within us and within our world today.

Actualizing, unifying and completing the common charism in a new creation.

What is in act then is something new. Such a new creation involves a deeper understanding of that which unites us: our common charism. When we allow ourselves to share at the level of our charism and of our spirituality, the depth and the richness arrived at is almost overwhelming. We need one another and can learn so much from one another.

This new creation will emerge from our understanding of who we are and how we are in the world and especially for the young. The journey of owning our identity as congregations has already been taken. The journey of apparent "separation" especially over the last years in the FMA congregation was a vital

pre-requisite making way for the new. The last years of "going it alone" was a necessary preparation for this moment in time.<sup>8</sup> In a sense we had to understand and own what is specifically "ours" in order to offer our part to the whole. The research and reflection on Mornese and the first sisters was necessary for us to be ready for mutuality. There has to be clarity around identity before a relationship of mutuality can be forged, and at the same time, as we enter more deeply into relationships of mutuality our sense of self grows.

What was happening around us gave us the necessary impetus. The rising importance of the place of women in society and in the church urged us to claim what is specifically ours, and in so doing to grow in self awareness. Now, having gained a greater sense of congregational self-esteem are we not ready to offer our gift, to complete the gift? To remain in a position of entrenchment with our gaze fixed however lovingly on the past on this issue is to risk missing yet another golden opportunity. It is to risk failing to respond to the call of today.

### **Called to Enhance and Advance Life's Capacity to Relate**

Our religious consecration calls us to be signs of unity. "We come into being" claims one writer, "because of a relational matrix... The purpose of our existence is to enhance and advance life's capacity to relate".<sup>9</sup> In the life of our congregations, community is a sign to the world of that unity which "comes from the Father and is manifested in the context of the one mission". As Salesian men and women we are called to enhance and advance the capacity of the young to relate. As we saw from the excerpt from the Barberis chronicle, at our origins the mission was one offered separately to boys and girls. We recall Don Bosco's anxiety that nothing get in the way of the new girls' school and his willingness to re-arrange the school schedule in order to facilitate the better running of that girls' school.

Today we are being called to the education of boys and girls together. Such a call moves us to seek ways of ministering together. These same boys and girls are experiencing the fragility and frequent failure of male and female relationships. In this context the call to us becomes clear. How can we, FMA and SDB live intensely and passionately our consecrated life choices so that the young might know and experience in us God's undying love for them and experience this intensely and passionately? How, indeed, can we do this together as Salesian women and men committed to the young?

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<sup>8</sup> The last two General Chapters of my own Congregation (FMA - 1990 and 1996) have attempted, I believe, to look at what is specifically ours and in doing so has given us a deeper sense of our specific contribution as Salesian women to the Salesian charism.

<sup>9</sup> Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy and Obedience* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 120.

### Acknowledging, Accepting and Embracing the Differences

This calls forth a deep level of collaboration. Paradoxically, this level of collaboration can only be reached by honoring and embracing the differences that exist among us. Experience has taught us that the differences are real. We are members of two different congregations, inspired by the same Spirit, fired by the same passion for the good of the young, but expressing that passion in different ways, just as men and women know, understand and approach life in different ways. Our processes of dealing with life are different. Our processes of relating are different. In the act of reverencing the differences we are already creating an experience of unity and enrichment.

At present I find myself attempting to work "collaboratively" in the community experience in Berkeley, California. I believe the project here to be "unique" to both FMA and SDB congregations. In the context of this experience I have been surprised at having to "re-visit and re-claim" my vocation as an FMA in a powerful way as I tried to live it out in what is a predominantly SDB context. The question surfaced quite quickly after my arrival: what is it that is different about my vocation, about my being a consecrated Salesian woman? It would have been so easy to become a female SDB in such a situation. Yet that would have been to deny something of my self and my response to the Lord who is calling me. It would also be a failure to give myself and my contribution to the whole.

### Acknowledging the Differences Disinterestedly

Once aware that we are indeed two different congregations seeking the same pastoral end we can begin to acknowledge in a "disinterested" way the differences. It needs to be a loving disinterestedness. Such disinterestedness is vital. Often it is "interest" that damages authentic relationships, creates dependency and therefore ascendancy or dominance. The word interest is used here in terms of having an agenda. Collaborative relationships of the kind we are moving towards require a kind of "holy disinterestedness".<sup>10</sup> The differences need also to be honored in a disinterested fashion so that the unity implicit in the relationship may emerge.

These differences seem to center around the following issues:

a. *the way we plan and carry out our projects*

For the most part men in the community context are task oriented expending the greatest amount of their energy on getting things done and moving on to the next task. Women on the other hand focus more on the

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<sup>10</sup> Francis de Sales used this term and was misunderstood in the use of it. His understanding was simply that true love, loves and true affection cannot create dependence.

experience of the task in hand. Process is important and the effect of the experience lasts much longer and needs longer to process.

b. *the way we handle power and authority*

It is said that our greatest weakness is our overplayed strength. At times I sense that the greatest strength we have at present, namely our "family spirit" is often overplayed and becomes an obstacle to real, open dialogue. In any team venture, and especially one carried out collaboratively, there needs to be clarity regarding roles. Team cannot function on family spirit alone. Once, however, roles have been clarified then we need to carry out our tasks as a family, one always ready to assist the other. If this is not present then the tasks become territorial space to be furiously possessed, controlled and defended. My perception is, in the light of collaborative experiences, that there is still much work to be done in this area of team collaboration, and much of this work would be enhanced by acknowledging the different ways we deal with power both individually and as communities of men and women.

c. *the way we handle information*

The different ways we treat information is one of the major causes of collaborative difficulties and tensions for us. For many of the Salesian men I have worked with there is the need to put the cards on the table and get the information out there. For us Salesian women we seem to hang on to the information until there is a certain consensus that it is the right moment. Hurts occur and many misunderstandings emerge when this difference is judged as failure to keep one's word or being overtly secretive. A middle ground must be attainable on this issue somewhere along the line.

d. *the way we form and sustain relationships in community*

Experience has taught me that we have a great deal to learn from one another with regard to friendship, closeness and intimacy. The first thing we need to learn is to agree on what we mean by those terms. Certainly as men and women we have different needs. We express, or fail to express those needs differently. One thing is certain for all of us, our needs are never fully met. At the same time we know in our hearts just how transforming love is, and how in loving one another sincerely we are constantly energized and expanded. Love empowers us. Our love for each other empowers us as nothing else can. Would it not be wonderful were we to empower one another with love and more love, so that together our young people would be loved into the fullness of their potential and each of us along with them? Perhaps we need to begin with one another in this sphere and in a spirit of disinterested intimacy.

Only when we can acknowledge these differences "disinterestedly", without letting them block the desire and search for collaboration can we truly begin to enter into relationships of real collaboration.

## A Male/Female Continuum

In terms of collaborative ministry we are still in transit. We have not arrived. We are still on the journey towards true and freeing acceptance of the differences. This is an intensely personal journey and an amazingly public one. As never before we are called today to be people who can live in some kind of unity the "either/or" and the "both/and" tensions with a fair degree of ease. It is a challenge. Little wonder that we give up so easily.

This idea of collaborative ministry being a process needing time and patience is a crucial one. At times we try to rush things and expect too much too soon. A book coming from the field of management and business maps out just such a process.<sup>11</sup> It has no explicit spiritual grounding. The book presents the whole issue of what is termed "gender equity" and how this is arrived at by men and women in terms of movement along a continuum. The concept of a continuum<sup>12</sup> is an interesting one. It points out that there are stages in the collaborative journey and that true collaboration comes about after a lengthy struggle to overcome what the book describes as the dominant/subordinate dynamic present in most male/female relationships. What is mapped out in the book is a journey in transformation.

There are three sections to this process of transformation according to the authors of the book. In the first section men assume entitlement and women act in a subordinate manner. This is a phase of the journey that none of us probably find ourselves in as we attempt to collaborate with one another. Our pastoral experiences will however resonate with elements of behavior outlined in the first phase. The adult relationships modeled for many of the young people we serve will contain many of the characteristics of this first phase. We are hopefully, somewhere within and even beyond the second phase. This is the phase of transition where men recognize that they do have limitations and are on a developmental journey and need others and women grow in their own sense of self and their connection with other women.

The authors of the book make the point that "no one moves through this continuum in a step-by-step, linear mode. We constantly cycle back and forth, depending on what day it is, how we are feeling, where we are, and with whom".<sup>13</sup> They go on to make an interesting distinction between the reasons men and women make backward or regressive movements.

Regression from the second phase back into the first happens for women when they feel there is no energy left to take on yet another man for his dominant ways, or alternatively, they have no power and need to stay in the job to survive. They become deferent, manipulative or compensate by

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<sup>11</sup> Carol Pierce, David Wagner, and Bill Page, *A Male/Female Continuum*, 2d expanded ed. (Laconia, N. H.: New Dynamics Publications, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> A continuum the dictionary tells us is "a continuous whole, quantity, or series; something whose parts cannot be separated or separately discerned".

<sup>13</sup> Pierce, Wagner and Page, *A Male/Female Continuum*, 38-39.

becoming so over-helpful they feed into the dominance of their male "boss" figure. There has to be work done by women to own their space and place in the relationship. This involves coming to awareness of their worth and of the contribution that they can give, and give in order to make a difference.

For men instead backward movement is accomplished by standing still. When men do not see themselves as growing, developing because they have no sense or little regard for their limitations then they fail to grow. Most of our institutional processes support male dominant behavior. Men, unaware of their dominant stance, begin running on automatic oblivious, to the impact this is having on those round them and maintaining the dominator stance and system. The challenge to change requires for men a conscious living. This can be draining and frightening in the initial stages. Much easier to stay with what has been and suffer the relapses. However the letting go of power and control is necessary for the relationship to become one of equality in reverencing the differences.

In the first section of the continuum, the dominant/subordinate section, role stereotyping ascribed one set of characteristics to femaleness and another to maleness. Such characteristics are the result of mindless behavior patterns we have allowed ourselves to be drawn into and often have little to do with our real gifts as individual men and women. In the transition towards collaboration we do the painful work of looking inside for lost parts of ourselves. This process will probably never end. The authors write,

in collegueship the emphasis is on exploring the balance and wholeness within each of us and with each other. The images of men as self-sufficient and women as dependent are gone. Healthy interdependence and caring for others are what is important. Both women and men raise process issues and keep us focused on the task. The process and the task are both acknowledged and considered integral in everything we do.<sup>14</sup>

The third section of interwoven possibilities and holistic envisioning can only be reached together. It is arrived at through divesting ourselves, both men and women, of the need for power "over" others and control. Power needs to become a "power for". For both men and women it requires consciously living from that place within ourselves where we believe in the value of one another and desire to have our power be used to empower those around us. Only at this stage can real complementarity and mutual enrichment come into being. Arriving at collegueship according to the authors remains a developmental and creative process. It is never a point of arrival, but always moving to deeper levels of understanding and collaboration.

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<sup>14</sup> Pierce, Wagner and Page, *A Male/Female Continuum*, 51.

**A New Impetus for our Salesian Story: Towards an FMA/SDB Continuum**

The model outlined above has been written with collaboration in business management in mind. Now this present reflection and discussion can be greatly enhanced by applying the "continuum" road map to our FMA and SDB collaboration. As Christian, religious and Salesian women and men we must bring to the male-female relationship at all levels of interaction a "distinct" hermeneutic of its significance and need. This is what lifts the relationship and the continuum above the managerial and the pragmatic. This is what brings it into the realm of Salesian collaboration.

All that has been said so far acknowledges that the young are asking us to model balance and wholeness for them, and to model together as men and women. It would seem that as we read the signs of the times by listening to the cries of the young we are being challenged to move into a more collaborative way as congregations, communities and individuals. Responding to the call of the God of love to make our world a better place through our educational service of the young is today a challenge to place our energy into forging new ways and new relationships of collaboration. It means engaging the power of love that we have within us and pouring out this love on those around us. It means envisioning, not simply doing projects together for and with the young. It points us towards finding more and more ways of envisioning with characteristic creativity new collaborative community projects for the young.

This is a task that is never finished. It asks us to take our relationships seriously. This requires us taking care of ourselves holistically (physically, mentally, psychically and spiritually). As we journey and journey more and more together the need to be clear and realistic about what we hope to do and who we want to be is more and more essential. Fears about losing our identity have to be overcome. Indeed it is as we move closer to one another that we also clarify our being who we are. This has been my personal experience. It is the strange paradox of acknowledging, appreciating and embracing the other.

The journey towards collaborative intimacy is one we need to get a little more excited about. Truly it is both an exceedingly private and exceedingly public task. If we can bring our enthusiasm to the task, then the excitement will break through and the fears regarding the complexities of this work will dissolve. This is a very Salesian journey to be undertaken in this new millennium. How wonderful it would be if those FMA and SDB who have moved along their collaborative journeys might be perceived, as we cross the threshold of the new millennium, as representing the normal, natural way to be and no longer the exception. These are the role models that the young and indeed all of us need today.

We are called today to journey together. We need to search for and discover a place where, beyond power games and control needs we can learn how to throw this gift of love and power in the good sense back and forth. In

this way our young people might indeed learn how to make all things new in their relatedness, and move around our world empowering others with their love, a love learnt at the school of collaboration. Such love challenges us to deep intimacy in all we do and are. Such intimacy fires our passion for God and for God's love for all. Such love emerges from hearts speaking to hearts about what matters most. Only in this way can we cast fear to the wind and move closer to one another and through each other to the young.