



# and you too **do** likewise

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*Sr. Carmela Paloschi*

## Services in seminaries

*Follow me and I will make of you fishers of men (Mk 1:16)*

The reverence our Saints had for priests and seminarians abounds in the literature of our Institute. A few hints will do. In a letter to Lucia Cismondi (22 June 1828) Bartolomea gives exact detail:

*The bearer of this letter is a good, intelligent seminarian who has a firm, earnest desire to dedicate his whole life and his studies to the good of his neighbour. With that end in view he is anxious to make the acquaintance of all persons who, in some way, could help him in such a beneficial task.*

Writing on behalf also of Vincenza, to don R. Barboglio, parish priest of Lovere, and to his vicar don A. Bosio, Bartolomea refers to them as «our superiors» and declares:

*... Our sole desire is to do the will of God as we recognize it in their decision since they are the persons God has given us to act on his behalf (vc II, 65).*

Concerning Gerosa (Scandella, VG 22-23), we read:

*Rector Gianbattista Verzi was quite familiar with Gerosa house; he held Caterina Gerosa in high regard as a person of great prudence, wisdom and serious-mindedness. If he had among his seminarians anyone absent-minded or melancholic, he used to send him to her, never doubting that if he passed through her hands, the boy would become sober, devout, cheerful and happy.*

And in the *Processes* in view of her beatification and canonization it is written:

*Her sense of respect towards priests was such that she often said: if I met a priest and an angel, I would have the priest pass first, because he gives commands to God himself (II, 233); she practised all sorts of deeds of charity such as helping several seminarians for their maintenance at the seminary (305); including poor seminarians: she paid for their clothes and the trip to the seminary etc. And her way of carrying it out was so humble that they were deeply edified: it was an effect not merely of good nature, but of love of God (316).*

Such are the roots of our simple service required, however, and institutionalized in so many episcopal seminaries of Italy.

### **EPISCOPAL SEMINARY, PAVIA - (1883-1952)<sup>1</sup>**

Mgr Agostini Riboldi, eminent professor of physics, mathematics and natural science at the seminary of Monza, became bishop of Pavia diocese (1877-1901). He devoted himself passionately to the study of philosophy and theology, and gave proof of exceptional zeal as pastor. With his particular interest in the formation of seminarians, he was the first one in Lombardy to ask for sisters at the seminary in order to co-ordinate service in the kitchen and the linen-room. His request took Sr. Teodolinda Nazari, superior general, by surprise: at first she said ‘no’ because it sounded unusual, not like other works of charity<sup>2</sup>. Later on, precisely on **2 August 1883**, she sent the first three sisters for service at Pavia seminary<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The seminary of Pavia is situated in the ancient monastery of Teodote, dating back to year 700; it is also called ‘of Pusterla’ because of its vicinity to a small doorway to the city. The monastery, of a Benedictine rule, stood till the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1865 the vicar general of the diocese, Mgr Vincenzo Gandini, purchased the monastery and had it restored; in 1867 the seminarians came to it.

<sup>2</sup> cf. PREVEDELLO M. A., *L’Istituto delle suore di carità*, Venezia, 1935, II, 36-37.

<sup>3</sup> Sr. Letizia Cima, Sr. Tomasina Casati, Sr. Ambrogia Schivardi.  
cf. Stato effettivo delle suore di carità delle sante B. Capitanio e V. Gerosa, year 1883, in AGSdC.

In the preserved series of letters there is no mention of the bishop's request nor of uneasiness or delay in mother Nazari's reply: probably there must have been dialogue and personal visits between the two. In fact, we are informed of likely events in a long letter written by the bishop addressing the rector of the seminary, Mgr Giovanni Pionni, dated «St Charles Borromeo day, 1883»; it is rich in relevant details and is valid as a *Regolamento* for persons concerned: sisters, servants and seminarians<sup>4</sup>. After stating that his aim was to define «the basic norms of assistance of the sisters of charity at the seminary, as agreed upon between himself and their reverend superior general; the bishop pointed out:

*Rev. mother Teodolinda Nazari had at first been unwilling to abide by my request to have her sisters sent to the place; later, when she had seriously considered it, she approved of it and, after briefly trying it out, she wrote to the superior here (to Sr. Letizia Cima, superior of the small community of the seminary) «The more I attend to it, the more I see in this new mission a service that is dear to the heart of Jesus: as an activity sanctified by him in Martha's house and praised by him when he defended Mary Magdalene, so lavish in her devotion to his person, through the words: let her do. Have courage, then, and a right intention too»...*

From this brief comment made by mother Nazari on John's text about the anointing at Bethany (12:1-8), the bishop draws up a *lectio divina* on the Gospel passage.

*Jesus came to Bethany: the three sisters did not come here as private persons but as brides of the Redeemer. [...]*

*There were three of them, and this number has a mystical significance because done in the spirit of their Rule, which they must all the time keep alive in themselves, and in perfect unity they have to form a real image of the Blessed Trinity, so as to please their most Holy Spouse ever more. [...]*

*Like Martha and Lazarus, they serve at table the future ministers of Christ... they make use of perfume, that is a delicate habitual touch of piety, meekness and a majestic, saintly cheerfulness that comes*

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<sup>4</sup> Regolamento, in AGSdC 236/H.

*from doing everything for love's sake, out of love for their heavenly Spouse, and so gaining vast merit even in completing little things. [...]*  
**The house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment:** *this may express another benefit deriving from having employed the sisters in the kitchen and at the linen-room of the seminary, that is: the edifying touch they give to the house, the seminarians, the servants. [...]*  
**The poor you always have with you:** *that's true; the sisters of charity are constituted for the poor, yet the poor they still have in the person of the servants they can help to become holy; they have them in these seminarians who are very poor; in other young men to whom the seminary can reach out its charity; they have the poor in the faithful of whom the seminarians will become fathers and comforters.*

This particular Rule is special, yet genuine because side by side with considerations of a spiritual kind there are suggestions and concrete norms of behaviour meant for the sisters, the seminarians, the superiors and employees at the seminary<sup>5</sup>. No Rule was ever thought up and drawn up the same manner and in this style!

Practical directions concerning the *sisters* say:

- *the sisters help in rendering life at the seminary smooth and easy to keep up and so they give no rise to complaining within the community; among the seminarians they promote order and cleanliness, which forms the splendour of priesthood; on this there often depends the best possible results in the ministry, achieving what is reasonable by simple means, with understanding and a holy intention;*
- *let the sisters have free time during the day (may be in turn) so that they can get on with deeds of piety without cutting down time of rest prescribed by their Rule;*

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<sup>5</sup> The long letter of the bishop to the rector of the seminary is not quoted in its original form but put in paragraphs in a manner that can be more easily followed, in PREVEDELLO M. A., *L'Istituto delle suore di carità*, Venezia, 1935, II, 37-42.

- *they are supposed to encourage seminarians and servants: through this they inspire reverence for the religious state: this will do good to their own Institute as well because by rendering it ever more visibly at work they will help in acquiring for itself new members and found new houses and by meriting the gratitude of the priests and more especially of the bishop they will deserve thanks and gain real support and whatever they may be in need of;*
- *when any of the sisters fall sick, her companions should at once be supplied with the best help the house can provide, and to relieve them of work which can be postponed;*
- *if, as time goes by, the number of seminarians becomes remarkably higher and with it also the service needed gets beyond what three sisters could meet, the superior general will be asked to provide another sister to help.*

Recommendation is made to the rector:

- *the main concern of the person in charge of the seminary is to manage affairs in such a way that the sisters can calmly, at their ease observe the rules and see to the duties of their Institute. The rooms where they dwell are always kept private; in the corridor attached to their rooms and up-and-down the stairs nobody else is allowed to pass at any time;*
- *the rector must have every regard for keeping up high concept of the sisters; that nothing lacks to the decorum of the religious dwelling and their food, a deep respect for their Institute and the gratitude he owes it for the service rendered to the seminary;*
- *let him take every care that the sisters do not overtax their strength nor do work meant for servants, like carrying heavy weights, cutting down and bringing in firewood, going to the scullery and tidying up superiors' rooms;*
- *the rector must see to it that the seminarians revere the sisters as brides of Jesus Christ;*
- *he must be extremely careful never to make remarks however small to sisters through the servants regarding kitchen or linen-room stuff;*
- *as the sisters have time prescribed for prayer and silence, for ordinary communications with the superior, if there are no special rea-*

*sons, the rector will try to choose some other time, so as to cooperate towards a perfect regard for the rules of their Institute;*

- *when a close relative of a sister pays a visit, particularly in the case of people who come rarely or from afar, let him see to it that duties of due hospitality are happily rendered;*
- *if the sisters' work is in any way found fault with, let the case be treated reasonably. Even Mary Magdalene's way of receiving Jesus was criticized.*

#### Concerning superiors,

- *let them consider that while they must never have to show familiarity with the sisters, they should however use with everyone manners of Christian respect and virtuous courtesy that are due to persons of an elevated state, as they are, being religious... they should show them all the respect for their state-in-life and gratitude for the service they render to the seminary;*
- *let these sisters who keep the linen of the tabernacle and of the altar absolutely clean and also accustom the seminarians to keep with decorum the 'house of God' particularly the little objects that are needed for Holy Mass and for the Eucharist, anticipate, in a way, the worship that these seminarians, as priests, will render to the real Body of Jesus Christ;*
- *let these sisters, coming to the oratory of the seminary during the time in which the seminarians are at school or studying, break the dead silence that remains around the holy tabernacle and fill in the gaps that remain in the adoration of Jesus-in-the-Sacrament.*

#### Concerning the seminarians,

- *entering the kitchen is absolutely forbidden... If by a rare chance it happens that a seminarian comes across the sisters, he should readily render them the Christian greeting: praised be Jesus Christ, without lingering with them, not even if someone may be a relative of a sister;*

- *in the person of the sisters let them always revere the brides of Jesus Christ.*

With regard to *servants* we read:

- *let the rector see to it that the servants be constantly respectful and obedient to the sisters: this is a basic point for the good functioning of the service and of the effectiveness of the sisters' assistance at the seminary: it would, of course, be impossible to have men-servants replaced by women servants;*
- *let no act of insubordination be tolerated but correction and punishment be meted out for any lack of respect; when it has to do with something habitual and of a serious nature, let the rector find an adequate way of avoiding the disorder and dismiss the servant or change him in time.*

Referring to the religious, the bishop calls them 'sisters' or 'nuns' indifferently though various details usually connected with cloistered nuns at times occur, for example:

*living rooms ever more cut off from the rooms of other residents... in the corridor leading to the rooms – stairs which no-one else is ever allowed to pass by... with no need to be on familiar terms with the sisters... they are not to linger with them, even if there is some relative among them...*

Such terms are more appropriate to cloistered nuns rather than a community of sisters of active life. Today, such conditions would be inconceivable. Considering the epoch and the bishop's wisdom and foresight, they create the complete weaving of this document.

However, other aspects there developed in the *Convenzione* (1883), a well-knit state-of-affairs, though it was then called *Norme*<sup>6</sup>:

*The superior general of the sisters of charity, encouraged by Mgr Riboldi, bishop of Pavia, agreed to put aside three sisters for the «azienda economica» of the seminary (No. 1).*

*The sisters had to attend to work in the linen-room, kitchen; the chapel's equipment and sacred vestments (No. 2).*

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<sup>6</sup> Convenzioni e Regolamenti: *Norme* of 2 August 1883, in AGSdC 236/H.

*Personnel attached depended on the sisters in the carrying out of the work to be done, and the sisters could communicate to them instructions and corrective measures, and, if needed, report insubordination to the vice-rector (No. 3).*

*The sisters' food was provided from the kitchen of the seminary according to what was prepared for the priests working there, and which corresponded to what the sisters were used to (No. 4).*

*The seminary allotted each one a hundred 'lire' as compensation for clothing... (No. 5).*

*The sisters used the chapel of the seminary to carry out what was prescribed by their Rules. Holy Mass for the sisters was celebrated before that of the community (No. 6).*

A bit surprising is the term «economic agency of the seminary» used, but the warmth of human relationships even on special occasions, easily emerges from the correspondence of the early years. As early as 21 August 1883, the superior general tells the bishop that it is better to entrust kitchen matters to Mr. Gervaso, because none of the sisters is adequately qualified for it, and so she thanks him for his favourable comments in their regard while they, in their turn, appreciate the bishop's «fatherly care». And at the end of the same year<sup>7</sup> the bishop writes to mother Nazari who already feels the benefit of the sisters' presence with regard to the 'servants' behaviour as well. As to the sisters: «they are keeping well, they are doing well, they are happy and everybody is happy to have them: men and Our Lord himself». And in his fatherly tone of voice he informs her that he has not allowed the sisters to fast because they have to work hard and keep up their energy, but since Sr. Letizia wants so much to observe it, he asks mother Nazari's advice on what he should do about it.

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<sup>7</sup> Letter dated 11.12.1883, Corrispondenza in AGSdC 236/H.



In December 1884 mother Nazari thanks the bishop for his visit and for his letters to her, she asks for a sample of the «Norms» drawn up by him, concerning the sisters, while she apologizing for daring to do so, just because she wishes «to serve him in the little that we can».

Another example of mother Nazari's graciousness (may be correspondence becomes rare or got lost?): on 18 April 1886 she tells the bishop that on her own she has decided that for the rest of the time that he remains bishop of Pavia she would exonerate the seminary from paying the fee to the sisters: he would instead receive «that little offering» in grateful acknowledgement of all his graciousness towards them.

After nearly a ten years' time (27.9.1894) the bishop writes from Chignolo Po to mother Nazari, greeting her also on behalf of the new superior, Sr. Ambrosina, now «surrendered herself to her new post». He mentions regarding sisters *mandatarie* and points that Sr. Serena of S. Gervasio does good work while Giuseppina of Sedriano is «slow and inexperienced» and so it would be better to place her somewhere else before the new school year starts. Surely, a familiar relationship of this type makes possible a healthy collaboration and a thorough sense of loyalty.

On the same lines is the figure of the new bishop, Mgr Francesco Ciceri (1901-1924), who in his letter dated 29.9.1905 expresses a personal evaluation, not altogether of a favourable type, of certain sisters and asks the superior general what she thinks. Don Luigi Valle, rector (7.10.1905) urges Mother to send the superior (Sr. Giuseppina Rocco) who could ensure well-ordered service from the sisters, and so make things smoother. In 1931, instead, rector Don Giovanni Pravedoni thanks the superior general for sending a *sorella mandataria* as a «substitute for the kind-hearted, sick Margherita»: she would surely be a good support for the superior (Sr. Andreina Riccaboni), a person who spares herself no trouble.

But even at that seminary, where the simple, discrete presence of the sisters had been sufficient in the beginning, it now called for an adequate preparation, skill, readiness for collaboration – all the more so since the religious community has increased

the number of its members in order to meet the request for a fuller service to the community of the seminary, made up of the seminarians and their superiors. This is attested by a glance at the statistic<sup>8</sup> quality of actual figures, which show the collaboration of 5 servants.

*community of the seminary*

1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
78 seminarians	87 seminarians	89 seminarians	89+9 priests	95+8 priests + 5 servants	83+11 priests + 5 servants	83+11 priests + 5 servants

1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951
65+12 priests + 5 servants	65+10 priests + 5 servants	50+12 priests + 4 servants	56+11 priests + 4 servants	56+11 priests + 4 servants	50+12 priests + 5 servants

*community of the sisters*

1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
4 sisters + 4 <i>mandatarie</i>	4 sisters + 4 <i>mandat.</i>	4 sisters + 4 <i>mandat.</i>	4 sisters + 4 <i>mandat.</i>	4 sisters + 4 <i>mandat.</i>	4 sisters + 4 <i>mandat.</i>	4 sisters + 4 <i>mandat.</i>

1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951
4 sisters + 4 <i>mandat.</i>	4 sisters + 4 <i>mandat.</i>	3 sisters + 3 <i>mandat.</i>	4 sisters + 3 <i>mandat.</i>	4 sisters + 2 <i>mandat.</i>	3 sisters + 1 <i>mandat.</i>

Mention of some friction among the sisters is confirmed by the superior Sr. Stefanina Jassi, who animates the community from 1945; in her letter of 13.2.1947 she thanks the superior general for the change «of the sister» (no name is given) and assures her that «now they're doing well, there is kindness and mutual help». The following year (11.1.1948) rector don Antonio Poma, while sharing the increased salary of the sisters, points out that three of them do not do any service because chronically ill, therefore, only five are needed for the service, considering that the number of seminarians has decreased.

<sup>8</sup> The *registro opere dell'Istituto* speaks of the presence of those looked after, starting from 1939; bearing the same date is therefore the «Annual Statistical data».

Later on, on several occasions, that is: to the vicar general of the seminary, to bishop Carlo Allorio and to the rector, mother A. Reali clearly says that<sup>9</sup> painful though it is, she has to call back the sisters as there are no more available. On **20 October 1952** the sisters left the seminary for good.

However, relations between the seminary and the sisters of Maria Bambina have always been cordial and held in high esteem. In fact, our community of «collegio San Giorgio», Pavia, a comprehensive school (infants, elementary, middle, gymnasium, lyceum, technical and linguistic institute) with about 50 sisters, has always received spiritual care from the professors of the bishop's seminary, duly promoted to important positions in the Church. In school year 1969-1970 the seminarians sat for the entrance examination to the various sections and were then regularly admitted to our *liceo-ginnasio* «S. Giorgio», thus constituting section B with the advantage of legal promotion at the end of the year.

By school year 1970-1971 Sr. Paola Gasperini, headmistress, was acknowledged as their headmistress as well, and two sisters shared the prescribed hours they had to give to the seminarians<sup>10</sup>.

The sisters were back at the seminary as qualified teachers and therefore a greater demanding service. Sr. Paola stayed on as teacher, headmistress, vice-headmistress and lastly as a secretary of the seminary till 1995. Characterizing our work remains a note of «giving free, seeking no other reward than the blessing of the Lord», as our foundress Bartolomea would say<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Letters dated 21.2.1949; 10.3.1949; 23.2.1951: Corrispondenza in AGSdC 236/H.

<sup>10</sup> cf Cronaca della comunità 1970; collaboration with diocesan seminar.

<sup>11</sup> C.F. 8.