

Sr. Carmela Paloschi

Services in seminaries

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

DIOCESAN SEMINARY OF TREVISO (1893-1990)

In the city of Treviso¹ the seminary had been instituted on the 11 November 1566 close to the presbytery of the Cathedral. In 1840, the former Dominican convent close to the church of St Nicolò had been purchased, where it is found to this day, after the successive extensions and adaptations. To confer it with prestige, between 1875 and 1884, canon Giuseppe Sarto, the future pope Pio X, had been its spiritual father.

After the second Vatican council, the seminary had passed through a period of crisis for about ten years; from 1975 it resumed, thanks also to the presence of our sisters. Today it is composed of four formative communities: middle school students and high school students specializing in education and classical studies and the students of the city high school specializing in scientific studies in the minor seminary; community of theology and vocational community (adult vocations) in the major seminary. There is also the community of priests, elderly or those occupied in various offices in the curia or professors².

The title of the city was conferred «as it was part of nine royal cities of Venice, constituted with the License I. R. in 1815 in the Lombardo-Veneto Kingdom» – Vienna, 7 April 1815 – the emperor of Austria Francesco I.

² cf. Brief historical record written by a sister in 1986.

The year 1893 was a year of intense correspondence between the seminary and our Generalate in Milan³. The bishop Giuseppe Apollonio with the letter dated 23 July expresses to the assistant general Sr. Paola Scotton⁴ the intention of entrusting to the «diligent care» of the sisters of charity the service of kitchen, storeroom, and linen room, and asks for five sisters and two *sorelle mandatarie*, to whom a helper would be given. The assistant responds saying that in the absence of Mother only problems «that are characterised by necessity and urgency» are handled, nevertheless, in principle the commitment to the new seminary is accepted. The bishop replies insisting that his request is connoted by 'necessity and urgency', and so he is waiting for the sisters immediately after the feast of Immaculate conception. He sends 100 *lire* for their journey and looks forward to the Agreement copy⁵.

Within the end of December, the community is complete: five sisters and seven *sorelle mandatarie*⁶. The first impression of the superior Sr. Ernesta Gallotti on the structure and on its interpersonal relations is positive; with great simplicity she writes to Mother:

The seminary is like a town, the sister's apartment can house about 15/20 persons, the chapel is welcoming and the benches have cushioned kneelers... there are stairs, halls, a vast kitchen garden, a courtyard fit for breeding of fowls (!!)... The bishop comes often

³ cf. Correspondence July-December 1893 in AGSdC.

Mother Clementina Lachmann died on 23 June; the new superior general, Sr. Angela Ghezzi, is elected in the following August and approved by the decree dated 20 September 1893.

In 1840 the Holy See had given the pontifical recognition, yet, in fact, the Institute was still managed as a diocesan Congregation and it depended on the bishop for the internal administration and expansion. With the Constitutions of 1896 the dependence on the bishop is limited to five points: consensus for new foundations, approval for the confessor, scrutiny of postulants and novices, presence at the general chapter.

In the Annual Statistical data of the Institute we find: Sr. Ernesta Galloti, superior (36 years), Arrigoni Sr. Rosa (26 years), Bonat Sr. Annunziata (26 years), Comini Sr. Gerolama (31 years), Ferrari Sr. Vincenza (54 years); Aggio Giuseppina, Appiani Assunta, Bianchi Maria, Colombini Giuseppa, Giacomelli Domenica, Marossi Maria, Pesenti Giovanna.

to meet us and is concerned and respectful with regard to us... We assure you that we shall not spare ourselves and we desire to fulfil perfectly the designs of God over this house⁷.

The sister's goodwill to commit themselves meets very soon with difficulties: it is true that Mgr Giuseppe Menegazzi, the archpriest of the Cathedral, ensured Mother of the excellent spirit of the sisters on 12 January 1894 but he also informs her that the work overload does not allow them to attend to their religious practices prescribed by the Rule and that their health may not resist for long such fatigue. His preoccupation is confirmed by the superior's letter – dated the same day and the year – who states how the sisters

neither have time to pray nor eat because of the work that keeps them occupied from morning 5.00 (rising at 4.45 a.m.) to evening up to 11.00 p.m. and... with six hours of rest they cannot last for long.

Therefore, the sisters and *sorelle mandatarie* are asked and Mother sends them as early as possible. With time some problems are resolved: in order to consent the sisters to dedicate themselves to prayer, Mother proposes them to anticipate some of the morning practices, in turn two or three sisters; the bishop handles the question of the lunch time (at 2 p.m. for the boarders and at 3 p.m. for the professors), unifying both groups for lunch at 1 p.m. The superior Sr. Rosa Amigoni assures Mother regarding the absolute separation between the sisters and the seminarians: food is given from the counter in order and silence, the sisters can go to the dormitories without being noticed, they go to the infirmary by a secret stairs, the sister nurse brings only the food and prepares the medicine for the sick clergy, who are assisted by lay or cleric nurses⁸.

Progressively the sisters increase in number up to a maximum of 20, but together with it increases also the number of services required: to those defined in the Agreement (kitchen, storeroom, linen room, furnishings and chapel linen) is added the two refectories, grinder, the bread oven, pasta maker, the scullery (older

⁷ Correspondence, letters 11 and 29 December 1893.

⁸ Correspondence, letters 1893-1894.

one was even without hot water), the washing and rinsing in the river Sile at the end of the property...⁹. Not the last, the increase in the number in the seminary is also to be kept in mind that reached up to 450 seminarians and 40 superiors, even though in the mean-time also the number of domestic helpers go from two to about 20¹⁰.

The most significant periods of the life of the seminary are above all three: the services to the sick and the wounded during the Great War (1915-1918); the assistance to Germans and Italians during the Second World War (1940-1945); the collaboration with the superiors of the seminary to overcome the institutional and individual crisis in the historical period between 1963-1980.

THE GREAT WAR (1915-1918)

Just after the war broke, on 24 May 1915, the seminary of Treviso is transformed into reserve hospital for the wounded and the sick of the battle front, offered to the prefect by the same bishop, Mgr Andrea Longhin (1904-1936). He, requested a little later by Sr. Prevedello, the Institute's historiographer, who was drafting the third volume of her work¹¹, sends to her a letter-report signed by him, dated 26 October 1934, on the activity of the sisters in that period, activity that he defines «work truly worthy of high commendation». The precious testimony of the bishop is the primary historical source, unique and authoritative, also for us; there we read that the sisters had been distributed in six groups: six for the

⁹ cf. PREVEDELLO M. A., *L'Istituto delle suore di carità*, Venezia, 1935, II, 258; Cronistoria del 1986.

¹⁰ cf. Annual Statistical data of the Institute and Register of works.

PREVEDELLO M. A., L'Istituto delle suore di carità fondato in Lovere dalle beate Bartolomea Capitanio e Vincenza Gerosa, Venezia, 1936, III, 106-107; 584-588.

medical and surgery departments, two for the linen room, two for the clothing storehouse, checking of clothing and sanitation, one for the supervision of the laundry service, for the kitchen... and the superior is at the head of all. The number of the inpatients went on increasing day after day, fluctuating in two and a half years that preceded the withdrawal at Caporetto around an average of 600, with a maximum of 700 and a minimum of 250, and the work of the sisters, always serene, prudent, assiduous, loving, never lacking, providing to all those in need and satisfying the wishes of various directors and the health officers.

The 'permission' or the authorization that the superior Sr. Rosa asks, almost pleading Mother on 6 August 1917, is very moving: in the month of June an additional lira per day was given to the sisters who were working in the hospital for the costly food supplies; the increase should go to the seminary that provides them everything, points out Sr. Rosa, but the rector has accepted only half of it. For this reason,

I ask you this charity: is it possible to give me permission to use the other 50 cents to give to the wounded some piece of bread in addition to that little the Government gives?... It is painful, heart breaking to see many poor men, who for years and months suffer in every way, now suffer hunger. Please do not refuse me this grace that I ask for so many unhappy poor hungry and full of needs...¹².

Mother naturally unites herself to the superior in the spirit of 'active charity' that characterizes us.

After the defeat at Caporetto the sick were not counted anymore... it was enough to have the bread, soup and meat ready for all those who arrived, and who, refreshed a little, were transferred elsewhere to leave the place for others who were arriving. Nor did the sisters show any preoccupation or dismay for this increase of work, happy in having in the storeroom still as much it was sufficient to lift up those poor, and grateful to the Providence that gave them such favourable occasion of doing good to the brethren.

¹² cf. Correspondence, in AGSdC.

The seminary, exposed to the German and Austrian aerial incursions, had to ask the professors to search for a place elsewhere and reduce the number of sisters. Among them six brave were kept back, including the superior, and the others according to the order of the provincial superior, Sr. Clementina Azzini, went to the military hospital of Rimini. The sisters who remained in the seminary took up two other services: the supply of wine and the host particles and the candles to the military priests of the Piave Zone and the surroundings of Treviso; besides disinfecting, washing and arranging the linen for soldiers returning dirty and ragged from the front... a work by no means pleasant, but they did it willingly. They did everything for everyone. To save themselves from the bombs they were taking refuge in an obscure and secluded angle of the basement, reduced to trenches of refuge also for other persons. On 5 January 1918 the superior writes to mother Ghezzi:

I do not hide from you that here the situation is always becoming more serious, more alarming. For almost two months that we have not seen our bedrooms; the bombing is continuous, and so we have to spend the days and nights in the underground of the seminary. In the midst of great panic, by the grace of the Lord we however enjoy good health, we are serene and totally surrendered in the fatherly hands of God and we are confident that he will continue to protect us, defend us and save us.

After the attacks in June, the sisters sent to Rimini had been called back and entrusted with the service of caring in a small hospital, opened by the prefecture of Treviso in the schools of Salvatronda for the women suffering from infectious diseases. After the victory over Piave, the seminary had been occupied by the field hospital n. 232 with about 400 patients including Italians and prisoners, wounded and sick, assisted by the sisters who remained. In February 1919, nine sisters were affected by black smallpox from the soldiers; they were taken immediately to the leprosy hospital outside the city according to the health officers' order. The isolation lasts from 25 February to 9 April; the only comfort was the fraternal visit and the loving words of the provincial. But one of

them, Sr. Giovanna Piazzani, dies at the age of 44 years on 1st March in very sad isolation, victim of her charity and was buried in the Treviso cemetery among the tombs of the soldiers¹³. In the Spring of that same year, 300 students and 23 professors were able to come back to the seminary and the family of the sisters was recomposed. They began with their usual calmness, as though the long break due to war had not happened, their ordinary work and

I have to declare – writes the bishop – that I have never happened to hear anyone recalling neither the travails suffered, nor the dangers fought and overcame, nor the good done, but satisfied for having worked for the Lord and from him alone expecting the reward¹⁴.

SECOND WORLD WAR (1940-1945)

The seminary in 1933 purchased a villa at Biadene of Montebelluna for the summer residence of the clergy during which the sisters' community divide: some at Treviso and others at Biadene. Thus up to 1940, when the villa is transformed into military hospital, first for the Germans and then for the Italian soldiers: the wounded arrived in hundreds by ambulance, in pitiful conditions (malnourished, mutilated, burned...); there were no doctors, medicines, even the bed sheets and the blankets were lacking, but the kindness and concern towards individual cases from the sisters' part gave them some relief. They in turn assisted them day and

¹³ cf Necrology, in AGSdC.

On 19 July 1919 the administrative council of the seminary records:

This council not unaware of the great services done at the seminary by rev. Sr.

Rosa Amigoni in the years of her service as superior, and of the special awards
got during the war for her wise and manifold attentions in favour of the
military hospital established here, and of the generous assistance offered to
His E. Mgr bishop and the priests who were inmates of the Institute during the
critical period of aerial bombardments, wishes to give her a tangible sign as
thanksgiving, and not knowing what could be pleasing to her, authorizes the
rector to offer her an equivalent modest sum which she can use as she wishes.
F. to G. Trabuchelli-Onisto, rector.
See Correspondence, in AGSdC.

night and remained there unmindful of themselves, until when they were substituted by the Dorotee sisters.

The academic year 1943-1944 goes on normally, but 7 April 1944 hundreds of four-engined aircrafts drop bombs many times on the Treviso city. By the order of Mgr Antonio Mantiero (1936-1956), there is a new exodus of the clergy and sisters to Trevignano, nursery school, while the provisions were coming from Vedelago, 13 kms far away. Some priests and a group of sisters remain in the seminary that becomes a centre and refuge for the whole city: a kitchen is open for more than thousand persons. Duty and charity prevail over the fright of bombs and the danger of death: bread and hot soup and a minimum of clothing had to be given to the mass of people who had lost everything.

Sr. Carolina Floran (in seminary from 1923 to 1990) – the rector Fr Severo Dalle Fratte will remember on the day of her funeral 31 December 1997 – was getting up in the night to prepare bread, was working during the day so that no one will lack the necessary... she remained in the seminary even during the tough years of the Second World War, when an American bombardment destroyed a greater part of the building... She was responsible for the storeroom, and was always among the first sisters who were in charge of the food for all superiors, the teachers and the students who were at that time were over hundreds. The treasurer was bringing home the collections from the parishes: wheat, maize, beans, potatoes and pumpkins. They had to select from among various foodstuffs to preserve them later in the store and have them available when needed 15.

On 28 December 1944 five air training target the seminary. All: superiors, sisters, helpers and poor people take refuge in the

¹⁵ cf. In memory, Personal folder, in AGSdC.

bell tower of the church of St Teonisto of the minor seminary; few minutes later other bombs were dropped continuously; the priests give absolution to those who were jammed in the place and immediately after the minor seminary is attacked. Everything falls, except the small bell tower: death passed close to the refugees. Coming out of the ruins, the situation presents its gravity: kitchen, linenroom, mill, store-house, pasta factory, oven, laundry, storeroom, refectories, dormitories are all destroyed. The church of the minor seminary is completely destroyed, the major chapel was wrecked, the cloisters demolished into three parts... and one victim: the good and faithful carpenter of the house, very gravely hit on the head by a shrapnel while he was running towards the door of shelter. The bishop gathers the sisters, and with tears in his eyes, tries to encourage them with words of faith and trust in the Lord, then with his car he accompanies some of them to their sisters stationed at Trevignano, who were anxious about them. But, he wanted that the assistance to the disaster victims to be continued, and so the others with generosity move to the «Collegio vescovile Pio X» to continue the work of charity.

The evening of 30 April 1945 the Liberation Committee requests the sisters to prepare pasta for 200 patriots who for days have been eating canned meat, and the sisters for an entire month, from morning to late night, dedicated themselves to feed many young men who were coming in groups. The Committee, later on, will praise the sacrificing spirit and patriotic love of the sisters.

Contemporaneously in the house there is the 'place of refreshment' for the repatriates: day and night the soldiers arrive exhausted by suffering, tired, with bleeding feet because of the long journey, in rags... and they receive food, medications, clothing. After a rest of some days, regaining strength to some extent, leave thanking and blessing the sisters¹⁶.

During this period, the presence of Sr. Benedetta Durigon in the seminary is very significant, who for more than 50 years (1928-

Of this long period of suffering and active charity of our sisters there is no correspondence; the only source of information is the historical record of the community, cf. AGSdC.

1947; 1950-1988) renders her service «in the obscure ordinariness», but with a joyous heart and «in a 'fidelity' renewed every morning in prayer and in work». And it is through the household works she «has guarded in the seminary the warmth of a family», affectionately close to the seminarians, and even more to the priests. While many young people did not know the sisters because of the reclusion, she almost knew all of them and followed them as it was possible for her, enjoyed their feasts, suffered their failures¹⁷.

Once the war ended, all the sisters re-enter the seminary, they settle down there as best as they can and take up the tasks for the advantage of the clergy, besides they start the «Refectory of charity» with about a thousand persons assisted daily. Even in this second section, characterized by episodes that could result without connections among them, the sisters' availability to respond to various emerging needs and their generous dedication in every assistance service towards any brother according to our founding charism catches our attention.

On 13 April 1948 to the city of Treviso «Golden medal of military valour» is conferred.

CRISIS AND RESUMPTION (1963-1980)

The reconstruction and restoration of the seminary gravely damaged, but above all the post-war cultural transition, with an effect at an international level, on each Country, on the very human psychology of individual and the mass, the doctrinal 'revolution' of the Church after the second Vatican council and the 'crisis' of the traditional faith in Europe have marked a hard period.

cf. Homily of the rector Fr Cleto Bedin during the funeral at Crespano del Grappa in 1992, personal folder, in AGSdC.

The seminary also experiences vocational crisis and the uncertainty of the search for new lines of pedagogy for the discernment, formation and accompaniment of the young aspirants to priest-hood. The sisters find themselves doubly involved and committed in the renewal: along the line of Institute-religious family and the line of Institute-Seminary. Already in 1957 the rector, Mgr Mariano Fantuzzo, wrote to mother C. Baldinucci:

The seminary is a great poor and, I would say almost, very sick surviving on charity and assisted with charity, and you are the angels and the true sisters of charity in your humble and precious work, of which, I am certain, your saints are pleased: thanks for having understood this and loving us in the Lord...¹⁸.

This period of crises is recorded in the statistical data which registers a slow but progressive decline of vocations to priesthood (420 in 1963; 131 in 1980)¹⁹ while the number of sisters is not modified accordingly (however the average of their age changes).

sem.	sup.	help.	sisters	mand.	sem.	sup.	help.	sisters	mand.	sem.	sup.	help.	sisters	mand.
1963					1964					1965				
420	40	30	10	3	440	40	30	10	3	430	38	20	9	3
1966					1967					1968				
440	40	27	8	3	395	30	20	9	3	369	35	10	9	3
1969					1970					1971				
340	33	14	12 suore*		337°		27	10*		380°		29	10*	
1972					1973					1974				
265°		27	8*		280°		32	8*		215°		— 11*		
1975					1976					1977				
212°			8*		168+24◆			7+2 •		150	25	25	7+2◆	
1978					1979					1980				
151+39*		22	8+2*		131+49*		22	8+	-2*	131	45	22	9+	-2*

^{*} from 1969 the 'mandatarie' are deemed equivalent to the sisters

 $^{^{\}circ}$ from 1970 the total number of seminarians and the superiors

[♦] theologians at Campocroce from 1976 to 1980

[♦] sisters at Campocroce from 1976 to 1980

¹⁸ Correspondence, letter dated 15 October 1957, in AGSdC.

¹⁹ cf. Register of Works - Annual Statistical data of the Institute, in AGSdC.

The experimentation of the new forms of life is actualized in an atmosphere of dispute that characterizes in a special way the scholastic institution. In 1976 a group of theologians are transferred ad experimentum to Campocroce of Mogliano with the professors and two sisters who, although having their service as cooks, spend together the moments of prayer, work and participate in the assemblies of sharing; they arrive here on Monday and return to Treviso on Saturday, bringing to the community the freshness of a new communitarian experience. Every service rendered becomes for the sisters an occasion for a fraternal encounter, and in some cases educational service of mediation with the formators of the young persons who easily confide in them their difficulty, confusion, preoccupations for the family: the simplicity of the sisters is often more efficacious than the dialogue with the superiors. They serve at table; the seminarians help in the washing, a sister accompanies the boys of the middle school, helping those who have difficulty in studies, and collaborates actively with the educational team²⁰. Even the service of the nurse sister, who is dedicated fulltime helping the seminarians and the elderly priests, is much appreciated.

The contact with the young people is constructive also for the sisters, as a direct apostolate that favours their growth on the human level, because it makes them more sensitive to the problems of others. Their mission is to be partakers like a mother of a family marked by availability, good example, attention to the needs of each young person, personal prayer, above all when someone manifests vocational crisis or leaves the seminary; the concern expands, then, also to the families of the seminarians. Such an opening is promoted and willed by mother C. Baldinucci, who had the privi-

²⁰ cf. Correspondence, letter dated 10 December 1984, in AGSdC.

lege of participating in the Council as listener and she was a stimulus and guide in the renewal for our Institute and other Congregations. Earlier the sisters' presence was efficacious only on the material level for a hidden manual service, now there is collaboration, active and effective participation, initiatives of common prayer, almost a friendly relation with a mutual respect with the seminarians and with the professors.

Always, anyhow, beyond and before the service, the sisters' community has carried out the fundamental duty of witnessing to religious life. Their presence has had a positive effect both while they worked in a hidden manner without any direct rapport with the boys and the priests, and when the Council has exhorted a journey of openness and renewal, with changes in the pedagogical and organizational structure of the seminary. On 10 October 1982, celebrating the 150° foundation of our Institute, the rector of the major seminary, Fr Cleto Bedin, to the question: why the sister in seminary? He answers:

The service of the sister in seminary is lived in humble and hidden fatigue, in discreet collaboration that does not hold the first place, in the goodness of a self-giving readily and continuously in all the hours of the day, in silent and daily prayer for all the necessity of the big family of the seminary... the sister in seminary in the day-to-day experience lives and testifies the great evangelical pages of holiness; she does not preach from the pulpit, but announces the Gospel with her life... In the light of the enlightened council's pedagogy, the formation of the seminarians is not complete if it lacks the feminine contribution. For this reason the sisters in the seminary slowly and naturally have come out from isolation of the kitchen and have shared the life of the educators and seminarians in all the moments of the day²¹.

In February 1985, close to the priestly ordination, the deacon Fr Mauro Motterlini writes to superior general:

I have personally enjoyed the works that the sisters of charity render, with generosity and intelligence, in the diocesan seminary

²¹ cf *La vita del popolo*, 14 November 1982, p. 9.

of Treviso... I wish therefore to tell you, whom the divine providence has placed as the first responsible of the Institute, my most sincere and grateful thanks. Thanks, because in the silent and daily witness of your daughters I have touched with my hands the joy and the pain of being always consecrated to the Lord. Thanks, because with discretion and humility the sisters of Maria Bambina know to 'support' in the moments of dreariness those who are preparing themselves to serve men in imitation of Christ. Thanks, because the direct closeness of women totally dedicated to more genuine and authentic charity is a comfort and hope for the future ministers themselves; the greatest among all the virtues! [...]

and, almost a prophecy of a possible change, follows

Even if tomorrow or later you wish to direct the works of the daughters of charity towards poorer and more miserable realities other than a seminary, in a greater fidelity to the spirit of your saints, please know that the time in which you have rendered service in the seminary of Treviso has not been useless nor outside of your charism. And the way in which you have witnessed was and is of consolation and encouragement for all who live and collaborate in the seminary²².

For this reason card. C. M. Martini in various circumstances will say: «It is very easy to teach than to educate, because to teach it is enough to know, while to educate it is necessary to be».

On 31 August 1989 the provincial superior, Sr. Silvia Telch, sends to Mother the request to suppress the community along with due reasons: advanced age of the sisters, precarious health condition of some, the impossibility of substituting with ideal persons²³,

²² cf. *In the Sign of Unity*, year XVI, n. 3, May-June, 1985.

To the superior Sr. Rosa Menazza in 1977 was conferred four triennium of governance, in an exceptional way, with the *nulla osta* of the Congregation for the religious.

the awareness of not being able to offer to the seminary a service adequate to the necessities and to the requests many times asked for and declined.

The service is terminated on **31 August 1990**, but on 12 February 1994 the Directive of the seminary celebrates 100 years of the presence of the sisters of Maria Bambina. The rector, Mgr Cleto Bedin, in the homily affirms:

The fraternity in the Lord, in the context of individualism, non communication and solitude of the modern world, becomes a great evangelical proclamation that shows the positivity, the beauty of being and living together in communion.

A plaque is kept in the ex-apartment of the community of our sisters in seminary at Treviso: IN MEMORY OF THE GENEROUS DEDICATION IN EVANGELICAL HUMILITY OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF THE SAINTS B. CAPITANIO AND V. GEROSA. THE SEMINARY WITH GRATITUDE. 1893-1993.