



and you too **do** likewise

Sr. Carmela Paloschi

Services in seminaries

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

MAJOR SEMINARY OF BERGAMO (1900-2005)

The seminary of Bergamo dates back to 1567 (the seventh one founded in Italy and in the world), opened in a house close to the church of «S. Pancrazio» in the city; in 1573 the so-called *seminarino*¹ was transferred near the houses annexed to the church of «S. Matteo», in the high city. In 1821 the seminary was constructed on the hill of «San Giovanni in Arena» and in 1966, during the episcopate of Mgr Giuseppe Piazzzi (1953-1963), the present seminary was built; inaugurated in 1967 by Mgr Clemente Gaddi (1963-1977), it was dedicated to pope John XXIII, who had been a student and a professor in that seminary².

During the 19th century in diverse circumstances, there were closures, conflicts or controversies because of professors and study paths; bishop Gaetano Camillo Guindani (1879-1904) renewed the

¹ The 'seminarino' is never abandoned; in 1825, «Pious evening schools for the young workers of the Bergamo high city» was opened; in 1890, it became the first inter-communitarian oratory.

² The building, as a small citadel, occupies a height of eight levels, connected by ring shaped tunnels; on the inside, on one side, there is a church, gym, theatre, the kitchens, the basement refectories, and on the other middle school, high school, the class rooms for beginners and for theology, the library.

plan of studies and suppressed the experience of ‘pifferi’³ priests. From the first half of the 20th century all the bishops had care for formation of clergy and they developed the pastoral care of vocations.

The historical archives of our Institute does not have the acts of the letters regarding the request for the sisters in the seminary; the list of the religious province of Bergamo notes:

Circumstances of the erection: *The community was erected by the superior general Sr. Angela Ghezzi following the proposal of bishop Mgr Gaetano Guindani for the domestic services in the diocesan seminary on 2 April 1900.*

The *Contract*, drawn up and signed by them⁴, specifies that

the Institute of the sisters of Charity grants 5 sisters and 5 ‘mandatarie’ for the domestic services of the seminary of Bergamo; these will attend to the running of the kitchen, the storeroom and the linen room and they will take care of the decor and linen of the church.

The terminology «the domestic services» pointed to the exclusive rapport of the sisters’ service with regard to the seminary, as a group of dependents, without valuing the witnessing presence of the consecrated persons; and above all, it was assured that their residence would be ‘separated’ from the rest of the seminary, as demanded by the Congregation for seminaries.

Letter of Sr. Raimonda Spina⁵ of 27 September 1900 informed Mother that 4 sisters and 5 *mandatarie* were in the seminary from

³ Pope Pio IX, due to a very strong vocational deficit, based on the maxim, «We are more in need of patient priests than intelligent priests», authorized the bishop of Bergamo Pierluigi Speranza (1854-1879) to introduce to priesthood some men of adult age, without any specific theological and dogmatic preparation. The first of these was Giovanni Piffari from whom this name was derived; some of them were worthy ministers, others did not even have vocation. cf. Carmelo Epis, *Il seminario di Bergamo: avviato nel Cinquecento, uno dei primi in Italia* - Ottobre 2017. *Approfondimento*.

⁴ cf. *Bergamo Seminario maggiore vescovile*, in AGSdC.

⁵ Sr. Raimonda was asked to begin the activity in seminary; from the *Annual Statistical data*, in fact, it results that superior of the community was Sr. Lodovica Conci (50 years), and that including her, the sisters were 5, all young: Altissimo Sr. Ester (26 yr.), Cefis Sr. Ester (21 yr.), Peregò Sr. Ottavia (21 yr.), Rizzonelli

17 February for cleaning and transfer of things, the renovation work being in process, that they were loved, they were content with little and that they will be happy; as regarding her, she asked to return to Corteolona (PV) before 1st October for the school reopening, while she hoped for good health of Sr. Lodovica, who was the superior and who worked till her strength permitted her⁶.

During the Great War, the seminary welcomed 500 soldiers returning back from the war front, wounded and sick, but the uneasiness of living together and the difficulty of reaching the high city led the military to be transferred to «Clementina»⁷ in the low city.

In the first half of the 20th century the bishops, in particular Mgr Giacomo Maria Radini Tedeschi (1905-1914) and Mgr Adriano Bernareggi (1932-1953), followed with attention the life of the seminary which they qualified in spiritual education, cultural formation and in discipline. The number of students increased so much that the bishop in 1934 had to construct for the younger ones of the middle school a seminary at **Clusone**: diocesan minor seminary «Villa Beato Gregorio Barbarigo», for which once again sisters were requested⁸.

The number of the clergy was very high (if we compare them to present numbers): in 1934 the middle school students at Clusone were 300 and the sisters 14, while in Bergamo seminary the semi-

Sr. Annunciata (35 yr.), and the *sorelle mandatarie* were 7, they too young: Bernasconi Marta (21 yr.), Chiapponi Elisabetta (24 yr.), Greco Virginia (28 yr.), Farina Orsola (25 yr.), Locatelli Maria (21 yr.), Tei Regina (26 yr.), Vitali Annunciata (24 yr.).

⁶ Due to heart illness, she died in the seminary on 23 October 1908; bishop G. M. Radini-Tedeschi had recently honoured her by his visit and mother A. Ghezzi, «composed a lavish eulogy of her religious virtues» to the dismayed sisters of the community, *Necrology*, pp. 336-337, in AGSdC.

⁷ cf. PREVEDELLO M. A., *L'Istituto delle suore di carità*, Venezia, 1935, II, 449-450. «Clementina», a rest home for elderly, later transferred to «Gleno», today called «Carisma», Fondazione S. Maria Ausiliatrice *Onlus*.

⁸ The imposing building is on the coast that goes down from Clusone to Rovetta. The community, constituted by 10 sisters and four *sorelle mandatarie*, settled there in November of the same year with the superior Sr. Luigina Piona. The *Contract*, signed on 31 July 1935 by mother A. Sterni and by bishop Mgr A. Bernareggi, was the same as that of the major seminary, for that reason the services were with regard to the kitchen, linen room, laundry and the care of the clothing of the chapel inside the seminary (AGSdC 646/C).

narians were 350 and the sisters 16, obviously helped by the house-boys for the heavy works.

Correspondence is not abundant nor interesting; the request for another sister or *sorella mandataria* for the service continued from the part of the bishop, while Mother proposed upgrading of the salary of the sisters and communicated to him the change of the superior. The only letter that is of certain importance is the *Promemoria regarding the nurse sisters of the seminary* that highlights the discussion between Mgr Ernesto Ruffini, secretary of the Congregation for seminaries, who, initially, was contrary to this service and praised the prudence of our Mother who contacted the Congregation for the religious seeking an elucidation; thereafter, following a dialogue with the bishop of Bergamo Mgr Adriano Bernareggi, came to a more convinced and elaborate conclusions⁹.

Mother in 1943 granted a nurse sister – Sr. Fiorenza Pessina of 68 years and 46 of religious profession – but only to the seminary of Clusone which hosted boys from 10 to 13 years and because the infirmary was close to the sisters' apartment. However, the presence of the religious sister should be discreet, humble, reserved, to avoid any kind of suspicion or doubt regarding relationships with the seminarians and priests.

The period of world war II was difficult, especially from 1943 to 1945, as it can be inferred from letters sent to Mother and the bimonthly magazine of the seminary¹⁰. In September 1943, the German army occupied one part of the seminary of Clusone and so preparatory level students were not admitted, that is the boys who were not able to complete the elementary school in their towns. In June 1944, the Italian government confiscates the seminary in order to host around 500 Libyan boys and girls; with difficulty, they managed to keep the rooms free for the professors and the sisters; in the month of August, the eighth-grade students enter the seminary at Bergamo during the holidays for a short period of school. Even

⁹ cf. Correspondence: Rome, 10.4.1942; Bergamo, 25.11.1942, in AGSdC 646/C.

¹⁰ cf. *Alere*, 1 January 1984, Seminario vescovile di Bergamo, *Ricordi e testimonianze*, in AGSdC 646/C.

here, the army of German Wehrmacht (armed forces) establishes itself; the freedom fighters were collected from the mountains of Val Brembana and shut up in some of the classrooms and were shot two or three days later. In November the seminarians were placed in this manner: the theologians at Bergamo, high school students in the girls orphanage at Alzano, students of *ginnasio* in the hostel «S. Defendente» at Romano Lombardo, the middle school students at Clusone. The rector Mgr Cesare Patelli wrote to Mother:

Certainly, a greater part of the merit of this arrangement and this restart belongs to the good Sisters of charity who at Bergamo, Romano, Alzano and at Clusone have done and continue to do many sacrifices to make the life of our community possible and do all they can unsparingly taking up many difficulties and privations. Only God can reward – and we pray Him for it whole-heartedly – so much goodness and generosity, but I feel dutiful and have the pleasure of expressing to you the satisfaction and profound gratitude from the part of the seminary and on my part for all the good that we have received in these difficult moments from this so praiseworthy Institute¹¹.

The best time of life in the Seminary is represented by the years 1945-1964, as indicated by the number of students and professors in the statistics.

Bergamo

1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954
287+16	198+13	138+8	242+12	240+12	220+12	257+14	260+14	273+14	270+14
1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
240+14	210+13	272+13	305+16	295+15	290+15	303+15	270+15	247+15	240+16

Clusone

1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954
340+23	340+25	235	248+23	275+25	235+25	240+24	238+25	240+25	240+25
1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
240+25	256+25	260+25	256+24	267+25	296+26	310+25	160+24	165+12	330+25

¹¹ cf. Correspondence, letter of 22 January 1945, in AGSdC.

The community of the sisters reach a maximum of 18 members in both the seminaries¹². The attention towards the seminary continues; when mother Costantina Balducci, in 1962, comes to know that the building work of the new major seminary has started, in order to respond better to the needs and to the formation of the young seminarians, wrote to bishop Mgr Clemente Gaddi:

...I know well that this wise, paternal initiative will be a great work, which will bring honour to your Excellence. Experiencing within me an ardent love for the Christian priesthood, both because the Holy Foundresses have given it to us as a precious heritage and also because we have to receive everything spiritually from priesthood, permit me, Excellence, that I too may give my contribution, a grain of 'sand', to the great construction by offering the salary of my sisters, who work in the seminary, until the work is finished. The littleness of the gift will be compensated by much prayer that, each day, is made for the priests in our Institute and, in particular, for those who are part of the teaching Church¹³.

In a note on the profile of the religious province of Bergamo we read that «once the construction was over the sisters continue their service freely», and in the community diary of the year 1971 it is said that the sisters offer their service without any compensation.

On 6th September 1972 the bishop communicates to mother A. Campanile the closing down of Clusone seminary for educative, formative and economic reasons, and he thanks her, also in the name of the rectors who had been witnesses to

the service worthy of all praise and for the active, generous, industrious, discreet sisters deserving the most vivid gratitude; they were

¹² cf. Statistics of the seminarians and priests, Register of works, Annual statistical data of the Institute, in AGSdC.

¹³ cf Correspondence, letter of 13.12.1962, in AGSdC.

concerned about the seminary, totally unselfish; someone is remembered almost with veneration, all with admiration... I place the sisters of Maria Bambina among the distinguished benefactors of the diocesan seminary... Obviously, the first thanks is to you, rev. mother general, for understanding our needs and for the great generosity.

Mother thanked the bishop for the message and for the expressions of esteem and benevolence towards the sisters who

had rendered their humble, but willing collaboration in favour of the young in formation¹⁴.

On 1st October 1972, the community was suppressed, the work was unified with the major seminary of Bergamo, where the three sisters of the seminary of Clusone were transferred¹⁵. With the reconstitution of one diocesan seminary «Giovanni XXIII», there was an increase in the number of seminarians and their superiors who were on an average of 300 persons. The sisters from 7 became 10-11 and their apostolic mission (not only service) was more precise and defined in various editions of the community project:

To help the growth of Christ in the future priest, after the example of the Virgin Mary, in joy, serenity, and availability to the service of seminarians (1979); we render willingly our collaboration, well aware that to Capitano, priests were very dear to her heart and that one priest, Fr Angelo Bosio, had been an indispensable support for the beginning of the Institute; we are at the service of the young seminarians working in silence and humility, because also through us the kingdom of God may spread and come soon (1981); essential, but the complete goal in 1985: To be a credible sign in the service of future ministers of the altar.

¹⁴ cf. Correspondence, letter of 14.09.1972, in AGSdC 646/C.

¹⁵ Sr. Gesuina Frosio (domestic offices), Sr. Elvira Lenarduzzi (cook), Sr. Ignazia Ratti (various services); cf. Statistical Data 1973.

In 1976 the administration, finding the basic expenses to be excessive in order to restore the building back to efficiency and to reactivate the life of the community, decided to alienate the immovable thus meeting the requests of the Municipality of Clusone that intended to buy it for the public schools of the Commercial Institute. The chapel «Barbarigo» began to be used as an auditorium for conferences and gatherings.

The formative-spiritual journey accomplished by the sisters is evident but, in the meantime, even the superiors of the seminary establish with them relationships of collaboration, for example as regards the programming of the year. The merit of such changes goes without doubt to the Vatican council II for the whole Church, and for the religious, to the special chapter of every single Institute.

In some circumstances, the relations were even 'familiar': every year the rector and the treasurer offered the sisters a school trip (Mantova, Pavia, Torino, Como, Venezia) or a pilgrimage (Madonna d'Oropa, Sacro Monte di Varallo, Madonna di Sombreno) or holidays with the seminarians at the seaside (Berzeggi-Savona), in mountains (Alto Adige, Zambra Alta), at the lake district (Perledo), while the deacons, in preparation for some feasts and in the month of May prayed with the sisters and offering them an 'exhortation'.

Meanwhile, the huge and modern building of the diocesan seminary «Giovanni XXIII» was chosen also as a place for meetings, international symposiums of scientific and religious character... and the sisters were always available for hospitality and service: the occasion increases their work, but also the possibility of personal relationships, cultural and spiritual enrichment.

In 1981 the treasurer Fr Gianni Bui expressed to the provincial Sr. Maria Teresa Bombelli gratitude for the great love and the total dedication of the sisters to the seminary, and the rector Fr Roberto Amadei (from 1991 bishop of Bergamo), wrote to Mother:

the seminary owe a deep gratitude for the generous and demanding work of the sisters who offer themselves with much self-abnegation, and to the Institute that, in spite of many urgent needs, continue to grant this precious gift.

In February 1992, Sr. Giulia Baiguera died in the infirmary «S. Bernardino», Bergamo, after a life spent at the service of the

seminary (1937-1938 at Clusone; 1938-1991 at Bergamo), the superiors, grateful for so much good received and for the service offered by her for a long time, wished to have her corpse in the seminary. The funeral ceremony was done here and it was a real triumph: all the students, from the little ones of the middle school to those of theology were present and have animated the liturgy. There were many sisters, other persons and 34 concelebrants... Truly the Lord exalts the humble! The rector Fr Gianni Carzaniga in the homily, highlighted Sr. Giulia's hidden work, a selfless work, done with much love and enriched with a prayer for the Church and the priests. The body was carried by the seminarians, then they accompanied her to Verolavecchia (BS), her place of origin¹⁶.

In 1999, considering the advanced age of the sisters and the difficulty to find a superior «fitting to take up such a responsibility, in such a delicate and not so easy environment», the provincial superior Sr. Anna Enrica dall'Oglio, having received the general council's approval, proceeded to the suppression of the community to carry out the plan of *ridimensionamento*. However, our dedication in the seminary continued in the modality of 'off-shoot', first dependent on Bergamo «casa provincializia» (21 September 1999), then on Bergamo «Scuola Capitanio» (9 September 2002), and finally on Bergamo «Istituto S. Chiara» (28 August 2004). In 2000, at the recurrence of the centenary of our presence in seminary, the rector Mgr Gianni Carzaniga wrote:

Hundred candles one only light. This event becomes part of the history of the long life of the seminary and opens the heart to gratitude for these humble women at the service of the Kingdom. Laborious and silent, dynamic and attentive, our sisters carry out their irreplaceable duty in seminary with such spontaneity that they go unnoticed, so much they are 'part' of the environment... For hundred years the small 'army' of two hundred and six sisters who succeeded one after another behind the walls of the seminary of Bergamo and Clusone has testified with intensity and passion what

¹⁶ cf. Community Diary 1992, in AGSdC.

It was followed by «*In ricordo di una silenziosa presenza*» (In memory of a silent presence) with a brief profile of each sister and, at the conclusion, Fr Alberto Monaci affirmed:

If I were to describe in a concise manner the sign left by this community in seminary, I would use the phrase taken from a letter that their mother general in 60's had sent to bishop Bernareggi: a handful of sand in the sea that has wished at all costs and in every way possible to contribute to the reconstruction and maintenance of seminary. Although the sisters are not in our midst anymore, and this truly fills our heart with sadness, the time spent with them, the untiring generosity with which they have served, the testimony of their simple and strong faith remain for us as a seed that dies to continue to bear fruit in a hidden and mysterious manner.

We too, today, say to our sisters: Thanks, sisters!

17 September 2005: we leave the penultimate seminary, among the 21 in which we were missionaries in the midst of those aspiring to priesthood; the last one will be that of Venegono (MI), in June 2013.

it means to be Christians: the presence of many sisters witnessed to hundreds of seminarians the evangelical radicality, made of chastity for the kingdom, that becomes service to the brethren in the daily duties as preparing of food and taking care of the house; made of obedience that becomes daily availability to 'exist for' the brethren; made of poverty, that means freedom from oneself in order to be there where there is need... they were 'witnesses' of the Lord in our midst¹⁷.

Thus the offer to serve becomes 'presence' and the service 'mission'. But, in spite of an evident desire and commitment to continue such a mission, the following year, as the sister-in-charge of the group Sr. Giovanna Manzoni fell seriously ill, the service was terminated in the diocesan seminary «Giovanni XXIII».

After 105 years, the magazine of the seminary *Alere*¹⁸ was dedicated almost exclusively to the sisters with the subtitle: «Who is the greatest? The one who is at the table or the one who serves?».

Thanks, sisters! We reserve a special word to your departure, which is unfortunately not substituted by any arrival. Our sisters have definitely concluded their much appreciated and precious presence in the seminary in the early days of September; their presence has lasted for more than a hundred years. They have carried out many tasks, manifesting always that of feeling the seminary to be their home; only the one who lives her service as a vocation can arrive at this. Nevertheless, above all the style, which they abided by, the witness of prayer, dedication and gratuitousness, in the name of religious charism, has made their presence irreplaceable. Our gratitude is immense and we express it even in this issue of «Alere» (Fr Pasquale).

¹⁷ cf. *Alere*, bimonthly magazine of the diocesan seminary of Bergamo, 2001, 1.

¹⁸ cf. *Alere*, anno LXV, November/December 2005.