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*Senior Member of the Faculty*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me join the previous speakers and extend my warm welcome to all of you, particularly to our foreign colleagues.

According to the programme, it was not planned for me to take the floor. The good reason is that you have already been told the essentials. Tommaso Di Fonzo, Dean of the Faculty, and Silvano Bodignon, Chairman of the Department, gave a concise, yet informative and convincing portrait of some of the main contributions of professor Bernardo Colombo to scientific research as well as to the Faculty.

But yesterday Tommaso and Silvano thought it was nice if I too would say a few words. I was glad to accept the invitation. However, as the senior member of the academic staff I have not much to add to what they said. So, let me take this opportunity to play a different role. I will present a few comments as one of the first comers when Bernardo Colombo started the Faculty of Statistical Sciences. Personal memories – perhaps in part collective memories from that small group of people – which, I hope, will help to clarify and appreciate some distinctive features of the personality of Bernardo Colombo.

Formally there was a Committee of three professors, appointed by the Ministry of Education, who was in charge of hiring the initial staff of the Faculty<sup>1</sup>. Bernardo Colombo was the leading personality in Padova<sup>2</sup>: the scientific appreciation and personal confidence he enjoyed from the members of the Committee was such that they were willing to leave him most of the substantive burden of decisions. Indeed, the first two professors appointed at the Faculty were Bernardo Colombo (from the Faculty of Law) and Albino Uggè (from the Faculty of Political Sciences). And some time afterwards, when – with the arrival of professor Odoardo Cucconi – the small Faculty Council was set-up, Bernardo Colombo was elected Dean and continued to play a crucial role in the recruitment process.

Statistics was a new Faculty in Padua. Surely, it could count on the well-qualified group of researchers at the School of Statistics, then within the Faculty of Law<sup>3</sup>. But the group was tiny, too small to face the teaching burden of a Faculty where almost immediately more students than expected enrolled. A larger staff was needed: more teachers and more

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee was made up by professors Luigi Carraro (from the Faculty of Law, University of Padua), Alessandro Faedo (President of the National Research Council) and Alessandro Costanzo (from the Faculty of Economics, University of Rome).

<sup>2</sup> Actually, there was another distinguished statistician in Padova, Albino Uggè: a colleague and friend of Bernardo Colombo (both initially at the Catholic University of Milan, benefited from the guidance of Marcello Boldrini). But professor Uggè already suffered severe health problems, and took more a detached role in the process of building the Faculty. He was a discreet, though influential, adviser of Bernardo Colombo.

<sup>3</sup> The School was founded some forty years before, in 1927 if I remember correctly, by Corrado Gini and Gaetano Pietra.

researchers, and in diversified fields (mathematics, economics, business administration and sociology, in addition to statistics).

Previously, the only one existing was the Faculty of Statistics, Demography and Actuarial Sciences in Rome. But relationships with Rome were a bit cold, for various reasons. There was academic competition, of course. But there was also some sort of cultural distance. The damages of “autarchism” – a sad, persistent heritage of the period before the second World War – had affected also part of the university *milieu*, statistics included, and the core of the so-called “Italian school of statistics” was in Rome<sup>4</sup>.

Thanks to his prestige and his large scientific relationships, Bernardo Colombo was able to obtain cooperation from colleagues from Venice and Milan. Some of them moved to Padua permanently or so, some others generously gave their help for the initial years. But the bulk of the task was the recruitment of new scholars.

Bernardo Colombo did an enlightened work of selection of young researchers: as Tommaso Di Fonzo said, and I cannot say better, «with scientific capacity and personal integrity as the pole stars guiding recruitment». Let me just add two remarks, in order to stress that this was not an obvious, easy task.

First, at that time there were no formal tracks for training researchers: no Ph.D. programmes (indeed, except for Rome, no Master programmes) in Statistics. So, rather than looking at well-documented scientific aptitudes, Bernardo Colombo had to act as a sort of “researchers detector”. He showed a remarkable capacity of identifying and anticipating research qualities of people, even when signs were poor, scattered.

Second, as you might know Bernardo Colombo was, and indeed is, a fervent catholic. His main field of study was already demography: a sensitive domain, especially when it comes to population policy and biological and behavioural patterns of human reproduction – two key research interests of Bernardo Colombo. And I think I am not far from truth if I state that his religious beliefs were relevant in shaping the focus of his research. As for the broader scenario of the late sixties - early seventies in Italy, one should remember that the ideological divide inherited from the second world war still influenced the public debate; and, specifically, that there was a high-spirited dispute about an Abortion Act.

Well, in this context Bernardo Colombo carried out the recruitment process guided just by the two criteria mentioned by our Dean: scientific capacity and personal integrity. Ideology played no role at all. Nor there was room for “familist” preferences, such as those who would drive a naïf geneticist looking at the roster of some Faculties in Italy, amazed by the anomalous recurrence of family names, to erroneously conclude that there is a dominant genetic component of intelligence.

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<sup>4</sup> Relationships between Fascism and statistics – and demography – were a complicated issue: only partly clarified, still controversial. I give just one reference: G.P. Dalla Zuanna (ed.), *Numeri e potere. Statistica e demografia nella cultura italiana fra le due guerre*, L’Ancora, Napoli, 2004, where a note of mine also appears: U. Trivellato: “Al crocevia fra scienza ideologia e regime: uno sguardo allo sfondo e ad alcuni statistici e demografi eminenti”, pp. 69-86. It is fair to stress that some of my opinions, especially those concerning Corrado Gini, are not shared by Bernardo Colombo.

Occasionally, I asked myself what kind of cultural *milieu* shaped Bernardo Colombo's beliefs and behaviour. I do not pretend to have an answer. Just some hints. Bernardo Colombo is from Olginate, close to Lecco, in Lombardy. It seems to me that one can recognise in the background the traits of what, for lack of better words, I would call the "Lombard catholic thought": profound, with a vein of rigorism, but at the same time open-minded. The names that come to my mind are those of Rosmini<sup>5</sup>, Manzoni, and in times close to ours, Pope Paul VI Montini. Besides, we should not forget that Don Carlo Colombo, the brother of Bernardo Colombo, was a close collaborator of Cardinal Montini and an influential theologian, professor at the Seminary of Venegono – the Seminary of the diocese of Milan – and Dean of inter-regional Faculty of Theology in Milan.

Open-minded, I said. It is not by chance that Bernardo Colombo was among the first post-war Italian statisticians with strong, systematic, vital relationships with the worldwide scientific community, first of all the English-speaking one: starting from his sabbatical at Princeton in the early 1950s up to this very same scientific meeting. The devotion of Bernardo Colombo to science is well illustrated by his favourite *caveat* to young researchers (and to mature researchers too): «Do avoid the wish to be father of the thought».

In short, if I had to select a single word to characterise Bernardo Colombo's ideas and behaviour with respect to academic life (and, perhaps broadly, to human life), I would borrow it from English: he has been, he is a "liberal".

When the Faculty grew, he kept up with the same attitude by leaving room and role to young people. Indeed, Bernardo Colombo likes research more than administration. It is astonishing to observe that, over 85, he is still an active scientist, currently – and abundantly – publishing in top level journals.

On the other side, it is a peculiar gift to maintain intellectual leadership without exercising any formal academic power. This is exactly what Bernardo Colombo did in the last thirty years. He expressed that leadership with mild encouragements, insightful suggestions, intriguing questions, sometimes with ironical comments; never with harsh criticisms. His close collaborators, our colleagues demographers, can testify that better than me. I simply remind that a research project I carried on for some five years at the beginning of the 1980s – measurement errors in preliminary estimates of economic aggregates and indices – was stimulated by conversations with Bernardo Colombo, in the small terrace at the fourth floor of *Palazzo del Bo'*<sup>6</sup>.

Not every doughnut comes out with a perfect hole. So, there has been some variability in the process of growth of the Faculty, even as far as research and teaching quality of the staff is concerned. I am not the right person to be asked an evaluation of that process: I

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Rosmini was born in Rovereto and graduated at the University of Padua. But he was mainly active in Lombardy.

<sup>6</sup> *Palazzo del Bo'* is the historical building of the University. The Faculty was initially located there, and maintained there the Dean's office for twenty-five years.

have been, and I am still, part of it. But I believe that, on the whole, the enterprise has been successful.

Thus, there are many reasons to express our gratitude and to celebrate Bernardo Colombo. Last but not least, his gentle manners, his attention to every single person. No doubt, we don't need a survey: Bernardo Colombo is the most loved person among the technical and administrative staff of the Faculty and the Department .

The multiple reasons for thanking and celebrating Bernardo Colombo are shared also by many colleagues and a larger group of friends who are not here. Colleagues and friends from Milan and especially from Venice, where he worked and lived for more than twenty years. Colleagues and friends from Ca' Foscari – I cannot avoid mentioning at least Mario Volpato, and many friends from the Association of Catholic Graduates – some of the names are those of Croff, Fogolari, Ghetti, Gottardi, Mariutti, Menegazzi, Sarpellon, Toniolo. Perhaps not so many of us know that among them Bernardo Colombo is better called with a nickname: Dino. (Venetians tend to give a short nickname to everybody.) Most of his colleagues and friends passed away, not surprisingly for demographers. Some of them were unable to participate to the opening of this meeting for personal reasons.

On behalf of that long line of colleagues and friends, and of all of us, let me conclude simply by saying: *grazie, Dino*.