

# **SHESHAN SEMINARY**

## **AFTER ONE YEAR :**

### **reported by the Rector**



by Peter Barry

What are some of the problems faced by the rector and staff as they re-open a Catholic seminary after a 25 year break? Father Louis Jin Luxian, rector of Shanghai's Sheshan Seminary, which is now well into its second year of operation, describes these for us in his first-year progress report published in the latest issue of Catholic Church in China (#8, Dec. 20, 1983).

The Shanghai Seminary, closed since the late 1950's (located at that time at Xujiahui), opened its doors again in Sheshan, a famous place of pilgrimage about an hour's bus ride from Xujiahui on Oct. 11, 1982.

Father Jin opens his report with a brief historical background. Under the leadership of Bishop Zhang Jiashu, Catholic representatives from Shanghai and the three provinces of Jiangshu, Zhejiang and Anhui met at Xujiahui in the latter half of June in 1982 to discuss the re-opening of the seminary. It was decided that the purpose of the seminary was to be "to train clergy who would be virtuous, have a complete knowledge of

Catholic doctrine and love the socialist motherland." Ten representatives were chosen to form a preparatory committee. This committee, made up of four bishops, one vicar-general, two priests and three laypersons, later became the seminary's board of directors.

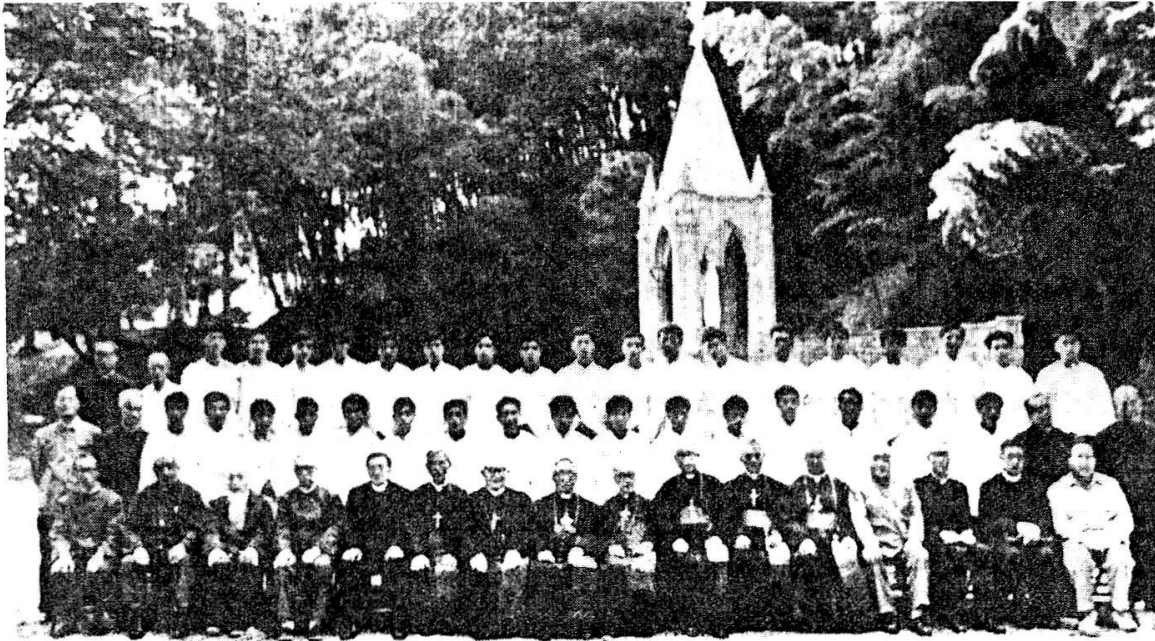
Because its quiet atmosphere was considered conducive to study, Sheshan was chosen as the location of the seminary and Father Louis Jin was appointed rector. (Father Jin, a Jesuit and the last rector of the former Xujiahui seminary, had studied abroad and is reported to be fluent in several languages.)

During the following summer months, each diocese sought possible candidates from among its Catholic youth. The requirements were: the candidate must be at least 18 years of age and a baptised Catholic who desires to give himself to the work of the church; he must be an upper middle school graduate or have the equivalent educational standard; and, he must have his parents' consent and the recommendation of his diocese.

The entrance examination was held on September 18-19, 1982, and, thirty-four young men were eventually selected to enter the first class of the new seminary. The school year began on October 11 with a Mass celebrated at Xujiahui by Bishop Zhang.

One cannot help but admire the determination of the preparatory committee. Less than four months after their decision to re-open the seminary, the first group of students had already begun their studies. However, there can be little doubt that the speed with which the seminary was opened and candidates selected also gave rise to the most serious problem encountered during the first year, namely, the candidates were of uneven quality. The preparatory committee had decided that each candidate should undergo a two-month period of training prior to taking the entrance examinations, but some dioceses found it difficult to implement this recommendation. As a result, certain candidates proved to be far from the ideal, and in Father Jin's estimation quite unprepared to begin serious study for ministry.

Some candidates had insufficient knowledge of basic Christian doctrine and very little foundation in spirituality. Others did not even have a clear idea of what a vocation to the priesthood was all about. Some entered the seminary only because they had failed to get into a university. Educational levels varied according to whether the student came from the city or the countryside, and, in moral character and habits of life, differences were also notable. Due probably in part



*Catholic bishops, clergy and lay leaders gathered in front of the Blessed Mother's shrine at Sheshan for a group picture with the seminarians on the seminary's opening day, October 11, 1982.*

to their growing up during the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution, some candidates manifested what Father Jin describes as "a spirit of anarchy", and considered the seminary rules too strict. A difference in language - the seminarians represented a variety of Chinese dialects - only added to the problems of communication. Thus, a lot of effort during the early months went into close personal supervision as well as administration of the study life of the seminary.

In spite of the above-mentioned difficulties, much was accomplished during the first year. There was a marked improvement in the area of spirituality, which, according to Father Jin, is the focal point of the training program at the seminary. At the beginning of the school year, seminarians considered the spiritual exercises too long. They complained that their knees were sore from kneeling so long in the chapel. But after some months had gone by, they no longer experienced difficulty in kneeling for one or two hours at a time. In the beginning, too, most of the seminarians were not familiar with traditional community prayers. Now they can chant them together in a sound pleasing to the ear. They also learned to serve Mass and to sing hymns. Father Jin observes that the students now frequently make visits to the Blessed Sacrament or make

the stations of the Cross during their free time, which he sees as happy signs of personal spiritual growth.

Improvement has also been noticed in student attitudes to the seminary rule of life. They are more ready now to accept its discipline. There is also a growing sense of community, a willingness and enthusiasm among the seminarians to exchange experiences, encourage one another in developing their spiritual life and gain a better understanding of their vocations.

Accomplishments were also noted in the study life of the seminarians. At the end of the second semester, 90% of the seminarians were averaging above 80% in their examinations. 40% had an average of over 90, and only two seminarians fell below an 80% average. In the curriculum, patriotism is given a special emphasis during classes in modern Chinese history and politics. The seminary also subscribes to many newspapers and magazines. This represents a change from the past when seminarians were not allowed to read newspapers. Another innovation is that the traditional closed system of seminary training has been opened up to allow seminarians to participate in outside activities, notably those sponsored by the Shanghai diocese. Also, field trips have been arranged for seminarians to study first-hand China's major efforts at modernization taking place in and around the vicinity of Shanghai.

Physically, the seminarians are healthier now than when they first entered. Father Jin attributes this to an improved diet and daily physical exercise. A major problem encountered during the first year was assembling a competent faculty on such short notice, finding qualified professors to teach the seminarians. Besides inviting local university professors to serve as guest-lecturers on cultural subjects, the Shanghai diocese assigned a number of priests to teach theology. The dioceses of Jiangsu and Anhui provided text books as well as priests to serve on the faculty. The priests divided the seminary duties among themselves: teaching, discipline, and manual labor. Some became full time spiritual directors or teachers, while others busied themselves with translating books or writing lectures. Some of the Shanghai priests were responsible not only for pastoral duties but also for preparing courses as well.

A third and final problem during the seminary's first year was the lack of teaching material. Apparently, the seminary staff must prepare much of its own material. In Father Jin's report he mentions a number of manuscripts that have already been completed, and others that are in

the process of being written in the following subjects: Pastoral Theology, Moral Theology, Dogmatic Theology, Fundamental Theology, The Trinity, God the Creator, Soteriology, The Incarnation, Grace, The Seven Sacraments, Mariology, Virtues, The Four Last Things, Ecclesiology, Catechetics, Church History, Bible and Liturgy. The work of revision is a continual process. Corrections are made after the opinions of other professors have been obtained, or after the material has been discussed in class. It is Father Jin's hope that the final product of all this effort will be a theology which is distinctly Chinese and which will help the Catholic Church to sink deeper roots in China. Father Jin explains that such a theology will preserve the essential teachings of Christ, be based on Biblical revelation, be supported by the explanations of the Church Fathers, and will contribute to the building up of socialism in China. Citing the proverb "A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step," Father Jin expresses confidence that seminary teaching materials will soon be produced which will be "in accordance with Christ's will and have the special characteristics of Chinese Catholicism."

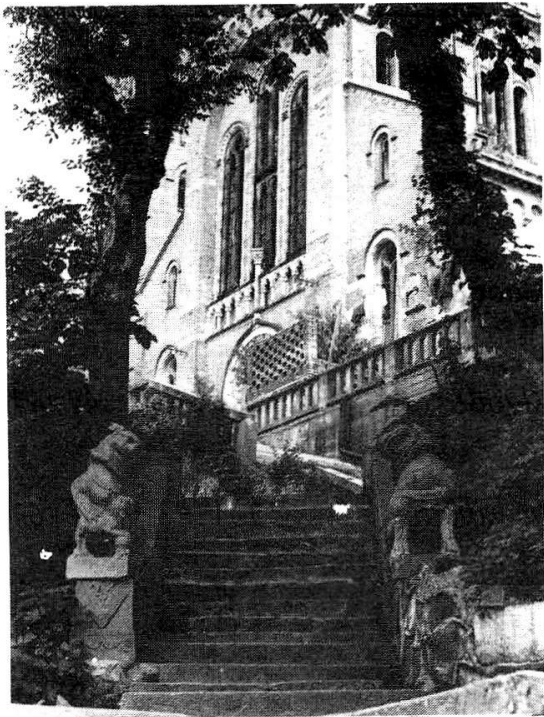
Father Jin concludes his report with some suggestions and recommendations. He feels that in the future greater attention should be paid to the quality of the seminarians selected. Quality should be placed above quantity. In the selection process and throughout the period of training, careful attention must not only be given to educational standards, but also to the seminarian's attitudes, life-style, moral character and motivation for entering the seminary. Every diocese should inaugurate a preparatory programme, Father Jin urges, so that diocesan officials can observe the candidates at close hand, become more acquainted with their family backgrounds, and weed out beforehand those considered unsuitable for the seminary.

In this context, Father Jin notes that the second year candidates are more qualified for seminary life. This is no doubt due to the introduction of pre-seminary seminars and classes for prospective candidates which have been held in places like Fujian during the past year. Fujian Province sent six candidates, graduates of just such a pre-seminary programme, to Sheshan in September to enter the seminary's second class (Catholic Church in China, #8, p. 52). The number of seminarians has now increased from 34 to 62. It should also be noted that the area for drawing candidates to Sheshan Seminary has been expanded from Shanghai City and the three provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui to include the provinces of Shandong, Jiangxi and Fujian.

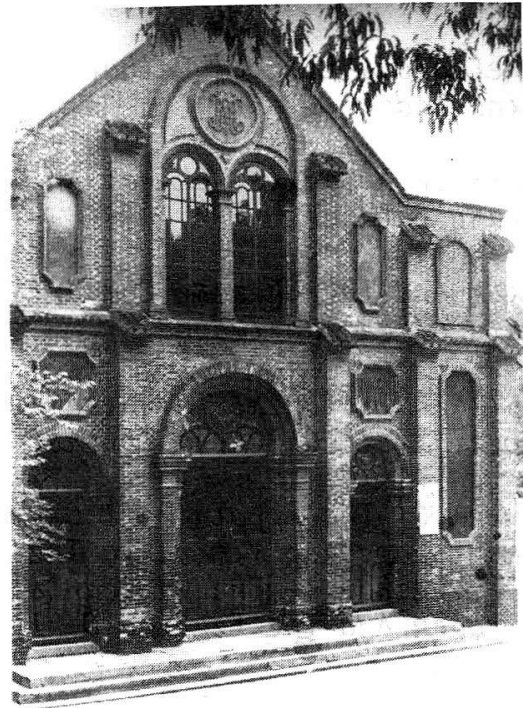
Father Jin's final recommendation is that cooperation between the

seminary and each diocese should be strengthened. Diocesan representatives should visit Sheshan often to encourage the seminarians, and supervised work should be arranged for seminarians during their vacation periods in order to maintain close contact and help them forestall negative influences that arise from their social situations.

Father Jin describes these first years as an "experimental period" during which the seminary staff is often groping in dark shadows. However, he is confident that with everyone's cooperation difficulties will be overcome, mistakes will be corrected, and the seminary will, in the not too distant future, begin to produce priests that are not only intellectually competent but also spiritually mature pastors.



*Sheshan Upper Main Church*



*Small Chapel at Sheshan  
mid-level*