

NEW PROFILES OF SEMINARIES

IN CHINA

by Anthony Lam
translated by Lucy Yau



above: Church of Xian; in becoming priests.
below: Fr. Song Jianxun
(宋建助神父) of Taiyuan

New developments in seminary education have been taking place in China since 1984. Besides the six major seminaries re-opened in the early 80's, several new centres for the preparation and training of Chinese Church personnel have also opened their doors during the past two years. Although these new seminaries are comparatively modest in size and organization, for those interested in recent developments in the Church in China they are well worth a visit.

Xian Minor Seminary

Among the newly established minor seminaries, Xian Minor Seminary draws the most attention. Catholic prelates in Northwest China had planned to re-open a major seminary in Xian for the formation of clergy from the five provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai and Xinjiang, but restoration work has still to be completed on the Tangzhuang Street site. As a result, this seminary has yet to be opened. In the meantime, the dioceses have pooled their resources and opened a minor seminary on Wuxin Street, which now offers a two year basic formation course for young men interested

Opened on Christmas of 1984, the minor seminary has a total of 20 students divided into two classes. There are 13

studying theology, while the other 7 students bone up on their knowledge of high school subjects. At present, Fr. Yu Xifeng is the rector. Ordained only two years ago, he had nurtured his desire to become a priest for 26 long years. When the Northwest Regional Seminary is finished, the students of this minor seminary, after passing a proficiency examination, will be promoted to the major seminary. However, according to Bishop Ji Huairang of Xian, the minor seminary will continue to function even after the major seminary is in operation.

Taiyuan Minor Seminary

The ambitious Taiyuan Minor Seminary does not limit itself to providing merely basic formation for its students. Established in April 1985, it has over 30 students from Shanxi Province, including 17 from the Taiyuan Diocese. According to Fr. Song Jianxun of the Church on Liberation Road in Taiyuan, the minor seminary will be recognized as a major seminary next year, and will go on serving the various dioceses of Shanxi Province. The seminary is located at Geliaokou, about 20 kilometers outside the city. Fr. Guo Yingong of Datong Diocese is its rector. More than 90 churches have been reopened one after another throughout the Taiyuan countryside. With this upsurge of activity in the rural churches, it is not surprising that the seminary is also situated in the rural area.

Shijiazhuang Seminary

Hebei's seminary antedates its neighbour in Shanxi by a few months. It opened on the 7th of December 1984 in Shijiazhuang and is administered directly by the Provincial Catholic Patriotic Association. Presently it has 35 seminarians from 8 dioceses and 2 prefectures; however, the whole complement of Hebei seminarians is far larger than this number, for another 15 are studying at Shenyang and 10 others are at the Beijing Diocesan Seminary. According to Bishop Chang Shouyi, President of the Provincial Catholic Patriotic Association, when the seminarians have completed their formation courses, they will all return to serve in Hebei Province.

The rector of Shijiazhuang Seminary is Bishop Liu



Left: Bishop Chang Shouyi (常守彝主教)(L) and Fr. Jiang Taoran (蒋陶然神父) (R) of Provincial C.P.A., Hebei. Right: Church of Shijiazhuang

Jinghe of Tangshan and Fr. Li Baocun is the vice-rector. The spiritual director is Fr. Hou Jingde. The formation programme covers four years. At the end of their fourth year, the seminarians will do one year of practical service in their respective dioceses before they are accepted for ordination.

The average age of the new seminarians is quite young. However, the seminary has also offered an intensive programme for older seminarians who have previously studied some philosophy and theology. On the 8th of December 1985, four seminarians were ordained to the priesthood from this older group. They are Chen Huanzhang of Tangshan, Fan Bingyi of Hangshui as well as Jin Shangzhi and Zhang Zhiyuan of Cangzhou.

The first group of the younger seminarians will graduate in 1988. Mr. Yao Zhixin, General Secretary of the Municipal Catholic Patriotic Association of Shijiazhuang, emphasized that the seminary is the first of its kind to be jointly administered by the dioceses without any government subsidies.

Jinan Holy Spirit Minor Seminary

Holy Spirit Minor Seminary on Jiangjunmiao Street in Jinan is the earliest of the minor seminaries to be re-opened. The formation course here was initiated in February of 1984. Fr. Guo Chuanzhen, the Vicar General of Jinan Diocese, serves as rector and Fr. Zhao Zhipin is the spiritual director. Its 13 students, together with those studying at Sheshan Seminary and at the National Seminary in Beijing, bring the total number of Jinan seminarians to 30. The formation programme of the minor seminary comprises a five year study course plus one year of internship. Its schedule and curriculum is very similar to that of a major seminary. Fr. Guo stressed that seminarians will not be transferred to Sheshan after graduation but will remain in Jinan for their advanced training. The campus of the minor seminary is quite spacious, but parts of its premises are still occupied by other non-seminary units.



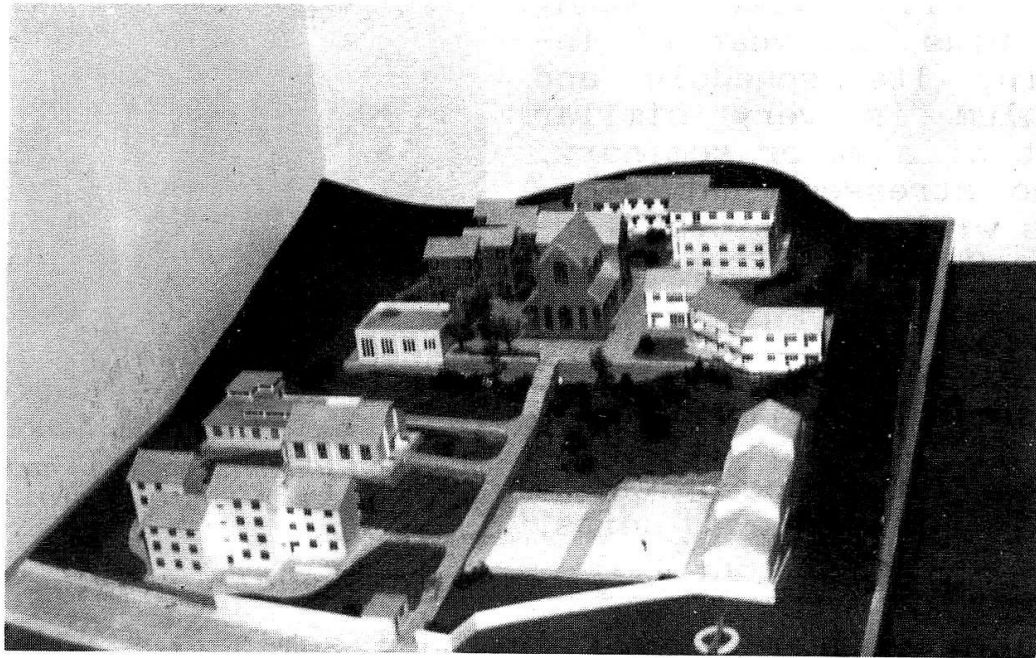
Fr. Guo Chuanzhen, (L) and Fr. Zhao Zhipin (R) of Holy Spirit Minor Seminary

Recent Developments in Beijing and Shanghai

Along with the above mentioned seminaries, there have been new developments in those seminaries previously established. Construction work on the new campus of the Sheshan Seminary is now in full swing. The foundation work for the seminary chapel has been completed and it is hoped that it will be in use by this autumn. On November 21, 1985 seven older seminarians were ordained here: Yu Chengxiang and Du Renyuan from Shanghai, Wan Jie from Bengbu, Cao Xiangde of Hangzhou, Hu Xiande and Xu Jiwei from Ningbo, and Zhang Qingzeng who is from Jinan.

In Beijing, the Diocesan Seminary accepted its third class of first year students last Fall. Among them are also

seminarians belonging to the Tianjin and Taiyuan dioceses. The national Seminary also admitted its second class of seminarians, bringing its total enrollment to 74. Limited space prohibits accepting any more new candidates. According to Bishop Tu Shihua, the seminary's present location is part of the former residence of a 19th century prince. Most likely, it will eventually be returned to the government to become a State cultural museum. In exchange, the government will provide another site for the seminary on the outskirts of the city. The first graduation exercise for young seminarians will take place in 1989. Bishop Tu expressed the hope that when a sufficient number of major seminaries have been established throughout the country, the National Seminary will become an institute of higher learning for ordained clergy.



Construction model of the new campus of Sheshan Seminary