

the flood had receded, so believers will surface from time to time from their underground sanctuaries of faith and worship to test the political climate for signs of change that will enable them to once again live their faith openly. A comment made by a foreign bishop during a previous trip to China now seems to me to be even truer than when he first made it. It sums up the resiliency of faith which Chinese believers have shown throughout history and which they will once again exhibit after the present crisis is over. As peasant farmers proudly showed us their ancestral shrines, first in their homes and then in the village temple which they had just finished restoring, the bishop remarked, "The Chinese are like the bamboo tree. They can be bent over until the top is almost touching the ground, and while this might go on for some time, sooner or later when the restraints are loosened, the tree will spring right back up to stand tall and sturdy once more."

A VISIT WITH FOUR YOUNG SISTERS FROM NANJING

TRIPOD

Last November, a group of six religious sisters from Nanjing were invited by the Canossian Sisters to visit Hong Kong. The four younger sisters had just completed their novitiate the year before and were still in training in Nanjing, where they work in a parish under the supervision of a local parish priest. The sisters are the first group of novices to graduate from the newly opened convent in Suzhou and they took advantage of their stay in Hong Kong to observe local religious formation and training methods, innovations in catechetical education, and the ways in which the church here takes care of elderly citizens. The Sisters do not belong to a separate religious community but to the diocese of Nanjing itself. All four of the younger sisters were baptized Mary, but this, and the fact that all share the same vocation, is where similarities end, as you can see from the following interviews.

Our first interview was with Sr. Zong Xiuhong, 25 years old:

Tripod: Sister Zong, what is your background? Are your parents Catholic?

Sr. Zong: I'm from an old Catholic family. Both of my parents are Catholics and our family has been Catholic for five generations.

Tripod: Being from Shandong, how did you end up



in the Nanjing Diocese?

Sr. Zong: Even though my parents told me that I was baptized 8 days after I was born, as a youngster I had no contact with the Church. In 1980 I graduated from high school and took the University entrance examination but I did not pass. So I went to visit my father in Nanjing, where he was working. While there, I heard that the diocese was going to open a new convent for religious sisters. I decided to enter and see whether or not I had a vocation to religious life. When my father learned of my decision he was very much in agreement with it. But, because I am the only girl in my family and also the oldest child (I have two younger brothers), my mother was against it. My father eventually persuaded her to accept my choice of vocation. Now my younger brother has entered the preparatory seminary in Suzhou. God has arranged all this. At first I did not think it would be easy to change my residence registration to Nanjing, but this proved to be no problem. I was the first girl to begin training for the sisterhood in the Nanjing diocese. I lived as a postulant there for more than a year. Then in 1984, when a convent opened in Suzhou I was transferred there to undergo a two year novitiate.

Tripod: What are your hopes and aspirations?

Sr. Zong: I want to serve the Church. If we are ever to attain a world of harmony and peace wherein all can be happy, we must learn how to love and have compassion, to manifest a Christian spirit and how to serve a suffering humanity.



Sister Xu Yaying is 24 years old and grew up in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province.

Tripod: Sister Xu, why did you enter the convent?

Sr. Xu: I am the only Catholic in my family. I was baptized in 1983, the year I graduated from high school. That same year I entered the convent as a postulant. I became interested in the Church out of curiosity. I used to go to church to hear the doctrine and felt it was very beautiful and full of meaning. The Church's teachings answered many personal questions I had about the meaning of my life. Where does man come from and where is he going? What is the purpose and meaning of life? One does not get the answers to such questions in our schools. After I studied the doctrine in detail and did some further reading on my own, I was ready to receive the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Then I heard that the diocese had opened a convent for the training of sisters. I thought I should give it a try and so I applied. I feel that it is God's will that I follow this path. After one year's postulancy, three other young sisters and I were sent to the novitiate in Suzhou where we underwent two years of training.

When I first entered the convent my mother disagreed with my decision. But she accepts it now, and even more, she herself is under instruction for baptism.

Sr. Yang Xiaozhao is 24 years old, and is from Yixing in Jiangsu Province.

Tripod: Sister Yang, How did you come to enter the convent?

Sr. Yang: My family are fishermen who have been Catholic for at least three generations. My decision to become a Sister was influenced strongly by attendance at fervent prayer gatherings of the older Catholics held in our village. I was baptized by this Catholic community, but when the church opened again in 1983, I was re-baptized by the parish priest. Later, when we heard the news about the opening of the convent, some Catholics urged my father to allow me to submit my application. He thought it was a good idea and I, myself, was willing to give it a try.



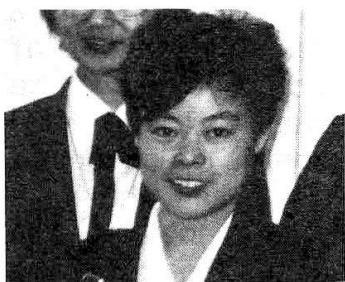
My reason for entering the convent was to save my own soul. But now I understand my vocation better. In today's society more and more people have trouble getting along with one another, in the future I hope to dedicate my efforts to working in the field of human relationships.

Tripod: What other aspirations do you have?

Sr. Yang: I hope to spread the Gospel in the context of China's present situation. In union with other sisters, I would especially like to organize a religious community which would gradually influence others to form larger Christian communities among themselves.

Sr. Shen Wenyan is 23 years old and is also from Wuxi.

Tripod: Sister Shen, why did you want to become a Sister?



Sr. Shen: My family are fishermen and have been Catholics for many generations. I have an older sister and a younger brother. I was baptized as a little girl, and from childhood my parents nurtured in me the desire to become a sister. I often prayed that God would call me to the sisterhood. One day in 1984, my mother told me that candidates were being sought for a Sisters' convent which was about to open

in Suzhou. I seized on this opportunity and applied right away. After undergoing two months of postulancy, I entered the novitiate in Suzhou.

Tripod: What are your hopes for the future?

Sr. Shen: I desire to be a sister worthy of the name and at the same time to work as be a good citizen of my country. I hope that I can belong to a religious community and, at the same time, make my own specific contribution to society.