

SEMINARY FORMATION IN CHINA TODAY AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

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I. Introduction

From the beginning of its missionary activity in China, the Catholic Church has continuously and energetically fostered vocations among local Catholics. However it was not until the first synod of the Chinese Catholic Church in 1924, and at the urging of the Apostolic Delegate Celso Costantini, that an overall plan was drawn up to establish 14 regional seminaries. In 1949 there were 16 regional seminaries throughout the country, and many local major and minor seminaries. In a report to all the Chinese bishops, dated November 15, 1950, the Nuncio, Archbishop Riberi, compared the number of seminarians in major, minor and preparatory seminaries for the years 1949 and 1950. The numbers are as follows:



<u>Seminarians</u>	<u>1949</u>	<u>1950</u>
Preparatory Seminarians	1311	1257
Minor Seminarians	1887	1730
Major Seminarians	908	723
Total	4106	3710 ¹

Seminaries closed one after another after the Communist regime came to power. Only a few seminarians went abroad to study. By 1955, except for the South China Regional Seminary in Hong Kong and the regional seminary for Hunan and Hubei, (which continued outside of China for a short period of time) not one Chinese seminary remained in existence. The government had confiscated the buildings and put them to other uses.

At the end of the 1970's, after the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping regained power, and promoted the four modernizations. For various practical reasons, the Communist government adopted a broader, more tolerant attitude towards religion and gave it greater freedom. Thus religious activity, which during the Cultural Revolution had become completely dormant or had gone underground, surfaced with new life. From May 23 to June 2, 1980, under the guidance of the national Religious Affairs Bureau, the third conference of the Catholic Patriotic Association and the first assembly of Catholic representatives was held in Beijing. Besides revising the Patriotic Association's constitution, the delegates set up two other organizations: the Catholic Church Administrative Committee and the Bishops Conference which would be responsible for pastoral work. The delegates then selected leaders for these organizations. On June 2 they passed a resolution regarding the re-opening of Chinese Catholic seminaries:

In order to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to carry on the mission work of the Apostles, to meet the needs of the Chinese Church, to form priests and to train professional personnel in philosophy and theology, the assembly has decided to open Catholic seminaries in China. The responsibility for carrying out this resolution has been given to the Catholic Church Administrative Committee.²

Because there are only about 1,000 priests in China whose average age is 70 years, the training of successors has become the Church's main priority at this time. From 1980 to the present, except for an unknown number of clandestine seminaries, about 20 public major and minor seminaries have been opened in China. This article will address the situation of formation in the seminaries in the 1980's and offer some reflections on the relationship between seminary training and social development.

II. Seminary Formation in China Today

The seminaries which have come into operation since 1980 can be divided into two categories: "clandestine" and "public." Clandestine seminaries pre-date the public ones. Because of the secret nature of the clandestine seminaries, outsiders know very little about them. What is certain, however, is that they were related in some way with two important church leaders: Bishop Fan Xueyan of Baoding diocese in Hebei Province and Bishop Zhou Weidao of Fengxiang diocese in Shaanxi Province.(d.Feb. 14, 1983)

It is reported that when the communists were promoting the establishment of the Patriotic Association some clergy and Catholic leaders adopted an open attitude towards it. Observing this, the communist government exerted even greater pressure. Therefore, several clergymen and Catholic leaders were forced to take a stand, and the

Catholics respected them for it. Bishop Fan was such a person, and he has been called the founder of "the underground church." He was arrested in the 1950s and sentenced to 15 years in jail. Following his release in 1979, seeing the need, he himself freely began to train and ordain clergy, and even ordained bishops. At that time, Bishop Fan's good friend, Bishop Zhou Weidao, wrote him a letter urging him not to do these things without the approval of the Pope. Bishop Fan answered that in these special circumstances, the church's canon law itself grants the required permissions. This matter gradually came to be known abroad, and even reached the Vatican. The Holy See did not prohibit Bishop Fan's actions. Since then the ordination of bishops by the "underground church" and the training and activities of its clergy have increased. Three years later Bishop Fan was arrested again. His "crime" was ordaining clergy secretly and maintaining foreign contacts. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison. However on November 17, 1987 he was released on parole. Before and after Bishop Fan's second internment many small formation groups sprang up to train a new generation of clergy. This kind of seminary is more common in the northern part of China. Operating without the approval of the government, they run the risk of being closed down at any time. They have neither a definite location nor a set curriculum. The length of training varies from two to six years. It is believed that these seminaries have trained nearly 200 priests, most of whom are capable of doing pastoral work. But because it is difficult for them to have contact with churches abroad, they run the risk of falling into a biased and subjective piety. Also there have been traces of abuses in the administration of priestly ordination, thus giving lawless elements the opportunity to pose as underground priests and cheat Christians out of their money.

The government has put a lot of pressure on these clandestine seminaries. During the night of May 29, 1986, a clandestine seminary located in Qiaozhai, a village in the Baoding diocese of Hebei Province, was raided and closed by the security police. About 40 seminarians and two priests were arrested, but they were released a short time later. The seminary was located in a private home and had been in operation for over a year.³ Furthermore, in October 1988, the 70 year old rector of the clandestine seminary, Bishop Liu Shuhe (an underground bishop) was arrested by public security personnel. He was released on January 16, 1989, but for the time being he is not permitted to meet outsiders.⁴

The category of official seminary is quite broad. The name applies to those seminaries established with government approval, and which are subsidized by the government. Also included in this category are those seminaries which came into existence without the government's knowledge. The government neither interferes with these nor does it subsidize them. October 1982 saw the opening of the first official seminary, Shanghai's Sheshan Seminary. At present there are over 20 such seminaries. According to the area from which they draw their seminarians, these seminaries fall into four

general categories:

1. The National Catholic Academy of Philosophy and Theology, located at #14 Liu Yin Street in Beijing's western district.

2. Regional seminaries of which there are six: Shenyang Seminary for the three northeastern provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang; Xian Seminary for the five northwestern provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Xinjiang and Ningxia; Sheshan Seminary for Shanghai and the six eastern provinces of Shandong, Jiangsu, Anhui, Zhejiang, Jiangxi and Fujian; Wuchang Seminary for the five south-central provinces of Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong and Guangxi; Chengdu Seminary for Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan Provinces, and the Beijing Seminary for Beijing and Tianjin.

3. Provincial Seminaries, like Holy Spirit Seminary in Jinan, Shandong Province; Geliaogou Seminary in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province; Shijiazhuang Seminary in Hebei Province, and Huhehot Seminary in Inner Mongolia.

4. Diocesan seminaries, which may be major, minor or preparatory. These seminaries are run by the dioceses at their own expense. Such seminaries are found in Xianxian, Changchun, Dali, Zhouzhi, Fengxiang, Sanyuan, Hongdong, Hankou, Guiyang, Kunming and Fuzhou.

There are over 700 students in the above mentioned seminaries. Of course, individual priests in certain parishes also give basic formation to some young men who are interested in the priesthood, in the manner of a master with apprentices. Recently branch seminaries of Sheshan Seminary have been opened in Shanghai City and in Jiangsu, Fujian, Zhejiang and Jiangxi Provinces to provide a liberal arts education for beginning seminarians.

The qualifications for taking the seminary entrance examinations are as follows: a candidate must be a male Catholic, at least 18 years of age who desires to devote his life to the service of the church. He must be a high school graduate or the equivalent, and have his parents' permission and a recommendation from his diocese. He must also pass a written examination and have an oral interview before he is accepted.

In the seminary the training usually follows the traditional three "S's": sanctitas (spirituality), scientia (knowledge) and sanitas (health). Spirituality follows a traditional style. The daily schedule provides for at least two hours of formal religious exercises in the chapel. These include morning and evening prayers, meditation, Mass, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and recitation of the rosary. Seminarians also have talks with their spiritual director, a monthly day of recollection and an annual retreat.

There are from 20 to 30 hours of class per week. Subjects studied are Latin, Catholic doctrine, Scripture, scholastic philosophy and theology, canon law and ascetical theology. Students are also required to study one foreign language, Chinese and world history, Chinese language, politics, music and homiletics. Religious subjects are taught by bishops and priests, while secular subjects are taught by professors from outside universities. Because the teaching clergy are quite elderly and have had no contact with the outside world for over 30 years, and because the seminarians have no text or reference books, the content of the courses has been rather weak and incomplete. However, this situation is gradually improving in recent years.

In July 1989 one bishop in South China told us that formation in Chinese seminaries was out of date and was not adapting itself to the realities of modern society. He said that the formation in today's seminaries was no different from that of the 1950's. Young seminarians have a difficult time adjusting to the system. The seminary rules are quite strict; a seminarian can be expelled for the slightest infraction of the rules. Two-thirds of this bishop's seminarians have been expelled, or left of their own accord. Not one has been ordained. What discourages diocesan personnel and prospective candidates alike is the method of seminary recruitment. Although some students meet the requirements, they cannot enter the seminary because that diocese's quota has already been filled. On the other hand, some dioceses cannot fill their quotas. Thus students lose the opportunity of entering the seminary. High school graduates can easily find work, especially in the coastal cities; so they do not wait until there is an opening for them in the seminary. The bishop regretted that precious vocations are lost in this way. He predicted that the present high number of vocations in China could not be maintained because the government's one-child policy will prevent parents from allowing their only sons to enter the seminary in the future.⁵

The influence of the Patriotic Association over the public seminaries varies according to personnel, place and time. To say that the Patriotic Association is simply a tool of the government or to say that these seminaries are completely under the CPA's control is not completely accurate. From actual contact with some of the seminarians one discovers that they have a very deep faith and a strong desire to become priests. Many come from fervent old Catholic families. Restrained by past government policy, many priest-professors in the seminary avoid mentioning the primacy of the Pope directly. Some priest-professors when explaining church history indirectly point out that Catholicism and papal primacy cannot be separated. For instance in explaining the basic difference between the Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic churches, the question of papal primacy naturally comes up, and strikes a responsive chord in the seminarians' hearts.

Although there is great variation in the seminarians' abilities and they suffer from

the limitations and pressures of objective reality, still with teachers and seminarians working earnestly together to overcome difficulties, the open seminaries have produced good results: nearly 200 young priests have come from them.

III. The Relationship Between Seminary Training and Social Development in China

The relationship between seminary formation and social development can be called a reciprocal relationship linked to three continually changing factors: the direction of the government's religious policy, changes in the Catholic Patriotic Association, and the role played by seminary formation in social development.

Firstly, in talking about the direction of the government's religious policy we should understand clearly the alternately open and restrictive articles on religious freedom in the current Constitution and the government's policy towards the Catholic Church. Article 36 of the 1982 Constitution regarding religious freedom is more balanced than similar articles in the 1975 and 1978 Constitutions. The phrase "freedom to propagate atheism" is now removed. However, in the present Constitution "religious freedom" and "religious activity" are discussed separately. The Constitution points out that the government only protects "normal" religious activity. But it does not explain clearly the difference between "normal" and "unnatural" religious activity. Moreover, in order to avoid the "interference" and "influence" of foreigners, the government's policy regarding the Catholic Church is that it must be "independent and autonomous." This policy also requires that the Catholic Church not publicly acknowledge the primacy of the Pope and that it elect its own bishops. Thus many Catholics are unwilling to enter the open seminaries and opt for the clandestine seminaries instead.

On February 17, 1989 the communist authorities issued Document #3, entitled "Strengthening Catholic Church Work in the New Circumstances." The new circumstances referred to is the change in China-Vatican relations from one of antagonism to one of dialogue. The Document hints that Chinese Catholics are now permitted "to maintain a purely religious connection with the Pope," to acknowledge the primacy of the Pope and to pray for him. However, the Chinese Catholic Church must continue the practice of electing and consecrating its own bishops. Document #3 also indicates that the Bishops' Conference is to be placed above the Patriotic Association. This document undoubtedly represents a new direction in the government's policy towards the Catholic Church. It is more progressive than former policies and good news for the public seminaries. Because there is still a great difference, however, between the manner of dealing with religion as it is spelled out in this document and that of the faith and organization of the universal Catholic Church (e.g., not permitting the Pope to appoint bishops), I think it will be very difficult for personnel in the clandestine seminaries to accept it.

Secondly, the establishment of the Catholic Patriotic Association in the 1950's is related to the invasion of China by colonialist and semi-colonialist powers and to China's emphasis on independence. It is also related to the communist government's desire to lead the church by means of this new organization. Today some CPA members acknowledge the mistakes of the past. But what is worthy of note is that many clergy and Catholics, who in the past have suffered and gone to prison for their faith and their loyalty to the Pope, and who in the past unswervingly refused to join the CPA, are willing to take up church work again out of concern for the Catholics and the future of the church. They are even willing to take up pastoral work at a church which has the sign of the "Patriotic Association" hanging next to the door. Also for the sake of the church's future some have gone so far as to accept positions in the CPA, all the while maintaining their loyalty to the Pope. The Catholics recognize this, and respect and support these priests. Therefore, many bishops, priests and heads of Catholic families permit their youth to enter the public seminaries. Recently the government has permitted non-CPA priests to teach in the seminaries. Beginning in 1989 Shanghai's Sheshan seminary has been permitted to invite priests from abroad to teach important theological courses. These are phenomena which indicate more openness, and they are changes for the better.

Finally, let us speak about the role of seminary formation in China's social development. It might best be described in biblical terms, that is by the roles of "priest" and "prophet." Although the clergy graduating from the open seminaries are not required to join the CPA in order to be ordained priests, they are still assigned work in the open churches and therefore most likely have to cooperate with CPA personnel. They enter the social system through the biblical role of "priest," since their main work is caring for the souls of Catholics, guiding them in love of God and neighbor, administering the sacraments, offering Mass and holding catechism classes in the church. Furthermore, in accordance with the law and with the blessing of government leaders, they do some small scale social work to share in the government's responsibilities and win the good will of society at large.

On the other hand, the clergy coming from the clandestine seminaries take on the biblical role of "prophet." They refuse to join government sponsored organizations. They dare to express the church's stand on questions of human rights and religious freedom. They play the role of a loyal opposition party outside the system. The struggle for human rights and religious freedom is a long and painful process. Such persons will be on the receiving end of both hard and soft measures from the government. The government will try to win them over either by friendly or heavy-handed means. Point Four of the above mentioned Document #3 has the following sentence: "Differentiate between the leaders of the underground forces and those Catholic masses who are

influenced and controlled by them. Through patient and conscientious work unite the great majority of them with us. Trends in the underground forces must be closely watched in every place. Once a problem is discovered, coordinate each department's forces to handle the problem promptly and securely, under the leadership of Party and government."

The leaders of the underground forces mentioned in the document refer, of course, to the clergy trained in the clandestine seminaries. After the "June 4th" events in Beijing, the Communist Party is especially sensitive to any activity which is not expressly approved by the government, and will even use heavy-handed methods to deal with them. Therefore clandestine seminaries will most likely come in for harsh treatment and may even be labelled "counter-revolutionary." Nonetheless, among the Chinese people who have awakened from the bad dream of the Cultural Revolution, that is, older people looking forward to a future life and younger people searching for the meaning of life here and now, many voluntarily come to the church to study Catholic doctrine with the priests and are eventually baptized. Therefore the clergy produced by both the open and clandestine seminaries will become sources of spiritual strength, despite being insufficient in number to meet the demands of Chinese society.

IV. Hopes and Expectations

What does the future hold? I am cautiously optimistic. Because as yet there is no definite successor to Deng Xiaoping and no real concrete change in the government's policy and attitude towards religion, a tense situation, short term, in China is probable. This will have an indirect effect on religion. However, following the worldwide dialogical trend relations between China and the Vatican have also begun to move in that direction. Since the Chinese government desires dialogue, religious policy will most likely become more open as time goes on. No matter what, the Holy Spirit is always with the church, and He will cause the seed of priestly vocations to transcend human restrictions and continue to grow and flower.

Document #3 has already hinted at changes in Catholic structures, that is, placing the Bishops Conference above the Patriotic Association. It is perhaps best to adopt a wait and see attitude, and observe the action of the Holy Spirit.

The role played by seminary formation in social development has seen a response from churches abroad. Vatican Council II's "Decree on Priestly Formation" points out: "The whole training that students in major seminaries receive should have as its object to make them into true shepherds of souls, after the example of Jesus Christ who was teacher, priest and prophet" (para. 4). This sentence spells out new directions for seminary training today. It directs seminary formation to return to its source by making the priest's duties of preaching, sanctifying and performing pastoral work

follow the model of Christ as "shepherd." The priest in carrying out Christ's redemptive mission is to interact with the modern person in a spirit of charity and openness. This shepherd role of Christ was reflected most abundantly in the lives of the disciples of the early church. It contained the following three elements. The first is "didache," which is the Greek word for "way of life," and refers to the spiritual journey in Jesus Christ; the second is "koinonia" or "communion," which means that although the church community is hierarchical, it expresses a spirit of mutual sharing and support through the virtues of faith, hope and charity; and the third element is "diakonia," or "service," which should lead to a situation where "God is all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). Through frequent contacts with the universal church, the role of shepherd, now latent in Chinese seminary training, will certainly make its presence felt; and the roles of "priest" and "prophet" now being emphasized will in the end blend into that of "shepherd."

It cannot be denied that the Chinese church is a wounded church, riddled with rumor and strife. Only through a renewing and healing love can the differences be resolved. If there are no Christians to act as mediators willing to bear another's burdens, then reconciliation is impossible. When two parties are at odds, there are three ways of resolving the problem. The first is for one party to acknowledge its faults and ask pardon of the other. Secondly, the injured party should not argue over past events. The final means is for an outsider to take on the faults of one party. The generous spirit of the third way will sometimes move the hearts of the two irreconcilable parties and finally bring them together. Actually this was Christ's way; although sinless, he took on the burden of our sins, so that we could once more become reconciled to God. This is the greatest challenge facing the Sister churches outside of China today.

At present many seminary graduates face the question of whether to be ordained priests or not. One seminarian who will soon graduate from an open seminary said frankly: "Regarding ordination I have an approach-avoidance problem. I do not know which path to choose. On the one hand I dislike everything about the Patriotic Association, and I do not want to receive ordination at their hands. On the other hand, I do not want to look for a non-CPA bishop to ordain me as an "underground priest" because such a priest cannot publicly administer the sacraments, nor publicly do evangelization work. I am on the horns of a dilemma, not knowing which way to turn. I could simply decide not to be a priest, but this would mean giving up my aspirations and even abandoning the vocation God gave me...I am really having a difficult time making a decision." Does not the pain in this young, innocent seminarian's heart call out for reconciliation in the church? I strongly feel that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and following the path laid down by Vatican II, the unity prayed for by Jesus at the Last Supper will certainly be realized. Furthermore, the seminaries in China will definitely produce a group of worthy clerical successors to shepherd the Chinese Church

and they will make it become "a sign and instrument of close union with God and of unity among men " (Constitution on the Church, para. 1).

NOTES

1. Luo Guang (ed.), Tianzhujiao Zaihua Chuanjiaoshi Ji, Tainan, 1967, p. 358.
2. Zhongguo Tianzhujiao, Beijing, No. 1, 1980, p. 52.
3. South China Morning Post, Hong Kong, September 23, 1986.
4. Asia Focus, Hong Kong, Vol.5, No. 9, March 4, 1989, p. 4.
5. Tianzhujiao Yazhou Tongxunsha Xinwen, Hong Kong, August 5, 1989, p. 3.

The Formation of Sisters in China

by John Tong
translated by Peter Barry

According to church statistics, in 1948 there were more than 7,000 religious Sisters working in China.¹ Two-thirds of them were Chinese while the remaining one-third were foreign. After the Communist Party came to power, the foreign Sisters gradually either left the country, or were expelled. Some native Sisters also left their dioceses and went to work in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, or overseas. But the great majority of the Chinese Sisters remained on the mainland.

During the 1950's the mainland convents closed one by one. Some Sisters were jailed or sent to workcamps. Even today we do not know if some are alive or dead. Because of environment or pressure, some married. However, many unafraid of difficulties maintained their vocations at home. In recent years, since the government has implemented a more tolerant policy towards religion and because the church communities encourage it, Sisters again have begun to exercise their religious life publicly. They joyfully welcome young women to join them in their way of life. They try as best they can to give these young aspirants some formation with the hope that they will become their successors. In the mid-1980's, not long after the re-opening of seminaries for priestly vocations, Sisters' convents also gradually came into existence. Some opened with the explicit permission of the government, while others received the