

Personality

Lin Zhao, Apostle to the Miao

(Much of the material for this personality profile is taken from *Histoire des Chrétiens de Chine*, by Jean Charbonnier, M.E.P., and translated and edited by Betty Ann Maheu, M.M..)

"Why are you not married?" the judge asked her. "You must be a member of a subversive sect? Why are you working with the Miao when you are Han? You have no business with them!" Lin Zhao stood courageous and firm. The judge, enraged, condemned her to death. She and the catechist, Jerome Lu Tingmei, were dragged through the streets. When she arrived at the place of execution, she bravely knelt upright next to the catechist. The executioner was awkward with his sword. He had to strike her neck several times before he succeeded in severing her head. Lin Zhao was beatified by Pope Pius X in 1909.

According to the story told by the Catholics of Guizhou, a young scholar, who had gone to Belgium to study, learned about Jesus and the Catholic Church. Enthusiastic about his new belief, he was baptized. When he returned home to China, he was so eager to share his faith that he began preaching the Gospel to his family and neighbors. As a result many were converted. With the expulsion of foreign missionaries, there were few priests to attend to the spiritual needs of the people, but the laity soon became outstanding apostles.

Among these wonderful men and women, Lin Zhao, known as "the apostle to the Miao women," is a shining example of feminine courage and fidelity. Lin Zhao, baptized Agatha, was the first woman to spread the Catholic faith among the Miao nationality and one of the first Chinese women to shed her blood for her faith.

Lin was born in 1817 in the village of Machang in the district of Qinglong, Guizhou Province. Guizhou Province is located east of the Yunnan-Guizhou plateau in Southwestern China. The Catholic Church in this area has a rich history for it has endured long persecutions and been blessed with the blood of

martyrs. During the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), in the reigns of the emperors Yongzheng and Qianlong, the persecution of the Church was particularly intense. All foreign missionaries were banned from the country and the preaching of Christianity was forbidden under pain of death. People who would not renounce their faith were imprisoned. This, in fact, was the fate of Lin Zhao's father who was in prison at the time of her birth. She was three years old when he was released and allowed to return home.

Lin Zhao was both beautiful and intelligent, and contrary to the custom for women of the day, she learned to read and write. When she was only a little child, her father, without telling his little daughter, arranged a good marriage for her. He did not know, of course, that Lin Zhao had other plans. Without telling her parents, she had decided to consecrate herself to God, and remain a virgin. When she was 18 years old, her father told her of the pre-arranged marriage. Fortunately for Lin Zhao, her parents were both devout Catholics; they understood and the marriage contract, made years before, was soon annulled. History does not record the feelings of the young man or his family on the matter!

Invited by Fr. Matthew Liu to join the virgin, Annie Yuan, in Guiyang at the new school opened for girls, Lin Zhao was enthusiastic about teaching young women. Her joy, however, was shortlived. The religious persecution intensified and the school was forced to close. She returned home. Sadness awaited her there for she discovered that her father had again been arrested and put in prison.

At the age of 25 she made her consecration known publicly. Her exceptional talents, beautiful character and goodness attracted all who came in contact with her and soon she was asked to direct the religious formation of the virgins in Guiyang. This task was both a source of satisfaction and suffering. Long walks were painful because, as a child, according to the custom of the day, her feet had been bound. Stick in hand, she would climb mountains and walk down valleys to follow the progress of the young women under her care. Her life was an example to all.

In 1854 she went to the Miao village of Maokou to instruct the women. Here, she made the acquaintance of the itinerant catechist, Jerome Lu Tingmei, a Miao convert, who had become

an apostle to the Miao not only in Guizhou but also in Guangxi where he had been imprisoned for preaching the faith.

In 1858, a magistrate came to visit the village of Maokou where she and Jerome were evangelizing among the Christians. They were both arrested and sentenced to death.

History records that the Church in Guizhou has fifteen martyrs enrolled among the blessed for this period. Guizhou is proud of its martyrs. With the restoration of property to the Church, the people once more are publicly honouring their saints. China in its long suffering religious history has given, and continues to give the Church and the world wonderful models of fidelity and courage.

