Eight American Daughters of Charity and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army in Jiangxi Province, 1928–1930

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This article follows the lives of a group of eight American Daughters of Charity in the southern part of Jiangxi Province, surrounded by the fledgling Chinese People’s Liberation Army as it slowly learned how to exert its power.¹

It all began simply enough for Sister Vincent Louise DeLude, a Daughter of Charity in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Sister DeLude had no thought of China and wanted to take care of lepers. Belatedly, she discovered that her province did not operate an institution for their care. When she considered transferring to another American province which did, she was urged by two priests to volunteer to go to China where, as one of them said, there are lepers. So she volunteered and then waited eight years for her request to be granted. Finally, on Monday, 15 October 1928, with her dear friend Sister Anselma Jarboe, she set out for the city of Ganzhou² in the province of Jiangxi³ in southeastern China. The two of them planned to join six other Daughters of Charity from Emmitsburg already there who had established a hospital four-and-a-half years before.⁴ She eventually wrote of her experience, “I was so happy to serve [God] in a foreign country and to think He gave me the privilege of making Him known and loved in that pagan land.”⁵

¹ The information in this article comes primarily from letters and memoirs in the Daughters of Charity Archives, Saint Louise Province. Hereinafter cited as ASLP. The author of this article weaves their narratives into the context of commonly-known historical events and geographical features. Place names are modified to modern spelling.

² Ganzhou, a city in southern Jiangxi Province, was formerly spelled Kanchow, Kanchou, or Kan-chou.

³ Jiangxi, a province bordered on the north by the Chang (Yangtze) River and on the south by the Nanling Mountains, was formerly spelled Kiangshí, Kiangsi, or Kiang-shí.


The Journey to Ganzhou

On Thursday, 25 October 1928, they sailed out of San Francisco Bay on the S.S. President Grant. On one day as they crossed the Pacific Ocean, when the waves were high, the two sisters, dressed as always in their large white cornettes and heavy blue ankle-length dresses, innocently thought it would be nice to sit on the hurricane deck to enjoy the weather. They were holding tight to their chairs which were bolted to the pitching, rolling deck when one of the waves came crashing over them, leaving them suddenly drenched but wiser. Perhaps this episode can be seen, in some ways, as a metaphor for their experience of China during the subsequent two years. The actors in the Chinese martial-political arena, a swirling mix of shifting loyalties, violent ideologies, and fluid alliances far removed from the quiet service of the sisters, were a rogue wave about to disrupt their lives. The houses of the Daughters of Charity in Jiangxi Province would be the most endangered of all their houses in China during the next two years.

At 7 a.m. on Thursday, 15 November 1928, the two arriving travelers, riding in a tender from the ship to shore, rejoiced to see two cornettes among the crowd on the Shanghai wharf. Two of the sisters who had been in China since 1922, Sisters Emily Kolb and Eugenia Beggs, had come from Ganzhou to greet them. They swiftly passed through Customs. After a quick visit to Mr. Lo’s Saint Joseph’s Hospice, but bypassing the other extensive works of the Daughters in Shanghai where sisters from nine different countries served the poor, the four sisters boarded a river steamer. They brought with them not only their own baggage but that of several Vincentian priests (Fathers Lawrence Curtis, Francis Flaherty, and Joseph Gately) who remained on the ship; they too were traveling to Ganzhou, but from the south via Hong Kong and the Mei-ling Pass — a mountain route that, contrary to all expectations, the escaping sisters soon would take in the opposite direction to flee the interior. Heading now into a largely road-less interior where people traveled mostly by river or footpath they put Shanghai behind them. For three days they steamed up the Chang River, passing Nanjing without incident. The year before, Nanjing had become the seat of the Guomindang government, a shifting coalition of warlords and provincial armies precariously led by Chiang Kai-shek.

When the sisters disembarked from the steamer in Jiujiang they cheerfully recorded visiting the Daughters of Charity from France who operated a huge compound including a hospital, nursing home, day school, and orphanage where as many as 800 babies a year were baptized:

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7 Chang River (Chang Jiang or Changjiang) was formerly called the Yangtze River. The longest river in the country, it creates a cultural and physical divide between north and south China.
8 Nanjing was formerly spelled Nanking. Around the year 1930, there were several steamer routes from Shanghai through the Chang River delta. All met downstream from Nanjing and passed this city.
9 Guomindang (GMD), formerly spelled Kuomintang (KMT), was the Chinese Nationalist Party.
10 Jiujiang, located at Lake Poyang where the lake empties into the Chang River, was formerly spelled Kiukiang.
We are at Saint Vincent’s Hospital. It is a foreign building, modern in every way, equipped with private rooms and connecting private baths with hot and cold water. A high bed, two chairs, a dresser, and a table, constitute the furniture of each room. In the operating room there are distilled water tanks, sterilizers, and every conceivable kind of instrument....Before being admitted to the wards each patient is given a scrub, sometimes two. It depends....Sister tells us that this is the way they manage to keep the ‘crawlers’ down.... However in the Sisters’ quarters they never have heat. This is done to save and thus to be able to give more to the poor.... It is warmer out of doors and for that reason we take our reading outside....

This extensive mission compound supplied so much to relieve the needs of the poor that two years later, when all European houses in the city were pillaged, it happened that “after making a round of inspection of the Sisters’ hospital and works the communist leader put a guard at the door and wrote over it in big characters, ‘Here is Charity’, and they were undisturbed.”

In contrast to the mission, all around it:
The streets are only a few feet wide ...there are rickshaws going in every direction; coolies carrying large buckets of water, and building materials....Beggars, almost naked, kneel in the very middle of the streets, banging their foreheads on the ground, imploring for help.... In a pagan cemetery we saw two men burn incense at one of the graves and shoot off some fire crackers. They were imploring the shades of their ancestors to obtain some favors for them....we came upon a wedding procession. Musicians marched ahead and the bride followed in a closed chair.

The four sisters were now 1000 serpentine miles upriver from Shanghai, but still 370 slow river miles (one month) away from Ganzhou, their destination. A new member of their party, Remigius, a Chinese catechist from Ganzhou, met them in Jiujiang on Monday, 19 November 1928. They were delayed here for several days by Customs, which at that time and place was rigidly enforcing the law because of widespread violence. Finally they were allowed to board the mission boat, a unique junk they dubbed ‘Noah’s Ark’ as it reminded them of children’s storybook pictures of Noah’s vessel. “It has a sail and when the wind blows in the right direction it moves. Otherwise it either stands still or has to be dragged along by men or towboats.”

The two veteran sisters hired men to carry their baggage onto their junk and the priests’ baggage onto a rented junk. They secured passports for both, and then made

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12 Anne Hughes, Sister Xavier Berkeley. Fifty-Four Years in China as a Missionary Sister of Charity (London: 1949), 139.
arrangements for an oil tug to pull them across Lake Poyang.\textsuperscript{15} Their junks almost foundered in the huge waves of a sudden night squall when another boat, crossing behind the tug, accidentally cut their tow rope. The sisters threw Miraculous Medals in the water and their boat’s crew screamed in panic. The tug captain came about and with some difficulty flung a new rope to them. And in that manner they were safely pulled to the Gan\textsuperscript{16} River.

On the junk boards set across sawhorses served as their beds during the night, and during the day for their kitchen. Within a week the two arriving sisters had become accustomed to sleeping soundly on the boards and waking refreshed, “When we get up we roll up our blankets and cook on the beds.”\textsuperscript{17}

On Thursday, 29 November 1928, the French Daughters of Charity who operated a hospital in Nanchang gave them a warm welcome, an American Thanksgiving Day chicken dinner inside a cold building on a cold day. They passed southward through the city where, on the first of August the year before, He Long and Zhou Enlai had staged an urban uprising. Communists hailed the event as the founding of the People’s Liberation Army. Although the uprising failed, the communists retreated successfully to the Jinggang Mountains along the southwestern border of Jiangxi. This communist base less than 100 miles from the sisters’ destination was still attracting highway robbers, nationalist army deserters, and

\textsuperscript{15} Lake Poyang is considered the largest lake in China but is actually a system of marshes and lakes fed by several tributaries, of which the Gan River is the most important.

\textsuperscript{16} Gan River (Gan Jiang or Ganjiang) was formerly spelled Kan.

\textsuperscript{17} “Anonymous letter from the Gan River,” 4 December 1928, \textit{Echo from the Mother House} 4:1 (January 1929): 44.
dispossessed farmers from throughout the province, as well as other communist leaders. And so it happened that Mao Zedong and Zhu De arrived in Jiangxi Province at around the same time as Sisters DeLude, Jarboe, and their escorts. Undetected by the sisters, restless and unsettled movement percolated throughout the entire province, sometimes bubbling up into violence.

After their Thanksgiving dinner, the sisters hired a steamer to tow their two junks upriver as far as the unusually low water level would permit, about sixty more miles. But the steamer had to frequently stop while the crew stuffed paper, the only available material, into the rusting holes of the steam pipes. After the third stop for repairs, at 3:30 a.m., the crews of the sisters’ junks unhitched from the steamer to make their own way. They started by paddling, but when a northeast wind rose in their favor they hoisted sail and got well ahead of the steamer with its irate passengers. Depending on the wind and water depth, for the rest of the journey the sisters’ two junks were slowly sailed, poled, and sometimes pulled in a south-southwesterly direction up the Gan River. Sister DeLude wrote of the awesome natural beauty of “the lovely Kan [Gan] River winding its way between the mountain ranges, which were reflected in the water below. What a gorgeous view! How I thanked God that I could see the beauties He had made for man.”

Hoping to make use of moonlight and a favorable wind, their captain nearly capsized the junk one night when it sailed onto an undetected sandbar. The crew jumped in the cold water to their waist and with great difficulty shoved the craft into deeper water. So, more cautious now, they anchored safely with a group of other junks stopped for the night. The sisters wanted to get out and walk along the bank but their captain warned them it would be too dangerous and that they could be kidnapped.

After they sailed past Ji’an where still another group of French Daughters of Charity operated an orphanage, the four sisters came to a long stretch of rapids. A pilot boarded here to guide them through treacherous waters lined with the remains of wrecked boats. They eventually stopped at the small river town of Tahoukiang where the Vincentian priest Father William Mc Climont was stationed — he himself was temporarily in Ganzhou welcoming the priests at that moment arriving from their journey over Mei-ling Pass. The sisters left the baggage belonging to these priests at his house. Perhaps with a sense of disappointment but

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18 See “Anonymous letter from the Gan River,” 2 December 1928, Ibid., 43.
20 Ji’an was formerly spelled Kian.
21 Tahoukiang was later flooded when a large dam was constructed. The old spelling is used here.
22 Between 1928 and 1930 nineteen Vincentian priests from the U.S.A.’s Eastern Province of the Congregation of the Mission, along with some remaining Vincentian priests from France, evangelized the southern part of Jiangxi Province. During this time the French Vincentian, Bishop Paul Dumond, was vicar apostolic of Ganzhou and the American Vincentian, Bishop John A. O’Shea, was coadjutor vicar apostolic. The other American Vincentian priests sent from Germantown, PA, were Leon Cahill, James Corbett, Thomas Crossley, Vincent Dougherty, George Erbe, James Gleason, John Lynch, William Mc Climont, Daniel Mc Gillicuddy, John Mc Laughlin, Francis Moehringer, John Munday, John O’Donnell, Francis Stauble, and Edward Young. Young was captured and tortured by the communists. The last ones to arrive during this time were Lawrence Curtis, Francis Flaherty, and Joseph Gately in December of 1928.
certainly with a cheerfully innocent spirit, Sister DeLude stuffed a bathrobe, hat, and shoes to look like a man sitting in the priest’s wicker chair. One dark night some time later when the priest returned home, he was so startled by the shadowy figure in his chair that he threw up his hands and accidentally destroyed an unlit oil lamp behind him.

**Arrival in Ganzhou and Taiwo**

Finally, admiring the skyline of pagodas, the sisters stepped ashore at Ganzhou on Friday, 14 December 1928.\(^{23}\) They rode in rickshaws through narrow, winding streets filled with grunting pigs, barking dogs, and scurrying chickens. They saw a barber cutting hair in the street, and women squatting by tubs washing their clothes, glancing up and smiling at passersby. An astonished doorman named John yelled and ran into a building to announce their unexpected arrival, the veteran sisters having chosen to make it a surprise. Suddenly explosions of fireworks roared all around them announcing their appearance at Saint Margaret’s House, their new home.

Many red steps ascended to a white hall with pine floors. The travelers knelt before the Blessed Sacrament in the little chapel to thank God for their safe passage, and venerated Our Lady and Saint Joseph. They admired the beauty of the statues made in France. They admired the cleanliness of the white altar, the white walls, and the white pine floorboards. It was now home, even with the cold air flowing up through the big cracks between those floorboards, even with the lack of heat, and even with the lack of hot and cold running water. Sister Pauline Strable, the sister servant — as the Daughters of Charity call their superiors — greeted them warmly, as did Sisters Catherine O’Neill, Clara Groell, and Helena Lucas.

The three priests who had traveled with them on the S.S. President Grant had arrived in Ganzhou only three days before, having explored much of the southern, mountainous

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part of the province. They had nearly been frozen and were suffering from serious colds. Everyone was pleased that they had arrived just in time for the beginning of the Christmas Novena, a hauntingly beautiful service of hymns, readings, and meditations celebrated by the Daughters and Vincentians during the nine days before Christmas.

The little hospital, established on 21 June 1924, had only 35 beds, but in the out-patient clinic the sisters treated as many as 300 people daily. Typical complaints were leg ulcers, tuberculosis, infected eyes, scabies, and boils. All nurses, the sisters worked without the supervision of any doctor as none in the city knew western medicine:

How often we wished we had a doctor! Especially when we had cases like the following: One day a man was brought to us whose leg had been crushed in a quarry some distance from the city. The accident occurred two weeks previously and the wound was badly infected. No X-ray! No doctor! What to do? So, we did the best we could. The wound was cleansed, dressings applied and the leg splinted. Day after day, small pieces of bone were removed, the infection cleared up, and finally after several weeks, the wound was entirely healed. Since we had no X-ray, there was no way of knowing if the fractured bones had united. Our patient soon settled that! One day, on entering the ward, we were amazed to find him walking, without any support....

Sister DeLude was quickly assigned to the out-patient department. She set herself the task of learning Chinese from an English-Chinese dictionary. With the help of a Chinese assistant who doubled as tutor she eagerly began to learn the language, especially those words indicating medical symptoms. Meanwhile, within several months Sister Jarboe, also learning Chinese, had three Chinese nurses working under her in the hospital and dispensary. They found consolation in compassionately and tirelessly providing treatment for the poor who sought their help, either in the sisters’ compound or in the simple clay structures many called home.

One of the sisters wrote that they were called out to see a woman who’d had an accident: “There was a cut of about three inches long on her head and it was plastered with a poultice of powdered young rat, mixed with lime. It was lucky for her we got it off before it hardened, for it becomes as hard as granite and then it is impossible to remove it...” Lepers, who were allowed to come and go as they pleased, sometimes came for help. However, lepers tested the limits of the sisters’ practical care as they could only hope to keep them comfortable. Remigius or another catechist usually accompanied the sisters when they visited people in their homes. This was done to explain their religion, and because of the example of their kindness many Chinese readily chose to be baptized. The sisters also sent out helpers to search for abandoned babies, and several were brought in daily. Sometimes hopeless mothers would bring in babies who were dying. The sisters


would baptize them just before they died, calling them thieves of heaven, providing spiritual healing to eternal life in heaven when physical medicine no longer sufficed, with the thought that these new saints would pray for the conversion of their families.

While the two new sisters were settling into their routine, the nationalist army was besieging the poorly-supplied communist base at Jinggangshan. In January 1929 many of the defenders under the leadership of Mao Zedong and Zhu De broke through the siege lines. They created widespread havoc as they passed singly, severally, or in larger groups through the whole region around Ganzhou just one month after the sisters’ arrival. Under the leadership of Zhu De many of them finally gathered again on the southeast border of Jiangxi. In the meantime, throughout the countryside of southern Jiangxi Province the poor were subject to pillaging by nationalist troops and communist bandits alike; landlords were killed and mission chapels destroyed wherever the communist army went. Thousands were killed and whole villages destroyed.

On Tuesday, 22 January 1929, Father Edward Young was captured by the communists as they passed through Nan’an, a mountainous region south of Ganzhou. He was given a fierce lecture by Zhu De himself and told to pay a $20,000 fine or forfeit his life. For about two weeks he was hustled up and down mountains in southern Jiangxi and northern Guangdong provinces. Firefights with nationalist troops occurred sporadically. During one, on Sunday, 3 February 1929, as the communists started to kill their prisoners, the priest and his good friend Pastor Schramm, an elderly German Protestant minister, managed to make their escape running hunched-forward through rice paddies in a pre-dawn heavy rain. The pastor had already arranged the release of his wife and daughter with a $10,000 check. The word “bandits” as it was used at the time frequently meant communists as they often demanded ransom for captured Europeans and Americans. Throughout southern Jiangxi Province, again and again, nationalist troops commandeered mission properties as

26 Nan’an, now a neighborhood in the city of Dayu, was formerly spelled Nan Nan Fu, Nannanfu, or Nan-an.

barracks, and tried to defend the territory from the waves of communist fighters.

Tension mounted in Ganzhou during January of 1929. “One of the buildings on our compound, the male employees’ quarters, was commandeered by one of the officers and was occupied for five months. He drilled his soldiers day after day in our front yard. Several times, officers tried hard to force us out of our house....”\textsuperscript{28} While the sisters were pressured on the one hand by nationalists, they were also pressured by the communists who:

\ldots did all in their power to instill anti-foreign and anti-Christian sentiments among the poor people and especially among the students, and succeeded only too well. Night after night, crowds of students gathered on the street before our house and yelled, ‘Down with the foreign devils!’ ‘Down with Christianity!’ ‘Kill!’ ‘Kill!’ and after having yelled themselves hoarse, came to our dispensary the next morning to have their sore throats treated!\textsuperscript{29}

During this time, in the latter part of January, as the sisters prayed for Father Young, Bishop John O’Shea urged nationalist troops to rescue him. One of the sisters wrote: “Most of the soldiers are out following up the bandits. Unfortunately they seem to move in a circle never accomplishing anything definite....”\textsuperscript{30} Although perhaps they did just enough to jostle several of the prisoners loose.

In early April 1929 the American Consul ordered the evacuation of all foreigners from southern Jiangxi Province, as he had done two years before. This time, one sister wrote, “absolute necessity alone will enforce this order.”\textsuperscript{31} Pockets of turmoil varied in frequency, intensity, and duration throughout the southern part of the province. Because their burned and looted missions were unsafe many priests hid in various places throughout the province. Father Gately and a number of Chinese priests took refuge in Ganzhou at this time.

Periods of dry weather during the rainy season of 1929 increased the fear of famine as the second rice crop the previous year had completely failed for lack of water. “Rain is badly needed and everyone is praying for it,” wrote one sister.\textsuperscript{32} Not trusting the gardener to do it right, Sister O’Neill herself planted seed potatoes, though the sisters feared even her efforts would be useless. Their well was drying up and water had to be used sparingly. “In some provinces many thousands have already died of starvation and now with another war about to begin, the poor people are to be pitied....”\textsuperscript{33} The sisters gave thanks to God when at last the rain came.

\textsuperscript{28} Groell, \textit{White Wings}, 52.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 53-54.
\textsuperscript{30} “Anonymous letter from Ganzhou on Pentecost Monday,” 1929, \textit{Echo from the Mother House} 4:6 (June 1929): 233 [mislabeled in \textit{Echo} as 133].
\textsuperscript{31} “Anonymous letter from Ganzhou,” 10 April 1929, \textit{Ibid.}, 222 [mislabeled in \textit{Echo} as 122].
\textsuperscript{33} “Anonymous letter from Ganzhou,” 31 March 1929, \textit{Ibid.}, 221.
During a lull in the military storm around the city, on Tuesday, 9 April 1929, Sisters Beggs, Groell, Lucas, and DeLude (the last having lived in Ganzhou only four months) were sent to start Immaculate Conception House and Hospital in Taiwo. A village in the countryside about thirty miles southwest of Ganzhou and five miles south of Tangjiang, Taiwo sat on the north bank of the upper reaches of the sinuous but temporarily dry Gan River. On their entry into town the sisters were greeted by Fathers George Erbe and Lawrence Curtis, a joyful crowd (including the Sisters of Saint Anne, a group of Chinese sisters who taught school there), and loud fireworks. They moved into a clean but unfinished house.

The following day carpenters installed windows and locks, and movers brought in the medicines and furniture that had been sent from Ganzhou via Tangjiang. Catholics called the hill on which the sisters lived Martyr’s Hill because that was where Father Anthony Canduglia, an Italian Vincentian priest, had been killed by a mob during the Boxer Rebellion. One of the three mob leaders had eaten Father Canduglia’s heart to gain some of his courage. He eventually became Catholic, and in sadness for his part in the murder the sisters would see him kneeling on the brick floor in front of the altar every Sunday during mass.

These four “country sisters,” as they came to be called by their city compatriots, found the poor people of Taiwo to be very cordial and appreciative of their service. The small village lacked even a post office, though it did have a Boy Scout troop, a Catholic church and school, and now a dispensary. From the start, the sisters treated the sick in their own homes or in the dispensary for free. During the first month, before the dispensary opened, the sisters treated 300 patients in the convent’s basement. As it was with all other Daughters of Charity throughout the world, their physical service was always intimately linked with spiritual service. It was all of a piece as they saw it.

On their second day in Taiwo one of the sisters baptized a four-year-old child who died shortly thereafter, eternal medicine offered with the same generosity as temporal medicine. About that same time they were asked to treat a burn victim who could not come to them:

Out we went, over the rice paddies and ploughed ground. We jumped ditches for one mile and at last found a poor settlement. The patient, a man, was horribly burned. His ears, the top of his head, his arms from the elbows down, including his finger tips and both feet, were a sight to behold. Even his fingernails dropped out. The accident had occurred three days ago…. He was lying on a wooden bed with hard bamboo pillows under his poor head. How disfigured! I thought of another Face. What a privilege is mine to dress his face. Well, you can well imagine the odor of the sloughing tissue after these three days. Even his bed reeked of pus. We went to work and while busy offered up all our discomfort for this poor pagan’s conversion…. They worked in cooperation with the priests and “visited several pagan tribes nearby.

34 Taiwo was formerly spelled in a variety of ways: Taholi, Ta Ho Li, Taiholi, Taiho-li, or Tai Ho Li.
35 Tangjiang was variously spelled: Tangkiang, Tang Kiang, or Tan Kiang.
Father [George] Erbe is delighted, for some of these tribes have been very bitter and hostile, and for years he has been trying to find a way to reach them.”

The sisters opened their dispensary with great fanfare on Monday, 13 May 1929, and hung in the waiting room a scroll which had been given to them citing their “wonderful deeds.” They treated leg ulcers, boils, and many kinds of infections during the morning hours in their dispensary. Many babies died in the heat; the sisters baptized them when they could. Poor persons often begged them to visit their homebound sick relatives, which they learned to do in the open air just outside the doorway because when they entered a home dozens of neighbors would crowd the doorway to see what was going on, in the process blocking out the only source of light.

The sisters walked many miles during the late afternoon and evening to people’s homes. Through painful experience they learned to imitate the Chinese who avoided travel under the midday sun when they could. On one occasion Sister DeLude met a leper on one of the many very narrow paths in the countryside. She wrote that the paths were “…so narrow in places that in passing another person one must touch the other to prevent slipping into the water…. As I was crossing a field, I heard a man call: ‘Wait, Sister, I am a leper.’ The poor fellow did not want to touch me in passing. ‘I am a Leper’: how these words pierced my heart! The ones I longed to serve. We treated them in an Out-Patient. Our only precaution was to wash our hands well, putting soap and then alcohol; we used no gloves in dressing their sores.”

Hilly paths could be even more difficult. Once Sister

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DeLude missed her step and slid twenty feet down, becoming plastered all over with yellow clay and having to walk below her companion Sister Groell for a long time before she could rejoin her. But they did not even have to leave the village to encounter problems with paths. Just to get to the nearby parish church for Sunday mass they had to slide down an embankment with skirts and umbrella firmly held, cross two “gullies” of rushing water which they sometimes fell in, and step along stepping stones through a rice paddy which they also sometimes fell in.

The “country sisters” had barely left Ganzhou when alarm shook the city. Contradictory rumors came and went. The communists were coming. No they weren’t. Yes they were. “Everybody is ready for them. Each householder has to have a light outside his door at night and every home has to either give one man to be on guard at night or pay ten cents which will hire a substitute. These men go around the streets and keep watch. They go in fours or fives and carry spades, hoes, and shovels. I hear somebody drumming all night long close to our place on something like two tin cans.”

The gates to the city were shut on Saturday, 13 April 1929, only four days after Sister DeLude and her three companions left Ganzhou. The inhabitants of the city felt temporary relief when nationalist reinforcements arrived during the first week in May 1929, but by the middle of the month the city was again surrounded by some of the communists who had fled Jinggangshan. On Sunday, 26 May 1929, Sister Jarboe dashed off a breathless letter, writing:

The bandits have been giving us lots of trouble and anxiety. We had orders from the American Consul to leave Kan-chou [Ganzhou] stating they could not protect us. At that time we were surrounded by these outlaws and [it] would have been dangerous to go outside of the city gates and besides if once we leave that would be the end of our mission. They would have a better chance to destroy it, and our works here mean so much to these poor people [and] the salvation of so many souls…. We treat a large number in our dispensary every day also a hospital for men and women and we have many conversions among them…. Our dispensary and hospital is free to all. We give them everything. I often wonder how we keep supplied with medicines but it is like the loaves and fishes it seems to multiply. And the little babies are so poorly cared for they die like flies in the summer time but they are so many little souls we steal for heaven. They are brought to us by their pagan parents for treatment of the body and in the meantime they get baptism. Also [we] visit the homes — and such homes — dark and dirty built of clay without windows some kind of an opening for a door. Many a visit means the salvation of a soul.

From this quickly-written letter we catch a glimpse of the organization of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity funneling resources contributed by so many unnamed Catholics in the United States, a glimpse of the impoverished milieu of the city.

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40 Anselma Jarboe, D.C., “Letter from Ganzhou to Mrs. Anna Murphy in Albany, NY,” 26 May 1929, ASLP record group 22-1, box 6-5’ #2B.
of Ganzhou, and a glimpse of the violent chaos around it. We also see two important motivations that led Sister Jarboe and her companions to leave their own country: medical care for the sick-poor of course, but more importantly spiritual care for sick-poor souls. Human dignity deserves both. While two vicious extremes of Western culture — nationalism and communism — were engaged in fierce conflict around them, the sisters went about their quiet business. They might have described their work as the true core of human, not just Western, culture: the physical and spiritual annunciation of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Associated with the sisters’ motivations was a sense of superiority. This certainly was also exhibited by the violent and often supercilious heralds of both nationalism and communism, who planned to force on others what they thought was best. Unlike them, though, the sisters’ sense of superiority was willingly offered as a nonviolent invitation to receive what was best, to anyone willing to take it. Even if our own, later sense of superiority were to judge them for sometimes baptizing dying babies without the full comprehension of parents, it must be understood they did so with an unabashed sense of generosity, and within the context of a medical delivery system in which unquestioning acceptance of the proffered treatment was the norm even in Western nations.

Poor babies who died “like flies” were not the only people singled out for special pity by the sisters. One of them wrote: “You cannot imagine the sad condition of women in China. If they are sick or cannot work, there is no room for them at home. They are not wanted and are gotten rid of....” And indeed among the babies, more often than not they were girls who were abandoned. By the leavening effect of sharing their Catholic faith, and converting others to it, the sisters hoped among other things to instill in China a moral system which values human life, both women and men equally.

Bishop John O’Shea and Father Francis Moehringer boarded “Noah’s Ark” on

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41 “Anonymous letter from Ganzhou on Pentecost Monday,” Echo, 233 [mislabeled in Echo as 133].
Monday, 1 July 1929, for the episcopal consecration of Father Edward Sheehan\(^42\) as vicar apostolic of Yujiang\(^43\) scheduled for Sunday, 14 July 1929. On this date, almost two months after her last letter, Sister Jarboe dashed off another. She was feeling short-handed because Sister Strable, her sister servant, had visited the sisters in Taiwo on business, and was now exhausted from the sixty-mile round trip. She wrote that “we are so few where we are so much needed among these poor pagans we have most pitiful cases they come to our dispensary hardly able to walk.”\(^44\) Although a temporary lull in “bandit” activity brought the city a sense of peace, Sister Jarboe had by now become attuned to the violent undercurrents. “The bandits are still in existence…. But we are not afraid. We know we have Our Blessed Mother to protect us and with all the prayers that are being offered daily for us.”\(^45\) As always, after her name she signed the letter with the acronym “udocsotps” — i.e. “unworthy daughter of charity servant of the poor sick.” It was a custom with meaning. A deep sense of personal humility tempered the superiority she felt about what she offered.

On Thursday, 15 August 1929, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a month after her last letter, Sister Jarboe again wrote from Saint Margaret’s House in Ganzhou. She filled several lines about how very happy she was; two masses and a solemn pontifical benediction by Bishop Paul Dumond produced a deep sense of joy that was a significant part of her general cheerfulness. She looked forward to seeing all the neighboring Vincentian priests at their annual retreat the following week when, no doubt, Father Young would narrate the story of his capture and escape from the communists (although she wrote nothing of it in her letters). And, after that, she especially looked forward to her own retreat wherein all eight sisters planned to gather at Saint Margaret’s House.

August was hot, but some said not as hot as previous summers. The many insects and spiders, as big as horses and dinner plates laughed Sister Jarboe, went unmolested by humans — everything had a purpose according to the Chinese. The well on the sisters’ property produced cold, clear water, but had to be boiled before drinking. Sister Jarboe hurriedly wrote in her usual slap-dash style about the arrival of soldiers that hot summer month:

> We are in peace at present a new lot of soldiers came to guard Kanchou [Ganzhou] such as they are. I think more than half came to the dispensary for treatment that morning their complaint chiefly tired legs I gave most of them a hot drink of soda water and told them to go home and rest and they would be cured. The poor creatures they have great faith in our medicines. They had

\(^{42}\) Between 1928 and 1930 two Vincentian priests from the U.S.A.’s Western Province of the Congregation of the Mission evangelized the northern part of Jiangxi Province. Edward T. Sheehan traveled around the Poyang and Yujiang areas between 1922-1951. Harry W. Altenburg arrived in Poyang in 1929 and remained in China until 1944.

\(^{43}\) Yujiang, located east of Lake Poyang in Jiangxi Province, was formerly spelled Yükiang.

\(^{44}\) “Jarboe letter from Ganzhou to Sister Serena Murphy at Saint Mary’s Infant Asylum in Dorchester, MA,” 14 July 1929, ASLP record group 22-1, box 6-5\(^2\) #2C.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.
been walking for two or three days is it any wonder their legs pained them. It is very hard traveling in the Interior any distance. We haven’t any roads only beaten paths.⁴⁶

The eight sisters enjoyed their retreat together during the first week of September. The two traveling companions, Sisters Jarboe and DeLude, were especially happy to see each other again and share stories. All the sisters were given strict orders to rest as much as they could during their retreat, orders they seemed happy enough to obey. Then the quiet, busy daily schedule began again. Sister Jarboe dashed off several lines of a letter on Wednesday, 16 October 1929, but completed the page only on Sunday, 10 November 1929. When she realized it would be a month before it reached the United States her thoughts turned toward the Solemnity of Christmas. She recalled the previous year when the sisters had exchanged little gifts with a huge number of Catholics during the holy day celebrated with a simple spiritual fervor. Now, the countryside was relatively quiet and so she and Sister O’Neill were already planning a December afternoon excursion in the mountains to gather evergreen.

That fall, as the days got shorter, the weather became unusually cold and gloomy with a lot of rain and ice, and some snow. The nearby mountains were covered with snow. The sisters had a stove in their community room, but for the most part they shivered under layers of clothing. Many half-starved and freezing people came for help. Christmas was quiet and peaceful. The sisters attended midnight mass. Money that would be used to buy food and clothing for the poor arrived by mail, but expected packages for the hospital did not come. The Gan River was a dangerous place again. On Thursday, 17 January 1930, Sister Jarboe wrote: “Sister Catherine O’Neill and I are praying that the boxes will come in time, we didn’t get any of our boxes for Christmas but we know they are all safe in Nanchang and will get them some time. At present the Kan [Gan] River is very dangerous it is filled with robbers and the boats will not venture out until it is safe for them to travel.

⁴⁶ “Jarboe letter from Ganzhou to Sister Serena Murphy,” 15 August 1929, ASLP record group 22-1, box 6-5² #2D.
The Reds are very numerous and only a few days ago rumors were that they were within two days reach and intended to take Kanchou [Ganzhou]."  

More soldiers arrived and the city freely celebrated the Chinese New Year on Thursday, 30 January 1930. Preeminently a family affair, most people in the region celebrated the event according to their means with a dinner honoring household gods and ancestors, setting off fireworks and opening doors and windows, if they had them, at midnight. During the next several days while people stayed at home or visited friends and relatives there was a pause in the activity at the hospital, dispensary, and out-patient department. The sisters went into retreat again during this expected break. Sister DeLude and the other “country sisters” arrived thoroughly wet from the rain during their trip to Ganzhou for the retreat. But the New Year lull was also the lull before the storm.

It is interesting to note that the sisters thought the arrival of extra troops and safety of the city during the Chinese New Year was the result of a flurry of telegrams sent by their “big brother,” Father James Corbett. And there may be something to this considering the lingering effects of the foreign treaties the Qing dynasty had signed to end the Opium Wars almost a century before, granting foreigners more privileges and authority than many Chinese had in their own country. But these privileges were also a hindrance to clergy because they wounded ethnic pride and stirred up resentment. Resentments which fueled the more-or-less leaderless country-wide phenomenon of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, and now fueled the ruthlessly-led phenomenon of Communism abetted by the political fragmentation following the end of the Qing dynasty in 1912. But the sisters placed their ultimate trust in heaven. Perhaps we detect even an implied impetuous command directed to heaven by Sister Jarboe, who wrote: “Divine Providence must and will protect us. Our Blessed Mother will not let anything happen to us. And we feel safe under her protection.”

The Flight of the Taiwo Sisters during the Siege of Ganzhou

Our focus now shifts to the country village of Taiwo for several days. As Sister Helena Lucas was to write afterward, “You could not imagine how much tragedy and comedy were crowded into those few days.”

On Saturday, 15 March 1930, the Taiwo sisters received a letter from Father Leon Cahill, in Ganzhou, saying that bandits were approaching the city and that reinforcements had not yet arrived. The danger was higher than usual. He described a line of conduct if they should be threatened.

On Sunday, 16 March 1930, at 3:30 a.m., Father Curtis awoke the sisters with his shouts and Father Erbe sent men out to watch the roads. A merchant had just arrived from Ganzhou saying the bandits had attacked the city. Concerned that a band might come

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47 “Jarboe letter from Ganzhou to Sister Serena Murphy,” 17 January 1930, ASLP record group 22-1, box 6-5 #2F.
48 Ibid.
49 Helena Lucas, D.C., Addendum to “Our Flight from the Bandits” (28 March 1930), 14, ASLP record group 12-11-11, box 3-2 #15. Hereinafter cited as Lucas, “Addendum to Our Flight.”
their way, mass was immediately celebrated in the sisters’ little chapel and the Blessed Sacrament was completely consumed. The sisters felt a palpable emptiness because of the now-empty tabernacle: “we realized that our Treasure — our ALL was no longer in our midst....”50 After breakfast, in case they needed to escape, they packed a bag with a few necessities.

On Monday, 17 March 1930, the sense of imminent danger to Taiwo gradually waned. Nevertheless, the sisters’ hearts ached with concern for the people in Ganzhou as they heard reports of the fierce fighting there. The Blessed Sacrament was returned to their chapel although watchers continued to take turns on the roads.

On Tuesday, 18 March 1930, Father Curtis informed the sisters that fighting around Ganzhou was still ferocious, but the communists were losing the contest. They would probably withdraw to Tangjiang, only a few miles away, and would no doubt sprawl throughout the area. He told them to obtain disguises because it would be too dangerous to travel in their habits. Sister Groell asked Martin their comprador to secretly find four old garments, long silk blue or black gowns such as ordinary men wore. Within the hour he was back with four old but spotlessly clean ones from his own home. That evening the sisters, with some laughter to cut the tension, tried them on. They wanted to be able to get into them in a hurry. They took off their cornettes; Sister DeLude wore a steamer cap, Sister Lucas some kind of Chinese hat, Sister Beggs a black cloth wrapped around, and Sister Groell a blue rag. A report, untrue but believed at the time, told of reinforcements arriving in Ganzhou from Ji’anfu, and contributed to a sense of good cheer.

On Thursday, 20 March 1930, from the out-patient department, Sister DeLude saw Father Curtis running toward the sisters’ house and so she ran there too, not bothering to lock the clinic door thereby unwittingly saving it from later being broken. Sister Groell, upstairs in the house, had just finished a letter to their director in the United States, Father John Cribbins, and rushed downstairs at the disturbance. Bandits were near. The midday dinner lay ready but ignored. In the chapel each of the sisters thinking it might be her Viaticum received several hosts. They sent a messenger to Ganzhou. They put on their Chinese clothes, gave their apron-wrapped habits to Rosa, a Chinese employee who hid them in rice bins, and ran to the parish church where Father Erbe told them to follow a certain Catholic man who would lead them to safety.

After two hours of steady walking they arrived at a Catholic household hidden behind a large hill where they were received kindly and offered dinner, but they were too upset to eat. They spent the afternoon reading and saying prayers, grateful that Sister DeLude had brought her “Catechism of the Vows.” Meanwhile, their practical-minded comprador, Martin, returned from Tangjiang to find a deserted mission. He assessed the situation, then packed and sent blankets, sheets, bread, table-service, and a lantern on to them. “The

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room in which we were to sleep contained three beds. Two of these were placed at our disposal, while the poor woman of the house crowded several children in the remaining bed with herself. Of course, the room was a typically Chinese one — mud walls and floor, and a tiny window at each end. Several chickens also found a sleeping place there.”

After dark, several Catholic men reassured them that others were watching the roads and stood guard around the house. To demonstrate their resolve one of them, a frail boy named Luke, showed them his very wicked-looking knives. The sisters decided to go to bed fully dressed, even keeping their shoes on, in case they needed to be taken to a safer place on short notice. And indeed there was a disturbance. Fathers Erbe and Curtis arrived with several other men in the middle of the night. The communists were expected in Taiwo at any moment and too many people knew the sisters’ hiding place. A pagan family living nearby agreed to take them in. The priests fled elsewhere. Through faint moonlight a man named Matthias silently led the sisters to their new hiding place where they were quietly admitted. Sister Clara Groell described the event:

Without a word, the man of the house and his wife led the way through a passage into an inner room. In this room a ladder led to a loft, up which we climbed one by one. It was devoid of furniture, except two old boxes, but our ‘host’ brought up four ‘horses’ and a few boards and our beds were made. I am quite convinced that from the day that house was built up to the present moment, no one had ever cleaned that place! Thick cob-webs like black curtains hung from the ceiling and on the walls and an inch or two of dust covered the floor. This room had two openings — very small holes — at one end. There was a door, but we had to keep it constantly closed for fear of being discovered. We sat on our beds for a while, praying. I made an act of acceptance of death and prepared for the worst. I prayed, too, that God in His goodness would bestow upon these good people the gift of Faith, for having so generously befriended us — perfect strangers to them.

Sister DeLude wondered if her own mother would do for complete strangers what these kind people were doing for them.

On Friday, 21 March 1930, after a sleepless night on hard boards the sisters could see a bright clear morning through their little window. They were offered eggs and rice gruel but their appetites were poor. The sisters were afraid to move or to speak above a whisper as they listened to the voices of people who came and went all day outside the house. That night Matthias returned to tell them their mission had been looted but not burned. After his report, they returned to their hiding place in the loft to be entertained again by scurrying rats and “affectionate” fleas. Sister Lucas would later say that the fugitives seemed “to thrive on Chinese food, midnight flights, hiding in lofts and other circumstances that go with escaping from bandits. The worst of the whole business was the anxiety we knew we

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52 Ibid., 5-6.
were putting others through on our account.”  

On Saturday, 22 March 1930, the sisters woke stiff and sore to a dismal rainy day. Their hostess cooked a chicken which they enjoyed. Funny remarks sent them all into fits of suppressed laughter but the least outside noise would make them turn apprehensive eyes toward the trapdoor. In the evening their hostess told them to pack immediately. After dark, “Matthias came with Martin. How glad we were to see them! We scarcely recognized Martin, for he was disguised as a coolie, and looked so haggard and worn. He feared for our safety. There was a certain man, who knew where we were and could not be trusted. A reward was offered for information as to our whereabouts — $200 for each Priest or Sister delivered into their hands! Martin feared this would prove too great a temptation to some, so he thought it best to take us to another place.”  

They left as quietly as they had come. It was night. The rain had stopped but the paths were muddy.

Stopping first at the Catholic’s home where they had initially stayed, they walked without light in the moonless night while several men with lanterns set out in the opposite direction to deceive anyone who might be watching. Everyone in the party clung by hand or by stick to the preceding fugitive, and so they wended their slippery way over hills and between ponds, steep inclines and crude ditches. Eventually it was considered safe to light a lantern. They slipped and stumbled onward, sometimes falling and even laughing. Then their guide discovered he was lost and so went ahead while they all waited in the cold, wet darkness. “After some minutes our guide returned and we started out once more. We had not gone far when we saw lights coming towards us. There were only two, but the reflection in the water made us think at first, that there were several. We feared that we had been betrayed and that we were about to fall into the hands of the bandits. Quick as a flash Martin turned out the light and waited. It was a tense moment! Thank God!  

They were the men, who had gone ahead with our blankets and were looking for us.”

Finally they arrived at their third hiding place. They passed through a labyrinth of inside passages, climbed a ladder, and found themselves in a loft with a tiny hole for ventilation and a pile of clean straw to be spread out for bedding. The men left and locked the door to the room below which caused some trepidation in the sisters. Locked in! It was very hot so Sister Lucas reached up and shifted some roof tile to make an opening; even the attic’s floor boards were not nailed in place. They slept well, and said their evening and morning prayers as always.

On Sunday, 23 March 1930, by mistake, they all received two breakfasts:
Matthias was so distressed because he thought we had not been getting the right kind of food, that he decided to prepare our meals himself, which he did from that time on, and we can assure anyone who wants to know, that he is a good cook. During the morning we had a pleasant surprise. Rosa (the girl who works for us) rushed into the room. She fairly hugged us. She had persuaded Matthias to tell her where we were, for she thought she could be of service to us, promising that she would be a “prisoner” with us, and only on this condition would he tell her. Her delight to see us and her distress at our sad plight were touching to behold. Enough cannot be said about the loyalty and kindness of these good Christians. Words can never adequately express our gratitude and appreciation for all that they have done for us!

Unbeknown to the four sisters, the messenger whom they had sent three days beforehand to Ganzhou had not succeeded in reaching the city until this very Sunday, and only by great daring. He was finally hoisted over the city wall by rope. The priests and sisters in Ganzhou now knew they had left Taiwo but were still in suspense concerning their welfare.

On Monday, 24 March 1930, while the four sisters united spiritually with their sisters throughout the world to prepare for the annual renewal of their vows, they were interrupted repeatedly with reports, some reassuring, some frightening. In the afternoon Matthias led them, along with Rosa, back to their first hiding place because the people wanted to have them back, and because the ambient threat level there had diminished enough that they could be as safe there as anywhere. In the evening a messenger from Ganzhou gave them such a puzzling dispatch about sedan chairs and an escort of soldiers arranged by Bishop O’Shea that they decided to remain where they were until they could talk with Martin.

On Tuesday, 25 March 1930, the four sisters arose early. It was a day in which the Daughters of Charity all over the world renew their Holy Vows, nearly 44,000 offering anew their hearts to God. “With a far greater zeal to love and serve Him in the person of the Poor, we four came down from our little shelter and in that mud hut knelt on the mud

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55 Ibid., 9.
56 Ibid., 10.
floor and renewed our Holy Vows. No Mass; no Holy Communion for us; but God in His mercy made Himself All in All to us. Never have I ever had such a Happy Renovation; peace and love filled each heart to overflowing. We had nothing, not even our Holy Habit, but we seemed to possess all things. How I should trust Him after that Renovation! Every Sister felt the same great peace of soul.”

Eventually they were able to retrieve, kiss, and don previously-hidden habits. In no time Martin arrived with four sedan chairs. He told them to travel with the curtains closed, because of continuing danger. On the way to Ganzhou they stopped at Taiwo, where a large crowd of people greeted them. They were told that when the looting began many Catholics also took things, to save them for their return. The sisters’ hearts ached to see the loss and damage, especially since their own families had donated many things. Most of what remained on the property was broken.

Sister Lucas learned that “the bandits encountered opposition or at least protest from the people both in Tangkiang [Tangjiang] and Taiholi [Taiwo], when they went for the mission. They told them, ‘If the communists are to help the people, why do they rob the Catholic Missions that give the people free medicine, etc?’” Then, hurrying toward Ganzhou, they had traveled about seven miles when they were met by one of their men who reported that the city was again under attack and the gates were locked. To go back would have been more dangerous according to Martin, and soldiers detailed to escort them into the city had taken a different path.

Sister Groell reminisced, “It was decided that we keep right on, so placing ourselves under the protection of our Immaculate Mother, we continued our journey. Our carriers fairly flew along, making only one stop. About 4 p.m. we reached the city. Thank God! the gates were open, and without any difficulty we entered and in a few minutes were at Saint Margaret’s and in the arms of our Sisters. How they rejoiced to see us! What a welcome we received! The scene can better be imagined than described!” Sister Lucas added that “this running around the country in men’s clothes was certainly a most unpleasant business.... And could you believe it? The missionaries were waiting for us with cameras, to get us in our disguises!”

Bishop O’Shea and Fathers Cahill, Corbett, McClimont, Jules Meyrat (from France), Daniel McGillicuddy, and Francis Stauble greeted them. When the excitement settled they all entered the chapel for benediction, and with great joy and gratitude they sang the Magnificat. Little did they know that their “running around the country in men’s clothes” had merely been a practice. The siege had been lifted, but four months later all eight sisters would be disguised as Chinese men, fleeing for their lives again as the communists firmly took control of the southern part of Jiangxi Province.

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Meanwhile, the Siege of Ganzhou

Meanwhile in besieged Ganzhou, despite the danger to themselves, Sister Strable worried about the country sisters so much that every day when they prayed the *De Profundis* she would start weeping, not knowing whether they were alive or dead.62 It was not until Sunday, 23 March 1930, that the messenger lifted over the wall was able to tell them that the sisters had left Taiwo safely. But the question remained: were they still safe?

We go back now to Saturday, 15 March 1930, the same day that the sisters in Taiwo received the message from Father Cahill about how to act if they were threatened. Until the attackers withdrew westward toward Tangjiang and the Taiwo area on Wednesday, 19 March 1930, the fighting was fierce. All the priests — excepting four of them who had escaped to Hong Kong and two who happened to be in Shanghai on business — had fled for refuge into Ganzhou, the only place in southern Jiangxi where Catholic Church property was not looted or destroyed during this phase of communist movement. One of the priests went around the city walls burying Miraculous Medals, praying for the intercession of the Blessed Mother.

Hundreds of attackers climbed up ladders and were shot down by the defending troops. Sister DeLude opined that if they had known how few defenders there were, because the expected reinforcements had not come, the city would have certainly been taken.63 Over five days the city was bombarded, once for an entire twenty-four hours. On the morning that the twenty-four-hour bombardment began, Sister Jarboe arose and dressed at 3 A.M. because the noise was keeping her awake, and had just stepped out of her room when a shell smashed through her bed.64 She later reminisced how amazing it was that no priests, sisters, employees, or wards except for one orphan were injured; none were killed. She stated what all the sisters and priests and many citizens believed, that it was the “Blessed Mother that saved Ganzhou. It is really miraculous how all the priests and sisters reached here safely some of them came in while we were being fired upon....65 Along with the “country sisters” in their mud home and the many sisters throughout the world, the Daughters of Charity in Ganzhou renewed their vows on Tuesday, 25 March 1930. After the Taiwo sisters reached the walled city of Ganzhou, they remained there to work. The eight were again reunited.

The sisters continued quietly and diligently to provide service to the sick poor. Later, in May, Sister Jarboe wrote: “Our work goes on as ever. Many sick ones in the hospital and dispensary arrived every day last week we treated almost a thousand men I do not know how many women and children we have two separate dispensaries and I have charge of all the men.”66

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 13.
65 “Jarboe letter from Ganzhou to Sister Serena Murphy,” 18 May 1930, ASLP record group 22-1, box 6-52 #2G.
66 Ibid.
The countryside was in turmoil. Communists in groups of variable strength moved to and fro. National troops, many of them with divided loyalties, attempted to defend the cities and towns. Transportation along the Gan River had already been stopped altogether in November of the previous year. In fact, by the time the sisters fled the city at the end of July, at least 100 parcel post packages with duty and postage paid were waiting downriver to be shipped to them.

A Second Flight, a Second Siege

Rumor had it that Mao Zedong and Zhu De planned to return to the Ganzhou area. At 3 p.m. on Wednesday, 30 July 1930, Father Cahill hurried to the hospital to report that the defending general had orders from Nanjing to abandon the city, orders he was not particularly keen to obey. The general had paced the room in agitation as he told Bishop O’Shea that he would be forced to leave on Friday, 1 August 1930, because he had his orders, had little ammunition left, and because one of his two regiments were communist sympathizers awaiting the opportunity to let the others in. In the afternoon of that day Bishop O’Shea, who was deeply worried about the wellbeing of the sisters, wrote to Sister Strable asking her to leave for Shanghai until Ganzhou was safer.

Father Cahill and Bishop O’Shea decided that it was advisable for the four Taiwo sisters to leave early the next morning, Thursday, 31 July 1930, ready for an all-day hike. So after the 4:30 a.m. mass at which the Blessed Sacrament was entirely consumed — causing a sense of desolate emptiness in the chapel — they left with Father Corbett at 6 a.m. in the rain, as though going to visit the sick as was their custom. Two Chinese employees named Rosa and Tina accompanied them. The sisters rode in rickshaws as far as the river. Then Sister Lucas rode the priest’s mule while all the rest walked westward until they arrived in Pinglu, about eight miles and four hours away. This was the closest Catholic mission to Ganzhou, where Father Stauble was stationed. He was able to acquire two sedan chairs for them, and so Sisters DeLude and Beggs arrived in Taiwo by nightfall.

Meanwhile in Ganzhou, Father Meyrat, the remaining French Vincentian, waited with the general who hoped to hear of a change in his orders. Aware of this arrangement, the Ganzhou sisters opened Saint Margaret’s clinic gate, still hoping that they would be able to stay. They worked quickly to serve the unusually large crowd of patients that morning. Right after the noon meal the sisters were told to leave the city within the hour. Sister Strable put her foot down and said two hours. They swiftly packed clothing in large baskets, paid the employees, secreted the chapel’s sacred objects, and set a trustworthy man in charge of the hospital. Then they were ready to start on their way; “the worst came when we had to leave our work our poor sick it was heart rending our hospital filled

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67 Formerly spelled as either Pinglo or Pinglu, the area is perhaps now in the western part of the city of Ganzhou. The old spelling is retained here.
with sick people.” Bishop Dumond, and Fathers McGillicuddy, McClimont, and Cahill completed the last group that set out at 3 p.m. for Pinglu in the hot afternoon sunshine, leaving Bishop O’Shea and several priests to their fate in the city.

At around 5 p.m. a fierce rainstorm with sudden black clouds and thunderous cracks of lightning caused this final group of refugees to take shelter in a teahouse. When the fury was spent half an hour later, they set out again under a steady rain. Finally, at about 7:30 p.m., they met up with Sisters Groell and Lucas in Pinglu. The priests stayed overnight at Father Stauble’s house. Rosa, Tina, and the six sisters stayed nearby with a group of Chinese sisters. The rain continued on. For the Ganzhou sisters, dinner that evening was their first experience of Chinese food, and that night their second experience of Chinese beds — a board with a wooden block for a pillow. Unaccustomed to board beds, except for their voyages on “Noah’s Ark,” the sisters awoke with aches and pains. Sister Jarboe said her neck felt like it was broken.

On Friday, 1 August 1930, the sisters attended mass in the chapel. The party set out again in sedan chairs in the rain, leaving behind Sisters Strable and Kolb who planned to leave at noon. The sisters often had to get out of their sedan chairs at rickety bridges; slippery mud was everywhere. The fatigued carriers finally got them to Taiwo at 4 p.m. The six sisters slept on the bare springs of the vandalized beds in the looted house.

On Saturday, 2 August 1930, because the communists had desecrated the sisters’ chapel in March, the group gathered in the mission church for mass. In the afternoon the remaining two sisters rejoined the group. All eight sisters still fervently hoped they would be able to return to Ganzhou. The remainder of the day was spent in securing sedan chairs for the next morning, and readying disguises.

On Sunday, 3 August 1930, the group spent their time happily enough in prayer and relaxation. They went to their spring beds again expecting another night’s rest, until suddenly at 11 p.m. one of the priests called to Sister Strable. A message from Bishop O’Shea

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68 “Jarboe letter from Shanghai to Sister Serena Murphy,” 25 August 1930, ASLP record group 22-1, box 6-5² #2H.
had arrived ordering them all to put on their disguises and get out of the province as soon as possible as they were in danger of being surrounded. They hastily dressed and packed what they could into bundles, including what they had of heavy Chinese silver money, and placed them in baskets. The baskets were hung one at each end of a bamboo pole and carried by a porter.

Monday, 4 August 1930, began with a midnight mass and 1 a.m. breakfast. They were now a group of at least forty-four people (one bishop, three priests, and eight sisters; each priest had a bus boy and muleteer, each sister one porter and two sedan chair carriers) attempting to slip secretly away into the night. “I noticed the tears spring to the Fathers’ eyes as dear Sister Pauline stepped through the arch of the mission gate to her chair.”

Sister Strable, at age sixty-one, was by far the oldest in the group of sisters. Under a moonlit partly-cloudy sky just as they passed a “particularly dangerous” place several miles from Taiwo (probably near Nankang), one of the priests became violently sick. He was placed in one of the sedan chairs and three of the sisters took turns riding the mule. Sister Strable allowed them only an hour at a time on the animal during daytime hours, fearing they might suffer heatstroke. At a rickety bridge Father McGillicuddy told Sister DeLude to get off and let the animal jump across. She retorted that it was the mule’s job to jump and hers to hang on. However, after the jump, she revised that philosophy and subsequently walked herself across rickety bridges!

Through the night and during the day they pressed on, covering some thirty miles. All along the way they saw “houses and even whole villages burned to the ground” by the communists. Although they hoped to reach the shelter of Father Young’s oratory in Xincheng, the Communists had gotten to it already. It was totally ransacked. So they stayed the night in a Chinese inn where they found one room for men and another for women. The beds were narrow mats on boards lined so closely together one had to climb on from the foot of each bed. Wanting more privacy for her sisters, Sister Strable asked if there was room in the attic. The innkeepers made a great show of sweeping and dusting an unused old loft, beneath which was an opium den where “horrid creatures were lying around smoking the opium.” An open door gave the sisters light and air. After an 8 p.m. supper they enjoyed the luxuries of a bucket of hot water to wash their hands and faces, and straw on the floor for beds. A shared bottle of Citronella did not deter the bedbugs or the swarms of mosquitoes. Sister DeLude told Sister Strable that “I was afraid to fall asleep, as I sometimes slept with my mouth open, for fear a rat would mistake it for a rat hole and dive in. She gave me one of her solemn looks!” The men stayed on the ground

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70 Nankang continues to be spelled as it was in 1930.
71 Groell, White Wings, 99.
72 Xincheng was formerly spelled Shincheng.
73 “Jarboe letter from Shanghai to Sister Serena Murphy,” 25 August 1930, ASLP.
floor to protect the sisters. The next morning they looked like they had measles, covered with blotches, but they boiled coffee in their wash basin and considered themselves happy enough. Sister DeLude’s comment about the night was to recall a statement made by Father John Gabriel Perboyre that advised if one wished to practice mortification there was no better place than a Chinese inn.

On Tuesday, 5 August 1930, at 5 a.m., everyone was ready to start out again. They travelled the forty miles to reach Nan’an, where Father Young was stationed (as well as a couple of Chinese sisters) and remained active after his escape from captivity. He and Father John McLaughlin welcomed them at the end of their hard day’s journey. Here they were able to wash, eat, and sleep in exhaustion. It had taken them six days of anxious travel by way of a winding, circuitous route to cover the fifty straight miles that separates Ganzhou from Nan’an.

Wednesday, 6 August 1930, was the Feast of the Transfiguration. The sisters dressed in their habits for the day, attended mass, received Holy Communion, washed clothes, and baked bread. The quiet day was interrupted once by the sounds of gunfire and many running feet, but their fears were quickly calmed by the news that it was “only a local fight between the salt merchants and the tax collectors.” Another night was spent sleeping on boards.

Mei-ling Pass and Beyond, Still in Flight

On Thursday, 7 August 1930, the journey began again early in the morning. The day became hot. The sisters remained in their sedan chairs for about two hours until they reached the mountain ascent to Mei-ling Pass. The road was several feet wide, chiseled by hand a few millennia before, and “by far the best roadway we had seen in the interior of

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75 Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, C.M. (1802-1840), served as a missionary in China from 1835 until his arrest in 1839 and eventual martyrdom on 11 September of 1840. He was canonized on 2 June 1996 by Pope John Paul II.

76 See Ibid.

77 Groell, White Wings, 102.
The famous Father Matteo Ricci had traveled this route in the opposite direction in the late sixteenth century. The sisters made it a kind of pilgrimage in honor of Fathers Regis Clet and John Gabriel Perboyre, nineteenth century Vincentian martyrs who also had crossed that mountain range although, the sisters were told, not exactly that pass.

Hiking upward they passed ancient pagodas and idols on the way to the pass which divides the Jiangxi and Guangdong provinces. At the top Bishop Dumond turned and solemnly blessed the whole of the Jiangxi Province, tears falling down his cheeks. His action was impressive to the sisters: “We looked below and knowing we were leaving the work we all loved so much our hearts were breaking, now more than when we parted with loved ones,” wrote Sister DeLude. The sisters chose to continue walking on the way down, rather than ride. The scenery was beautiful and they felt secure with soldiers of the “Home Guard” protecting the road on the south side of the pass. Later, they heard that the soldiers were driven away the following day. The day continued to be fiercely hot, and they passed the body of a man on the side of the road who had apparently died of heat exhaustion. In late afternoon they reached Nanxiong where a Salesian priest from Italy named Del Maso heartily welcomed them and had a greatly appreciated spaghetti dinner prepared. He had been a captive of the communists for a time but was set free by one of their officers who had once been nursed back to health by Daughters of Charity in Paris. The sisters slept that night on boards, as usual, in the school.

On Friday, 8 August 1930, Father Del Maso arranged for their passage down the Zhen River on sampans. Because of widespread robbery along the river in the wilderness downriver he hired wary, well-armed soldiers from the local Mandarin to serve as security. Each sampan was a flat riverboat about thirty-five feet long, open with no partitions. The soldiers occupied one end, the crew the other. The passengers, the priests and employees in one, the sisters in the other, occupied the middle under a bamboo covering. The sisters cooked, ate, and slept on their little vessel. The deck was the table where they ate and the bed where they slept four to a row; the taller ones could not stand up straight because of the low roof. Moonlight allowed them to travel at night, during which the boatmen would stop for only a few hours of rest before beginning again. The fugitives spent three days and two nights like this and covered about fifty miles, drifting past makeshift communist forts placed at regular intervals waiting for an unwary boat to drift within range of their weapons. If any of the sisters became a little glum, Sister Jarboe would chide them saying, “Cheer up! Every minute is bringing us nearer to the ice cream and bananas!”

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78 Ibid., 104.
79 François-Regis Clét, C.M. (1748-1820), served as a missionary in China from 1792 until his arrest in 1819 and martyrdom on 18 February 1820. He was canonized on 1 October 2000 by Pope John Paul II.
81 Nanxiong was formerly spelled Nan Yum or Namyung.
82 Salesians of Don Bosco, formerly Society of St. Francis de Sales, is a Catholic institute founded in the nineteenth century.
83 Groell, White Wings, 110.
On Sunday, 10 August 1930, at 2 p.m. they arrived in Shaoguan, at the convergence of the Wu and Zhen Rivers. At one time Father Matteo Ricci had temporarily located his mission house at this spot. Currently the Salesians operated a very active mission here, and the Italian Sisters of Our Lady Help of Christians ran a large school. From the river the whole group of travelers, including the still-disguised sisters and their bodyguards, trudged a long way through the streets to the Salesian mission. They were delighted by its cleanliness and were again able, temporarily, to change into their habits.

Around the same time the Taiwo sisters had begun their trial flight on Tuesday, 25 February 1930, Luigi Versiglia, vicar apostolic of Shaoguan, was martyred here by the communists. A few months previously he had publicly prayed for martyrdom in distant Tianjin, the site of the martyrdom of ten Daughters of Charity sixty years before. The sisters felt a special bond with this bishop because he had visited them and said mass for them in their chapel several years before. As Sister DeLude knelt and kissed the stone that covered his remains, she begged him to intercede for her so that God would bring her back to China. Her prayer would later be answered as she hoped, but not without a six-year delay.

The sisters, aware that they had perhaps come close to martyrdom several times themselves, felt privileged to visit this holy place and to see the bloody ropes and handkerchief that had bound Saint Versiglia and the bloody bamboo rod that had beaten him. Eye-witnesses told how cruelly he had been treated and of a young priest with him martyred at the same time. In a slight digression Sister DeLude wrote that she gave a relic of this saintly bishop to Father William Slattery, future Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, who daily touched this relic to his eye. By this means, much to the amazement of his physicians at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, God miraculously healed him of an untreatable tubercle lesion which was causing “progressive blindness.”

On Tuesday, 12 August 1930, the sisters boarded a train, one which might be said to have been located at the junction of two frontiers: the industrial revolution, and the Chinese communist revolution. The train was supposed to leave at 8 a.m. and take them to Guangzhou (Canton). However, the still-disguised sisters waited in their seats on the train for two-and-a-half hours while another engine was moved out of the way. Sister Strable did not have much money but, when she saw the third class car they were in, she sent Sister DeLude ahead to check out first class. The only difference she saw were swivel

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84 Shaoguan was formerly spelled Shou Kwang or called by variations of Shiuchow. Areas named Zhenjiang and Wuijiang now also occupy this same area, on the northeast side of which is located the “Shaoguan Martyr’s Cemetery.”

85 Luigi Versiglia (1873-1930), was a Salesian priest who served as a missionary in China beginning in 1906. On 25th February 1930 he and fellow priest Don Caravario were traveling with five others when they were stopped by a group of armed bandits demanding money. Both priests were martyred when they attempted to stop the bandits from abducting three women traveling with them. Both were canonized by Pope John Paul II on 1 October 2000.

86 Tianjin was formerly spelled Tientsin.

87 On Tuesday, 1 May 1928.

88 Guangzhou, also known as Canton, was formerly spelled Kwangchow.
chairs that allowed passengers to hang their legs out the windows. The sisters willingly stayed in third class.

Eventually underway, the train chugged very slowly along the east side of the Bei River and then the Zhu River, surrounded by the beautiful scenery of flower-laden mountains reflected in the water of the winding river. They stopped at every teahouse, and at one several sisters and priests with cups and jugs made a dash for a mountain spring to gather water. But, hearing the train’s whistle they had to hurry back, spilling much of what they had been able to get. The train was already jolting ahead in uneven jerks when they boarded, and ultimately their car became disengaged and was left at a standstill. Alerted by their yelling and flag-waving, the surprised engineer looked behind, realized what had happened and returned to reattach their car. By the means of this ramshackle railway they covered what seemed to them an astonishing 150 miles in a mere ten hours.

Resting Finally, in Guangzhou

On Tuesday, 12 August 1930, at 8 p.m., they arrived at the big port city of Guangzhou in the delta of the Zhu River. Here they piled into two “real” cars that tore so quickly through the streets the sisters feared they would be killed — speeding along at 25 mph! Looking like a “bunch of tramps,” they arrived at a convent of the Immaculate Conception Sisters, a French-Canadian community. They had not received the telegram announcing the sister’s arrival and were already in bed after a hard day’s work. Yet, they graciously arose, prepared something to eat, and set out boards on sawhorses for beds. Sister Beggs was so exhausted she remained on her bed the entire time they were there. Meanwhile, the other seven sisters witnessed the good works done there.

Among the works was the salvation of infants. Every day Chinese lay women searched the streets for abandoned babies. Most of these babies were girls (as many as a dozen a day) and almost all were comatose. The women carried two babies to a bushel basket, with a basket tied to each end of a bamboo pole. When the women returned, the superior waiting at the door immediately baptized the babies she thought would die before noon. The rest were baptized in a solemn ceremony in the afternoon. If a baby was still alive one week after admission the chances were good she would live, but most died within a few hours.

Sister Strable decided that they should not look like tramps as they entered Hong Kong and so she borrowed $100 in U.S. currency from the French-Canadians to buy a trunk and suitcases for their clothing. The two sisters who entered China together, Sisters DeLude and Jarboe, volunteered to do the shopping and took with them their loyal comprador

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89 Bei River (Bei Jiang or Beijiang), one of the main tributaries of the Zhu River, was formerly spelled Pei.
90 Zhu River (Zhu Jiang or Zhujiang) was formerly known as the Pearl River, less commonly as the Guangdong River or Canton River.
92 Ibid.
Martin and one of the local employees of the French-Canadian mission who spoke both the Cantonese dialect and Mandarin.

While the sisters had only to re-acclimate themselves to the speed of the traffic, it was Martin’s first experience of the city’s quick pace and he was frightened, especially when crossing streets. Besides this, he did not understand the local dialect. To make matters worse, Martin had been entrusted with the $100 and unfortunately he encountered a pickpocket. Martin suddenly swung about with the stranger’s arm in his grip, shouting in his own dialect, “This man has my money; I have his hand; I know he has it.” A struggle ensued. Martin’s shirt was ripped. A crowd gathered. The thief broke away and ran, followed closely by Martin and the mission employee running after him and shouting “Thief!” A shop owner offered the sisters a place to sit and wait. Eventually the mission employee returned and led them back, telling them that Martin and the thief were in a police station. After the noon meal one of the priests went to the police station and brought Martin back, along with the $100 which had been found in the thief’s hat lining. So, for several reasons, Martin asked to be relieved of his duty and returned to Ganzhou. The sisters remained in Guangzhou until after Friday, 15 August 1930, the Feast of the Assumption.

It took the sisters five hours to travel the eighty miles to Kowloon in the private compartment of a train, “like we have in the U.S.A.” Even before lunch Sister Strable allowed them to eat ice cream. It had been eight years since some of the sisters had tasted it. In Kowloon they were received by a group of Maryknoll Sisters who “gave up their

93 Ibid., 23.
94 Kowloon was sometimes also spelled Chiu-lung.
95 “Jarboe letter from Shanghai to Sister Serena Murphy,” 25 August 1930, ASLP.
96 The Foreign Mission Sisters of St. Dominic, commonly called Maryknoll Sisters, officially changed their name in 1954 to Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic.
beds and slept on cots and tables to give us a much needed rest.” 97 Additionally, friends of the Maryknoll Sisters provided an automobile tour of the island of Hong Kong. They stayed in Kowloon until Wednesday, 20 August 1930, when a Canadian Pacific line steamer arrived to take them to Shanghai. The 800-mile voyage over two days and two nights on the ocean delighted the eight sisters.

**Continued Work in Shanghai and Environs**

On Friday, 22 August 1930, at the pier in Shanghai, two French Daughters of Charity greeted them and took them to Maison Centrale. After several days of rest here they all went to work. They expected to stay and work there until Ganzhou would be “freed from banditry. If it is His Holy Will we want to go back to Kanchou [Ganzhou] as soon as possible our poor people need us. It will be like beginning new again.” 98

Six of the eight sisters worked in the out-patient department of Maison Centrale, or in the clinic at Saint Mary’s Hospital in Shanghai. But they were having difficulty readjusting to the complexity and speed of modern city-life. They complained that the ports simply were not “China,” and that they longed for “our poor in the country with all their primitive ways.” 99 No doubt they also had trouble adjusting to the French language commonly spoken at the mission. Untainted by contemporary prejudices which seduced many civic leaders in early twentieth-century America, the American sisters were pleased to notice the presence of many Chinese Daughters of Charity, including fourteen in the seminary with “many aspirants and postulants.” 100

Sisters DeLude and Beggs were sent to Hangzhou 101 in Zhejiang Province, a mosquito-filled city of many canals, fine silks, and pagan altars. Sister DeLude wrote of the 500 pagan altars and about the ubiquitous mosquitoes: “...the quinine is passed around the table three times a day. The Sisters are all anemic-looking.” 103 She was also fascinated by the silk industry in the city. In a lengthy digression she wrote about witnessing the process of its manufacture from the cocoon, to dying, to weaving: “I could hardly believe my eyes when I say what was hidden in this little mud house. Beautiful silks of pure white in flower patterns, raised and so rich that you felt like you could pick one of the flowers from the silk. Silk is very cheap in this city, cheaper than cotton, this last imported for weaving.” 104 Perhaps this account metaphorically can be seen to indicate the beauty of

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98 “Jarboe letter from Shanghai to Sister Serena Murphy,” 25 August 1930, ASLP.
99 Pauline Strable, D.C., “Postscript to Jarboe letter from Shanghai to Sister Serena Murphy,” 25 August 1930, ASLP record group 22-1, box 6-5 2H.
100 “Jarboe letter from Shanghai to Sister Serena Murphy,” 25 August 1930, ASLP.
101 Hangzhou was formerly spelled Hangchow. It is the capitol city of Zhejiang Province and is located in the extensive Yangtze delta 110 miles southwest of Shanghai.
102 Zhejiang Province, which occupies the middle part of the East China coast, was formerly spelled Chekiang.
a freely-given Christianity, now hidden in the inner lives of individual Chinese people, particularly those who appeared to be poor and insignificant. Sister DeLude was placed in charge of a 40-bed ward in a hospital run by a Catholic Chinese doctor who had studied in France. It was a post she would hold until just before Christmas.

On Saturday, 4 October 1930, the communists captured five French Daughters of Charity in Ji’an, close to where Sisters DeLude and Jarboe had been warned during their voyage two years before not to get out of the junk for fear of being kidnapped. The five sisters were “carried off into the mountains from place to place for eighty days.”¹⁰⁵ Three priests were murdered there, and a bishop and priest were tied up, driven through the city streets, beaten by insulting crowds, and sent downriver to Shanghai with orders to send back $600,000 in ransom for the sisters. The bishop was told never to return, and to take his Christianity with him.¹⁰⁶ Later, in Shanghai, it became known that the Chinese sisters among them were able to move about freely but anxious doubt remained regarding the fate of the European sisters: “we have very little hope of their deliverance perhaps they are in heaven by this time.”¹⁰⁷ Then, the day before Christmas, the sisters learned that the captives had been rescued.

This distinction between Chinese and foreigner, and the resultant acts of persecution, illustrates a continuing resentment the unequal treaties of the previous century fostered by the communists and probably a significant number of the common people. The line many Chinese drew between Western politics and Christianity was blurred, no doubt because of the privileges these unequal treaties gave to missionaries. The ironic thing is that the communism the Chinese people were eventually bludgeoned into accepting was, itself, from the West.

On Saturday, 18 October 1930, the sisters received an encouraging message: Bishop John O’Shea and several priests were still holding out in a besieged Ganzhou. The sisters hoped the danger would soon pass and they would be able to return. Ambivalent news continued to come in as well. Nanchang, where four of the traveling American sisters had once been treated to a Thanksgiving dinner by courteous French sisters, was completely overrun and looted by the Communists. They chose to spare the French sisters and allowed them, with some inconvenience, to continue operating their hospital.

In late October 1930, still longing to return to Ganzhou, Sisters Jarboe, Groell, and O’Neill traveled twelve hours by boat to the pleasant Zhoushan Island. Here they were to assist the English Daughters of Charity led by the able Sister Xavier Berkeley. She had been in China for forty years and had established extensive works of the community there, including “the infant asylum, the old folk’s home, hospital for men and women, dispensary, and

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¹⁰⁵ Hughes, *Sister Xavier*, 139.

¹⁰⁶ See “Jarboe letter from Zhoushan (Chusan) Island to Sister Serena Murphy,” 7 November 1930, ASLP record group 22-1, box 6-5#21.


¹⁰⁸ Zhoushan was formerly spelled Chusan.
catechumenate, school, workroom, and orphan asylum....”\textsuperscript{109} One day they accompanied an English Daughter of Charity and a Chinese Daughter of Charity to visit prisoners in a jail. “Those who needed treatment were brought out of their cells, ten at a time, into a room where we attended to them. They were so glad to see us, and the well ones crowded to the doors of their cells and peered through the bars, calling to us. We treated over forty cases and after we had finished with the patients, we went from cell to cell distributing buns to each prisoner.”\textsuperscript{110}

The American sisters returned temporarily to the French sisters in Shanghai (perhaps on Tuesday, November 18) for the weeklong celebrations of the Feast of the Miraculous Medal, which culminated on the feast day of November 27. One of them wrote that “…it was nice to see our Blessed Mother loved and honored by so many of the Chinese people the church was filled every day and from the 19\textsuperscript{th} until the Feast they had pilgrimages every day with four or five Masses and three or four benedictions in the chapel. The sisters all went to the choir to make room for the people.... Twelve thousand medals were given out each person being enrolled.”\textsuperscript{111}

A feeling of thanksgiving for their own safety, tinged with sadness and longing, filled the sisters’ hearts at the end of the year. One of them wrote: “Just now we are exiles. Our French sisters are kind enough to us but it is not like our own. We are thankful to have a place to stay and appreciate all our sisters are doing for us. But the first of the year we hope for good news of our mission in Kanchou [Ganzhou].... It is really beautiful here and we have plenty of work. We have the poor with us always and we can serve them here as well as any other place.”\textsuperscript{112}

\textbf{Epilogue: Back to North America}

The next month, with a deep sadness for China’s poor, seven sisters left the country as violence continued to wash across it. The sisters left for the United States, perhaps on 26 December, in 1930; it was the very year that Chiang Kai-shek in Nanjing vainly declared the whole country unified. Sister Jarboe would be the last of the eight sisters to leave, sometime in 1931. It was as though they were leaving a hurricane deck, hoping to return when the waves were less violent.

In Honolulu the sisters felt blest to meet “Brother” Joseph Ira Dutton, a tall, old man with a full beard, who for three years had assisted the “martyr of charity” Peter Damien

\textsuperscript{109}“Jarboe letter from Zhoushan (Chusan) Island to Sister Serena Murphy,” 7 November 1930, ASLP.

\textsuperscript{110}Groell, \textit{White Wings}, 121.

\textsuperscript{111}“Jarboe letter from Zhoushan (Chusan) Island to Sister Serena Murphy,” 2 December 1930, ASLP.

\textsuperscript{112}\textit{Ibid.}
de Veuster\textsuperscript{113} on Molokai. Then, for many years after the priest’s death, he had taken over for him, washing sores, dealing with ulcers, performing surgeries, and building shelters for the lepers. It seems fitting that on her journey from China “where there are lepers,” as a priest had once told her, Sister DeLude should meet, shortly before his death, this man who had given the better part of his life in service of lepers. The sisters had escaped a martyrdom of blood, but still hoped to give their lives in the white martyrdom of service in faith.

Of these eight sisters who were exiled from China in 1930 and 1931, five returned to continue their charitable work. Sister Catherine O’Neill returned in 1932. Then, in 1936, Sisters Vincent Louise DeLude, Clara Groell, Anselma Jarboe, and Emily Kolb returned. All were exiled from China a second time in 1951-1952, never again to return.

\textsuperscript{113}Father Damien or Saint Damien of Molokai (1840-1889), was a priest and member of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary who served as a missionary in Hawaii. In 1873 he began work at a medical quarantine on the island of Molokai, ministering and caring for those stricken by leprosy. In 1884 he contracted the disease; despite this he continued his many good works until his death on 15 April 1889. Father Damien was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on 11 October 2009.
Map of mainland southeast China, which includes the province of Jiangxi.

Courtesy of the author
Period postcard of the S.S. President Grant, onboard which the sisters journeyed to China; Chinese junk boats lining the Yangtze River bank.

Public Domain
The Bajing Pavilion in Ganzhou, Jiangxi province, China.

Public Domain
Mao Tse-Tung (Zedong) at left and Chu Teh (Zhu De), circa 1938. Photograph by Earl Leaf.

Public Domain
Chinese nationalist troops in training; a gathering of People’s Liberation Army soldiers.

Public Domain
The China ministry, Sisters on mission visiting the poor. Written on the back of the photograph: “Visiting the poor in their homes. This man has a dreadful abscess on his thigh. The Sisters went nearly every day to dress it. The distance about two miles. Notice the furniture.”

Courtesy, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, MD
Portrait of Sister Helen (Helena) Lucas, D.C.

Courtesy, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, MD
Turn-of-the-twentieth-century collotype depicting Chinese bandits. Printed by the The Swift Collotype Company.

*Public Domain*
Map of the Mei-ling Pass, over which the sisters fled.

Courtesy of the author
Portrait of Sister Vincent Louise DeLude, D.C.

Courtesy, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, MD
Ministry at St. Margaret Hospital, Kiangsi (Jiangxi). Written on the back of the photograph: “St. Margaret’s House Kanhsien, Kiangsi, May 1940. Our women’s clinic. This is not a picked crowd but the regular number called in from waiting room to be treated. See how the mothers carry their babies to clinic on their backs. Sr. Anselma and Rose our nurse.”

Courtesy, Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, MD