

HISTORY

Sunday, September 4, 1932

By Bertrand Roy, p.m.é.

It is Sunday afternoon. During this Labour Day weekend, a huge gathering of the Catholic Workers' movements takes place at the Saint Joseph Oratory of Montreal. Tomorrow, the parade of the labourers organized by the international labourers' unions will bring life to the city centre. But this year, anxiety wins over the desire to celebrate, because the «crazy years» of a peaceful period are over. Since the 1929 stock exchange crash, the economic crisis hits harshly. Unemployment keeps on rising, more than 26% in Quebec in 1932.

Another gathering takes place this afternoon. A huge crowd s gathers in the wide church of Saint-Stanislas in the Plateau Mont-Royal for a missionary send-off. Ten sisters of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate-Conception and ten priests of the Quebec Foreign Mission Society leave this evening for Asia. Aboard the train going to Vancouver, and then on the liner *Empress of Russia* to cross the Pacific, these missionaries will travel with the new apostolic vicar of Szeping kai in Manchuria.

Bishop Louis Lapierre is returning in the missions after a short stay in Canada. After leaving Szeping kai last December, he stopped over in Rome where he met with Pope Pius XI. Following the steps taken with the Roman authorities by Canon Roch, general superior, the mission territory entrusted to the Quebec Foreign Mission Society in 1929 became bigger with a part of the neighbouring vicariate of Jehol. On May 24, the mission of Szeping kai rose from the status of a prefecture to that of an apostolic vicariate under the leadership of Louis Lapierre. His episcopal ordination last August 4 at the cathedral of Montreal made headlines in the newspapers and contributed as such to make the Society known. Today, he takes the road again.

A Characteristic Quality

Since the foundation of a seminary for the foreign missions by the bishops of Francophone Canada in 1921, Louis Lapierre saw the growth of the missionary society that carries this project at arm's length. Today, there are 43 members and 35 seminarians. What a

development since the beginning trio that he composed with Joseph-Avila Roch and Clovis Rondeau!

In mid-August, the first general Chapter of the Society took place in Pont-Viau. Besides electing the central council for the coming years, the eight participants in this meeting both juridical and spiritual, wanted to make the most of the experience of the first years.

The Chapter wished that the spirit of obedience and of availability for the mission be the characteristic quality of the Society, whatever the differences in ages, talents or functions carried by its members. « The fact of being a member of the Society, to be called to share its work, is the most enviable glory, the sure sign of being agreeable to God, and the most suited means to sanctify oneself. By putting forward this wish, the Chapter is happy to observe that the first missionaries drew the attention because of their discipline, their activities, their zeal and their generosity.»

« Oh! how beautiful are... »

This afternoon, presiding the eighth missionary sending off of the Society at Saint-Stanislas Church, Louis Lapierre remembers the first departure in 1925, when he took the road for Asia with Eugène Bérichon and Léo Lomme.

For the past seven years, how many hours dedicated to the study of a difficult language, how many days spent travelling by train or by chariot, how many months necessary to get used to the ways of living and doing so different from those of the native land. He makes it his own obligation to remind the new missionaries that only generosity manifesting the charity of Christ towards those who suffer the most will give rise to the acceptance of the Christian faith. Giving thanks to the parents and friends of those leaving for their support, he remembers the words of an old French missionary he has known in Manchuria: «One more missionary is the assurance at his death of 1,000 more Christians. »

The celebration goes on with the blessing and the giving away of the crucifixes, the act of consecration to the Virgin Mary and the ritual of the kissing of the feet of the missionaries while the choir of Saint-Stanislas church sings: «Oh! how beautiful are your feet, missionaries... Oh! how beautiful on those faraway lands where reign error and death. » Words with heroic accents to take with a grain of salt, no doubt!

To bring the Good News, it is important that the feet of the missionaries walk well on earth and go forward with discernment. As a son of a farmer, Louis Lapierre knows well that we cannot plow the earth with varnished shoes. If there is work to be done by walking on those faraway lands, error and death wreak havoc everywhere in this period of the Great Depression. Here also, many families have to take the road of the immigration to survive. If he had remained in the country, maybe he would have accompanied them in a new colonization project?

A Danger Spot of the Globe



Photo 1 Chart of Manchukuo in 1932. PHOTO Wikipédia

Even if the climate of Manchuria looks like the one in Quebec, « a little bit colder during winter and a little bit hotter in summer, » that country finds itself today as one of the danger spots of the globe. In fact, four empires overlap. First with China with which that territory historically is connected, the «Three Provinces of the northeast» is the official term to speak about Manchuria in China; then the United States that include Manchuria in their politics in the Far East; then the USSR, heiress of the Russian empire, and finally Japan that jostles to install there a colonial empire that competes with the great occidental empires.

One year ago on September 18, 1931, an attack on the train station of Moukden provided a pretext for the deployment of military forces aiming at providing security for the Japanese interests in the region. Since last February, a zone declaring itself independent from the Republic of China, put in place and in reality, controlled by Japan, forms the State of

Manchukuo. The news received from the confreres these last weeks raise concerns about the security of the people and the belongings. Armed robbery, a traditional scourge in the region in times of famine, increases in this time of political uncertainty and police chaos.

Nevertheless, the missionary work is taking shape. Counting the new priests who will travel with him, they will be more than thirty over there, which is not too many, since stations with residence, church and school will have to be multiplied to serve the Catholics scattered over a vast territory. The Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate-Conception are also present since 1927, and around thirty of them dedicate themselves to the care of children and sick people in clinics. That service offered to all without discrimination answers to the dire needs of a poor population where Christians are only a tiny minority.

One year ago, four religious of the Clerics of Saint-Viator also arrived to collaborate in the field of education. While waiting to build their own school, they lend a hand at the Saint Francis Xavier minor seminary inaugurated in Szeping kai last December. At the beginning of this September, around twenty young people are enrolled in this seminary that is the continuity of the presbyteral school initiated by Ernest Jasmin in his station. The formation of future Chinese priests is a priority for the future of the mission.



Photo 2 Fernand Schetagne. Travel companion of Bishop Louis Lapierre, the young missionary Fernand Schetagne experiences his first meetings in Manchuria in 1932. PHOTO Archives SMÉ

The celebration comes to an end. The Saint-Stanislas church slowly empties with the murmuring of greetings. After supper at the Montreal archbishop's residence according to tradition, it will be the departure at the Windsor Station nearby. The day after tomorrow, readers of *La Patrie* will be able to imagine the feelings of Louis Lapierre tonight while reading their newspaper. « It was a simple gesture full of affection. Before boarding the train, Bishop Lapierre blesses a group of people who had genuflected around him, and then he gives a special blessing to his father who is in his nineties, after what the bishop kneels in turn to receive the paternal blessing. With the ceremony finished, the bishop walked away, active and happy, towards the train. » (*La Patrie*, September 6, 1932)

LEAVING FOR THE MISSIONS



Photo 3 The train at Windsor Station. Missionary departure for Asia, by train from Montreal to Vancouver. PHOTO Archives SMÉ

In 1932, Canada has 1, 242 missionaries (520 are men and 722 are women) in mission territories depending on the Roman Propaganda Congregation (seven apostolic vicariates in Northern Canada and ten other territories abroad).

Friday, September 2, the editor of a Montreal newspaper writes in his column: « We cannot open a newspaper these days without finding the account or the announcement of a departure of French-Canadian missionaries, religious men

and women, for faraway missions. The other morning it was a group of Oblates leaving for Basutoland nearly at the same time that a new group of White Sisters were travelling towards Central Africa. Sunday evening, it will be a departure for Manchuria, then later on, another departure, this time for Japan. At the same time as those departures increase in number, the entries in the noviciates also increase. Something is taking place that does not make much noise, but that is much more important, bigger of consequence than many rowdy events. » (Omer Leroux, *Le Devoir*, September 2, 1932).

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



The Chapter 1932. First general Chapter (August 16-20, 1932) (from left to right: name, age, diocese, function)
First row: Donat **Chaumont**, 55 years old, Montreal, 1st assistant in the Central Council; Joseph-**Avila Roch**, 57 years old, Joliette, Superior general; **Louis-Adelmar Lapierre**, 52 years old, Montreal, Apostolic Vicar of Szeping kai; **Clovis Rondeau**, 51 years old, Joliette, General Secretary. Second row: **Joseph Roberge**, 37 years old, Quebec, leaving for Manchuria; **Edgar Larochelle**, 36 years old, Quebec, Regional Superior in Manchuria; Alexandre **Paradis**, 34 years old, Quebec, 2nd assistant in the Central Council; **Joseph Geoffroy**, 47 years old, Joliette, Director of the Pont-Viau Seminary. PHOTO Archives SMÉ

The term « General Assembly » replaced that of « General Chapter » to name the highest authority in the Society. Composed of a representation of the whole of its members, this assembly meets currently every five years to revise the activities of the Society and its rules, work out orientations, study major questions and elect the Central Council. The XIV General Assembly is called in Laval on May 21, 2018.

THANK YOU IN ADVANCE

While writing this chronicle, I receive from my brother the travel diary of an aunt who was missionary in China. Do you have letters, travel diaries, pictures of a relative or a friend who was missionary of the Quebec Foreign Mission Society? Thank you in advance for sharing them with us for the benefit of our History Project. B.R.