

HISTORY

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28, 1962

An agreement signed in Resistencia

By Bertrand Roy, p.m.é.

That day will not go down into history, but it is done, the agreement is signed. Fernand has been working on it since his arrival in Resistencia, a city of the province of the Chaco in the north of Argentina. It was about clarifying with the bishop how the Foreign Mission Society will answer to his request for missionaries.

In a letter to Arthème Leblanc, missionary in Peru who came to visit him last July, Bishop José Agustín Marozzi had written: « The people here have a golden heart and they are souls ready to go to Christ. They have an urgent need for missionaries because of the lack of priests, the growing number of the faithful and the intense Protestant and communist propaganda. Let us not prolong their expectations. »

According to the agreement signed today, seven parishes already established or to be organized later are entrusted to the Canadian priests in the city of Resistencia or elsewhere on the territory of the diocese. Bishop Marozzi is enthusiastic, no doubt about that. A bit more, and he would entrust his diocese to the Society that as such offers him some personnel. He would even have said to his collaborators that he expects a dozen Canadian priests this year, and that would double the number of his priests.

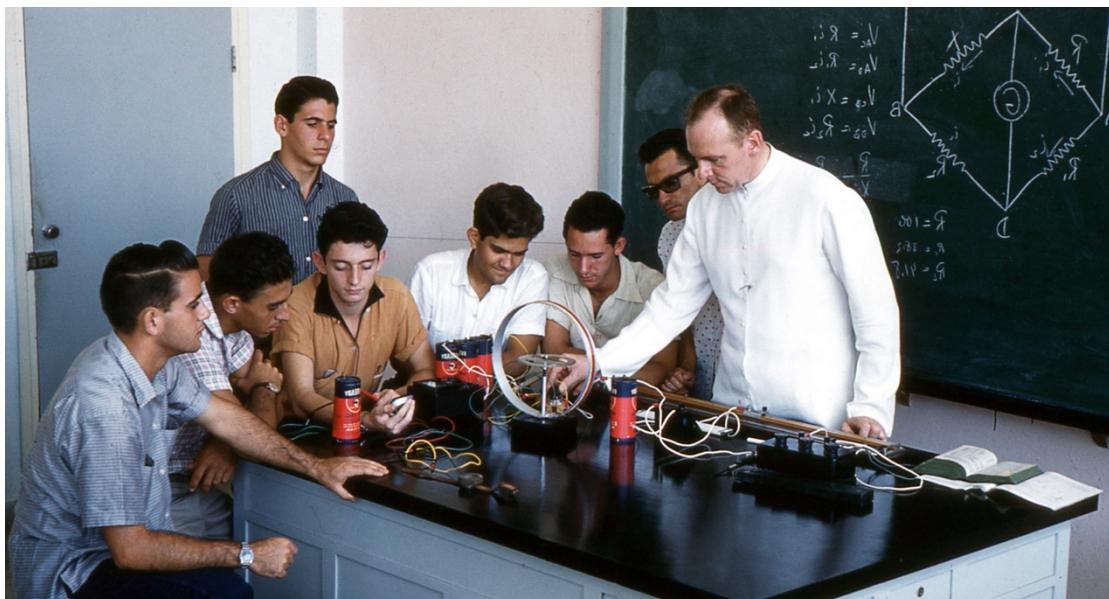
But a question can be asked. Why did Fernand Gaudry, who was a missionary in Japan and then in Cuba, found himself in Argentina for three months? The same question for Conrad Côté, former missionary in the Philippines and in Cuba, who also arrived in the Chaco last December 29. Why that redeployment?



(From l. to r.) **Bishop José Agustín Marozzi**, 54 years old, Santa Fe, bishop of Resistencia; **Fernand Gaudry**, 44 years old, Québec, regional delegate of the SME.
PHOTO Archives SME

A few years only after the opening of new missions in Honduras and in Peru, and now, the Society is extending its presence in Latin America. Last October, the decision was made to send missionaries to Resistencia in Argentina and to Temuco in Chile in answer to urgent requests for personnel. Moreover, when it will be possible and opportune, we even think about sending missionaries in the department of Alto Paraná, in Paraguay, near the famous Iguazú Falls.

Last year at the same date, who would have imagined such a development? Fernand and Conrad both worked in Cuba at the college *Padre Felix Varela*. That college is located on the Student Campus of Colon, a school campus founded by the Foreign Mission Society in the diocese of Matanzas in collaboration with the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.



The physics lesson - In Cuba, Fernand Gaudry taught at the *Padre Felix Varela* College on the Student Campus of Colon. PHOTO Archives SMÉ

Being in Cuba for nearly twenty years, the Canadian priests have worked a lot in the rural communities often abandoned socially as well as pastorally. They gave priority to education in the parochial schools to the point of promoting the development of that Student Campus in Colon, including a minor Seminary for the diocese of Matanzas.

One year ago, Fernand was then teaching physics and Greek in Colon and his project to build there an astronomic observatory was even at the point of being realized. Sadly, none of this plan came to anything because of the events of May 1961. Let us recall briefly what happened.



Visit of the barbudos to Manguito - In 1959, **Jean-Paul Dugal** (40 years old, Montréal) welcomes the friendly visit of a few bearded men (**barbudos**). That is the nickname given to the Cuban rebels during the 1950s and that they kept after the power takeover in 1959. Having left Cuba on May 16, 1961, Jean-Paul Dugal is sent to Chile and arrives in Temuco on February 3, 1962.
PHOTO Archives SME

An Unexpected Exodus

In 1961, the Cuban revolutionary movement that took power in 1959 under the leadership of Fidel Castro still retains its popularity as victory of the people over a corrupt regime. Among the missionaries, there was first an attraction and sympathy for the social ideal of the new leaders, and then more and more fear fronting the expeditious justice, the repression of the opponents and the stiffening of the relations between Church and State.

The implementation of a socialist revolution in the context of the cold war is a sign of hard times. Besides, the situation is worsening rapidly following the attempt of the opponents of the revolution, supported by the USA, to set foot on the Island at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. In spite of the tragic failure of this invasion, the menace that it always represents strengthens the influence of the Soviet ally in Cuba.

At the beginning of May, the announcement of the project for a new constitution including the nationalization of the private centres of education comes like a bolt out of the blue. Without prior notice, the parish schools and the College of Colon are subjected to preventive «interventions» by the local authorities: compulsory turn over of the keys, expropriation of properties, seizure of buildings, no admittance.

On the other hand, activities of religious nature are forbidden in the public place and limited to the enclosed space of the churches, according to a hostile propaganda inspired by the militant atheism of the communist party. Priests are arrested and jailed, others are forced

to stay in their houses or their colleges by the militia pretending to protect them from the anger of the population.

On May 16, Fernand and Conrad belong to a group of missionaries who, having lost their teaching post or still within the scope of various threats, leave Cuba to go back to Canada. During the year 1961, the presence of the Society in Cuba passes from 41 to 20 priests. The group of Cuba, second in importance in the Society after the one of the Philippines that numbers 70 priests, is split into two: those who can stay in Cuba to take care of the Catholics who are more and more marginalized, and those, having gone through the exodus, are ready to leave for a new mission, like Fernand and Conrad. Where will they be sent?

Cooperation Canada-Latin America

At the beginning, the missionaries of the Society were sent to Asia: in Manchuria (1925) and in the Philippines (1937). During the Pacific war, faced with the impossibility to send to Asia the new missionaries formed in the Seminary of Pont-Viau, the Society offered its services to Churches having a great need of personnel, like Cuba in 1942. Also, in answer to the request of the bishops of Japan, the Society got involved in that country in 1948.

During the 1950s, that availability brings to accept commitments in Honduras and in Peru in the sense of the cooperation with the Churches of Latin America that ask for help. The crisis that those Churches at the time are faced with, takes place in the context of the cold war, the progress of communism and the growing influence, as a counter-offensive, of the American Protestant missions. Moreover, at the turn of 60s, the echo of the Cuban revolution spreads all over the continent.



« The people here have a golden heart » - (Bishop Marozzi) - In his parish of San José Obrero in Resistencia, **Conrad Côté** (52 years old, Québec) presides at a community baptism. PHOTO Archives SMÉ

Pius XII and John XXIII who succeeds him in 1958, strongly invite the North American and European Churches to help the Churches of Latin America. The accent is put first on the lack of apostolic personnel and religious ignorance, from which follows the urgency to send priests and religious, to open seminaries, to promote education and development.

In 1960, a letter of the Canadian episcopate on the theme of the apostolic cooperation of Canada-Latin America refers to that call for solidarity: «Without the immediate assistance of their brothers of North America, our brothers in Latin America dread of not being able to protect enough the sheepfold of Christ. Tomorrow – they say to us in a poignant cry – if we are helped today, we in turn will be able to help others. But alone, without foreign aid, we cannot save that portion of the catholicity that is entrusted to us.» (Canadian Catholic Conference - *Collective Pastoral Letter of the Canadian Bishops*, » January 13, 1960).

In keeping with that movement of cooperation between Churches, the answer of the Society to the call of Bishop Marozzi of Resistencia and of Bishop Bernardino Piñera of Temuco brings many former missionaries from Cuba and from elsewhere to offer their services to those Churches that need a helping hand. The agreement recently signed in Resistencia, this March 28, 1962, is valid for three years and it can be renewed for seven years. Since the missionary arrivals rapidly follow each other and since they will be many, maybe a dozen, to begin to work until the end of the year, Fernand is delighted that everything is in order before the departure of Bishop Marozzi for Rome. He is to participate in a council called by Pope John XXIII.