Coady International Institute
Saint Francis Xavier University
Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada

The World comes to Antigonish

WHEN MSGR. F. J. SMYTH was introduced to Pope Paul last year, it was explained that he was from Antigonish, a small town in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia.

"Ah, Antigonish," said the Pope. "Fisheries co-operatives."

This instant recognition of Antigonish, a snug little town of 6,000 tucked away in the valleys of eastern Nova Scotia, didn't surprise Msgr. Smyth. He could not have spent five years as director of the Coady International Institute without knowing that in some countries of the world, Antigonish is Canada's best-known town.

In Nigeria, for instance, public-school students learn about Antigonish in their economics and history books. When the University of Basutoland decided to establish an extension department, it called for men from Antigonish. The Agriculture Department of the Congo Republic says it is trying to solve its problems "the Antigonish Way." The mushrooming Co-operative League of Puerto Rico owes its birth to Antigonish. And there is an "Antigonish Movement of Australia."

This news probably comes as a shock to the thousands of tourists who virtually blink their way past Antigonish as they zip through on the skirting Trans-Canada Highway. And the town itself gave quite a shock to Shebu U. Abbas, an official of the Nigerian government, when he finally arrived there after reading so much about Antigonish in his school.

"You see, I didn't hear of Montreal or Toronto from our textbooks. Ottawa was mentioned, but the name I remember best was Antigonish."

The town of Antigonish, it should be explained, has had very little to do with its fame. It simply happened to be the place where St. Francis Xavier University set up shop in 1855. And it was St. F. X. which started the program that played such a massive role in pulling Nova Scotia workers through the mire of the depression. The men from St. F.X. went into the tiny coastal villages and taught the people how to band together into co-operatives to build fish plants and market their catch. But more than that, it taught the people how to have faith in themselves, it gave them back the dignity they had all but forgotten.

But little did those educational pioneers realize that some 40 years later, in 1961, Dr. D. M. Connor, a New Zealand native, would be researching the Antigonish Movement for a doctoral thesis at Cornell University and writing that five million people around the world had been directly affected by it. And in the last five years the strides have been greater.

It was in 1961 that the Coady International Institute opened its doors for the express purpose of bringing the Antigonish Movement to students from foreign lands. And since then more than 800 students from 80 countries have returned home to spread the Antigonish gospel to thousands. Msgr. Smyth, a genial realist who seldom dabbles in overstatements, says the future impact of the movement on the world "could be just enormous."

The woeful economic conditions that spurred the early St. F.X. priests into action in the deep depression, now are being experienced by most developing countries in the world. And the university's extension department, which blazed the trail at home, has passed the torch to the Coady Institute to blaze a bigger trail around the world.

And when you walk into that four-storey brick building, on a far corner of the St. F.X. campus, and see the men who hold the torch, there's no doubt that the Antigonish Movement still has the same vibrant enthusiasm that changed the face of Nova Scotia.

In a temporary sheet-metal classroom, an architectural nightmare slapped up against the already over-crowded institute, 71 students from 32 countries were poring over their books. Not an eye flicked sideways when we entered the room in the midst of a lecture on rural development. Hands — black, yellow and white — scribbled feverishly, and all eyes appeared burning with eagerness. There were clerical collars, African robes and Indian turbans. There were men of all ages.

They had all come to Antigonish under a spectrum of sponsorships — External Aid, the Colombo Plan, Knights of Columbus, German labor unions, the United Church of Canada, and the International Labor Organization — to take the social leadership course, and nothing was going to distract them. In six weeks, these summer students would cram themselves with the highlights from the full eight-month winter course, and many were staying up half the night to do it.

"We sometimes have to turn off their lights and order them to rest," said Msgr. Smyth. "These people have a passion for learning."

The co-operative movement, on which the Antigonish program was originally launched, still dominates the courses, but with considerably more sophistication than was evident when it was started in the wind-whipped coastal villages of Nova Scotia. In those early days, it was enough to get a group of fishermen together to build a fish plant. But it's not enough to bring a student from Antigua to teach him the same thing. He must go back a trained community leader, ready to help establish co-operatives, credit unions, housing projects and other local needs.

Michael Sangho Lee, a Korean bank employee, is convinced he will go back home qualified to play a big role in community affairs. "I would not believe they could do so much in such a short time," he said. "I feel very, very good about it."

What inspires the students is not the lectures, the books or the theories. "It's the people," said J. Van Alphonso Charles, of Guyana. "There are wonderful people here."

Actually, the cast of people has changed drastically since the Antigonish Movement was begun, but there has been little change in basic outlooks and attitudes. And Dr. M. M. Coady, who will ever remain the giant of the movement, would be proud to see what goes in the institute that bears his name. He died in 1959, just a few months before the building was begun and never saw his long-cherished dream of an international school come to reality. But there is no doubt that his spirit still haunts the bright, painted brick corridors of the institute. His strong, craggy face peers down at the students from a giant photograph.

To a large degree, the Antigonish Movement was a product of its times, and so was Dr. Coady. As Nova Scotia wallowed in the depressive 1920s, with fishing boats rotting on the beaches, and farmers eating their badly needed livestock, there was a need for a powerful leader of men — a thundering orator, obsessed with human dignity, who could inspire others to pull yourselves up by your bootstraps."

And now there are men like Msgr. Smyth. As the problems have become more complex, so has the training, and the job calls for men with master's and doctoral degrees in economics and sociology — but still retaining the ability to talk to men on their wharves in their own language. Msgr. Smyth, a 50-year-old native of Sydney, is a master at this.

For nearly three months earlier this year, he toured Asia, studying the work of the institute's grad-

uates and seeing what lay ahead. Although he's a strapping six-footer, his exhausting schedule took its toll, and the Monsignor eventually was carried into a Methodist hospital in Korea suffering from severe virus pneumonia.

When he awoke, a nurse was hovering over him. "Father, what in the world are you doing in *this* hospital?"

"I must have been delirious," he replied. "But I've never really noticed much difference between Catholic and Protestant penicillin."

Although St. F.X. is a Roman Catholic University, and the town of Antigonish is 85 per cent Catholic — "they call it little Rome," says Msgr. Smyth — the Antigonish Movement has always been non-denominational. For one six-month period the entire extension department was directed by Rev. John Wayling, a United Church minister, now in Ottawa. And one of Dr. Coady's companions when he shuttled from one fishing community to another was Rev. J. D. N. MacDonald, a fellow Cape Bretoner, and a United Church minister.

If the Antigonish Movement had any specific beginning it was back in 1921 when Rev. Jimmy Tompkins organized a six-week course called "the People's School", open to all. In overalls and rubber boots, from the ages of 17 to 57, these men came to the first adult education course ever held in the Maritimes. "No longer can education be confined to the few elite who can afford university," Father Jimmy told them. "Education must go to the people."

But Father Jimmy became involved in a controversial move to unite Nova Scotia's various universities, and the Bishop banished him to the fishing town of Canso as a parish priest. The frail little man was then 52.

He didn't give up. In the rutted streets and on rotting wharves, Father Jimmy organized study groups. The conditions in the fishing villages and towns were desperate, and he had 40 other priests sign a petition with him calling on the federal government to investigate the practice of wealthy fishing companies flooding the local markets while individual inshore fishermen were near starvation. A royal commission was established.

Meanwhile, Father Jimmy went to work on his own. The lobster fishermen of Dover were getting ridiculously low prices for their catches, and were helpless to bargain.

"You must start your own lobster plant," said the priest.

During the next winter, the priest led his parishioners in the mammoth undertaking. The fishermen went into the woods, cut enough lumber for a plant, and with nickels and dimes they managed to save $128. Father Jimmy went from door to door in nearby Canso, gathering small donations and loans.

Two years later, the plant began canning lobsters and within another year the fishermen of Dover had a debt-free operation worth $5,280. And besides, they paid themselves more for their lobsters than they could get on the open market.

Meanwhile, the royal commission handed down its report and it recommended co-operative organizations of fishermen. Against the strong bargaining power of buyers, said the report, the fisherman was "as helpless as one of his own dories in a typhoon." The job of starting these co-ops required a strong, inspirational leader, and Fisheries Minister P. J. A. Cardin settled on Father Coady, then a relatively unknown teacher at St. F.X. The strapping six-foot-two native of Margaree, N.S., was a natural for the job.

When the university established its extension department Dr. Coady was its full-time director. But far from getting bogged down in administrative detail — which he detested — he continued to stump the province. More priests and lay workers joined the task, and co-ops and credit unions began sprouting up all around the coast.

Gradually the Antigonish Movement spread through the Maritimes. At last reports, the 430-odd credit unions in the region had assets of nearly $55 million, and members of the United Maritime Fishermen, the co-operative organization launched some 36 years ago, were selling $8 million worth of fish each year. The regional library system Father Tompkins introduced spread from the basement of his home to envelop the entire region, and nearly 2,000 Nova Scotia families were living in coop-housing projects.

Foreign students began coming to study the Antigonish Movement, and returning home to spread the message. The U.S. State Department asked Dr. Coady to come to Washington to see how his program could best be applied in developing countries. University officials from around the world began coming to see the program for themselves.

There is no doubt that the growing international reputation of the movement was largely responsible for the establishment of the Coady Institute. It was begun after Cardinal Cushing of Boston donated $200,000 toward its erection. European co-operative organizations and labor unions also kicked in with funds.

To ensure the new institute would retain the same non-denominational flavor of the original movement, a special mural was designed — by an Anglican — with all the symbols of the world's religions. Across the mural, which decorates a wall in the lounge, are Dr. Coady's favorite words: "That all may be masters of their own destiny."

Already, the work being done by Antigonish graduates in their own homelands makes an impressive list of accomplishments.

Sung Kyu Kim returned to Korea and became permanent vice-minister in charge of the country's agriculture and forestry. Maria T. Langlois went back to Brazil to become executive secretary of the Brazilian Credit Union Federation. In Guatemala, Rev. Luis Gurriaran organized 41 adult study clubs.

In Puerto Rico, where an adult educational movement was copied from Antigonish, more than 4,000 foreign students have been trained in social leadership.

When Msgr. Smyth visited Ceylon recently he found two Institute graduates — A. H. Bucksimiar and Rev. Joseph Fernando — doing exactly what Coady and Tompkins did in the Nova Scotia fishing villages.

"It is magnificent to see how much these people have accomplished with so little," he said. "Their fishing boats are nothing more than four large logs fashioned into a raft . . . the whole rig is propelled by a small outboard motor.

"Nylon nets have been introduced and the fishing season extended to 10 months by arranging a system whereby the fishermen in a group migrate from one side of an island to the other to take advantage of weather conditions."

The graduate who brings the biggest smile to the face of Msgr. Smyth is Kevin LeMorvan, an Englishman who worked his way to Canada on a ship a few years ago, and arrived in Antigonish without a penny. Msgr. Smyth liked this young man of 24, and took a chance by wrangling a scholarship for him. LeMorvan was a top-notch student with the magic qualities of leadership, and he was sent to Ecuador to establish a credit union movement.

"He did a magnificent job," says Msgr. Smyth, "and he's since sent us several students."

Next year, LeMorvan will join the staff of the Coady Institute.

At home, the extension department, under Msgr. J. N. MacNeil and a 20-member staff, is moving into new phases. Its primary role was to solve the desperate economic problems with education and organization. Now it has moved into broader educational programs, including over-all community development, greater research into human problems and the problem of creating better-integrated and larger social units.

Because the movement originally laid a lot of stress on economic problems and co-operative action, it naturally had its critics. Many private businessmen did not like Dr. Coady's outspoken attacks, and there were complaints in some circles that the program was too materialistic. Some critics went so far as to suggest the movement had some Communist tendencies because of its emphasis on co-operative action.

In his cluttered office, Msgr. Smyth smiled when asked about this criticism. With his chin resting on his fingertips, he rocked back and forth in his swivel chair, thought for a moment, and said, "Really, this has never bothered me, not at all. I know what we're teaching here."

It was a hot steamy afternoon when Msgr. Smyth revised an already tight schedule to make room for a two-hour interview.

"It's not enough to be a do-gooder in this world," he said. "If we're going to solve basic problems we must be scientific. There's no point sending someone back to Africa unless he is capable of leading his community on a scientific basis.

"That's why we want a special type of student. Educational qualifications alone won't do it. Personally, I've always believed in spending my time with people who could influence many others."

Although many Coady students have college degrees, and most have matriculation, there have been many influential graduates who never saw the inside of a high school.

Canada's External Aid Office will send as many students as the institute can handle, but Msgr. Smyth doubts whether enrolment will ever get over 150. "We now have a staff of 12, and we must always maintain that close personal contact that allows you to really see a person. I hope we'll never sacrifice quality for quantity.

"No, we can't have any assembly line operation here."

Laughter comes easy in the institute. A casual corridor meeting between a teacher and student always brings out more than a mere "hello." There's usually light-hearted kidding, a friendly pat on the shoulder or, at least, a warm smile. The building's doors are never locked.

"We must all get along well together," said Msgr. Smyth. "After all, this is what it's all about."

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For more than thirty years

Men and women have come from many parts of the world to study the Antigonish Movement at St. Francis Xavier University. The Coady International Institute was established in 1959. Between then and 1966, students have come to the Institute from:

Afghanistan
Antigua
Australia
Austria
Bahamas
Barbados
Belgium
Borneo
Botswana
Brazil
British Honduras
Cameroon
Canada
Caroline Islands
Ceylon
Chile
Colombia
Costa Rica
Cuba
Dominica
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
El Salvador
England
Ethiopia
Gambia
Germany
Ghana
Grenada
Guatemala
Guyana
Holland
Honduras
Hong Kong
India
Indonesia
Iraq
Ireland
Jamaica
Japan
Kenya
Korea
Lesotho
Liberia
Malaysia:
Malaya
N. Borneo
Sarawak
Malawi
Mauritius
Mexico
Montserrat
Nepal
Nicaragua
Nigeria
Pakistan (E & W)
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Puerto Rico
Rhodesia
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Sierra Leone
Singapore
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