

Thomas Joseph Dowling **The First “Canadian” Bishop of Hamilton** **1889-1924**

by Gerald J. STORTZ

University of Saint Jerome's College
Waterloo, Ontario

The diocese of Hamilton, founded in 1856 with the partition of Toronto, was blessed with abundant episcopal talent in the nineteenth century. The first Bishop, John Farrell, was a flamboyant, colorful figure actively involved in federal and provincial politics on the side of the Tories and Liberals respectively. He was also a controversial figure involved in the deathbed conversion of Alan MacNab, the Laird of Dundurn.¹ Peter Francis Crinnon, his successor, like Farrell an Irishman, physically expanded the facilities, though the diocese became geographically smaller. As well as 18 churches built, land for the House of Providence in Dundas and Holy Sepulchre Cemetery overlooking Burlington Bay was purchased.² The third prelate, James Carbery, o.p., though aged and ill, made his mark upon the diocese by continuing its physical expansion, travelling extensively and convening the first diocesan synod.³

It is, however, the fourth Bishop of Hamilton, T.J. Dowling, who is the subject of this paper. Though born in Ireland, Dowling came to Canada while very young and as diocesan historian Ken Foyster has noted, “Thus he can perhaps be regarded as a native son of the diocese of Hamilton.”⁴ It can also be argued that, given his lengthy tenure as the Ordinary of the diocese (1889-1924, 36 years), it was he who had to deal with a Church in transition from an identifiably Irish institution into one which reflected the changing ethnicity of an immigrant population with varied languages and cultures. It was a situation to which Dowling reacted with both alacrity and ability and may rest as his greatest achievement.

¹ The most detailed account of this controversy appears in Donald R. Beer, *Sir Allan Napier MacNab* (Hamilton, 1984), pp. 392-398. At least one Hamilton newspaper reported that Farrell had converted to Protestantism on his deathbed.

² Ken Foyster, *Anniversary Reflections 1856-1981: A History of the Hamilton Diocese* (Hamilton, 1981), p. 25.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Thomas Joseph Dowling was born in Shannagh, Golden County, Limerick, Ireland, on February 28, 1840. The son of farmer Martin Dowling and his wife (who is never named in any of the biographies), Thomas emigrated with his family to the rising industrial centre, Hamilton, Ontario. His early Canadian education was at a select school with further study at Saint Michael's College, Toronto, a school run by the Congregation of Saint Basil.⁵ At Saint Mike's, Dowling, obviously on the road to a priestly career, came under the influence of Father Michael Ferguson, a renowned orator. He also achieved high standing in literary subjects, a fact attested to by the existence at the institution of the Dowling prize for excellence in English.⁶ Theological training followed at Le Grand Seminaire de Montréal.⁷ Priestly orders were conferred by Bishop Farrell at Saint Mary's Cathedral, Hamilton, October 5, 1864.⁸

Pastor

Dowling was immediately appointed pastor of Sacred Heart parish in Paris, Ontario and quickly earned a reputation as an orator and 'a brick and mortar' priest. In the former case, he had obviously learned well the lessons taught by Michael Ferguson. The young Dowling was invited regularly not only to parishes in the immediate area but also to Toronto, Hamilton, Chicago and the oil fields of Pennsylvania.⁹ In the latter case, Dowling opened a school and a convent for the Sisters of Saint Joseph. He also established a church in Galt and a mission between Galt and Paris (possibly in present-day Ayr).¹⁰ What is perhaps most remarkable is that Dowling was able to promote such expansion while quickly retiring the \$3000 parish debt.¹¹ Later in his career, Dowling himself noted the importance *in his own eyes* of such work, describing himself upon arrival in Hamilton as "a

⁵ George McClean Rose, ed., *A Cyclopedia of Canadian Biography* (Toronto, 1886), p. 183.

⁶ Archives, Diocese of Hamilton (hereafter, A.D.H.), Bishop Dowling Scrapbook (hereafter, Scrapbook).

⁷ Mgr. Oliver Maurault, "Saint Sulpice et la hierarchie de l'Ontario," Canadian Catholic Historical Association, *Report* (1940-1941), p. 12.

⁸ *Catholic Record* (London), December 8, 1888.

⁹ A.D.H., Scrapbook, Unidentified Clippings, January 25, 1867, November 25, 1867, December 3, 1867

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; The Dowling Scrapbook contains the reference to a mission between Galt and Paris. While this would not be an entirely accurate description of Ayr's geographic location, a Catholic Church did exist at the time according to local church historian Theresa Bildstein.

¹¹ *Catholic Weekly Review* (Toronto), May 5, 1887.

progressive Bishop ... who ... believed in the multiplying of the clergy and the building up of the church.”¹²

Typically, church administrators utilized Dowling’s considerable talents but formal recognition did not come until the second decade of his priestly career. In 1881 he was installed as Vicar-General of the Hamilton diocese, a post he occupied until 1887. When Bishop Crinnon died in November 1882, Dowling acted as interregnal administrator until James Carbery arrived in September, 1883.¹³ Dowling enjoyed a warm relationship with Carbery, whom he described as “a warm hearted Irishman and holy prelate.”¹⁴ Carbery, in turn, recognized, it would seem, the considerable talents of his Vicar-General. Although there exists no substantial evidence to confirm it, it would seem likely that it was Carbery who suggested Dowling’s name for the list of candidates as Bishop of Peterborough upon the death of John Francis Jamot. Certainly this was the speculation prevalent in Hamilton.¹⁵ However, almost a year after the rumours began no decision had yet emanated from Rome. Dowling himself insisted during this period of uncertainty that, given a choice, he would prefer to stay in Hamilton.¹⁶ However, when chosen as Bishop of Peterborough, Dowling relented and was consecrated May 1, 1887 at Saint Mary’s by Bishops O’Mahony (Toronto Auxiliary), Walsh (London), Cleary (Kingston) and Archbishop Lynch of Toronto. Installation at Peterborough was by Lynch and Cleary.¹⁷

Although in some respects the Peterborough material is sparse in the kind of sources historians wish would exist, it is clear that, as Bishop, Dowling instituted two policies which would characterize both his episcopacies. Despite the vastness of the Peterborough See, the Bishop travelled extensively even to the distant centres of Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Port Arthur and Fort William as well as to centres in closer proximity such as Bracebridge and Gravenhurst.¹⁸ His other innovation was to provide services to non-English-speaking Catholics. The largest of these groups was obviously the French-Canadian population in large pockets of such places as North Bay, the Sault and Sudbury. This group was generally well served but other language groups were not and at Christmas and Easter special

¹² Quoted in *Catholic Record*, October 28, 1899.

¹³ Foyster, p. 27.

¹⁴ A.D.H., Thomas Joseph Dowling Papers (hereafter, Dowling Papers), T.J. Dowling to Archbishop John Joseph Lynch. October 26, 1885.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Dowling to Bishop J.J. Carbery, January 17, 1886

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Dowling to Carbery, December 2, 1886.

¹⁷ Archives, Diocese of Peterborough (hereafter, A.D.P.), Bishop Thomas Dowling Papers, Act of Administration as Bishop of Peterborough; *Catholic Record*, June 25, 1887.

¹⁸ *Catholic Record*, October 1, 1887, January 7, 1888.

provisions were made to provide retreats, hear Confessions and provide other church services in Dutch, German and Italian, as well as French and English.¹⁹

Bishop Carbery of Hamilton died December 9, 1887 and the Vatican appointed Toronto auxiliary Bishop O'Mahony as the interregal administrator.²⁰ Dowling reacted as expected to continuing rumours that, since he had grown up in Hamilton, he was the logical choice, by denying interest.²¹ However, when the choice finally was made Dowling confessed, "it is a consolation for me to know that I am not a stranger to the diocese, that I am returning as it were, to the home of my childhood, amongst kind and esteemed friends of the clergy and laity, endeared to me by a thousand holy and happy recollections."²² Dowling's first act as Hamilton Bishop was to assist at the consecration of his successor, R. A. O'Connor, who had been on the Peterborough list with him in 1887.²³ He also asked permission to take with him Father Fergus McEvay, who was later the Archbishop of Toronto.²⁴ Permission received, the three travelled with the Bishops of Montreal, Kingston and Detroit to Hamilton for the installation by Archbishop Fabre of Montreal.²⁵

Bishop

Dowling's popularity was immediately evident. Even one man who had in the past been publicly critical of Dowling had obviously changed his mind in the meantime. As the rumours of Dowling's Hamilton appointment circulated, A. J. Smith wrote to J. J. Lynch of the new bishop's "deep reverence for his Bishop, his humble obedience to all commands ... his truly brotherly regard for his fellow priests ... his great prudence and thoroughly conscientious fulfillment of his pastoral duties."²⁶ The charm which had evinced such a change was yet another consistent feature of Dowling's

¹⁹ Edgar Boland, *From the Pioneers to the Seventies: A History of the Diocese of Peterborough 1882-1955* (Peterborough, 1975), pp. 18-19.

²⁰ Foyster, p. 29.

²¹ A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Dowling to Lynch, January 2, 1888.

²² A.D.P., Dowling Papers, Circular Letter, January 11, 1889.

²³ Robert Choquette, *L'Église Catholique dans l'Ontario français du dix neuvième siècle* (Ottawa, 1984), p. 269.

²⁴ Joseph V. Millar, "The Story of Saint Mary's Roman Catholic Church," *Wentworth Bygones*, v. 3 (1962), p. 22.

²⁵ *Catholic Record*, May 11, 1889.

²⁶ A.D.H., Dowling Papers, A.J. Smith to Lynch, January 28, 1887.

career. While certainly exhibiting the required episcopal demeanor, Dowling seemed more ‘a man of the people’ than his contemporaries.

Dowling was noted as a poet and a singer and regularly offered original, if not very good, verse on priestly anniversaries, at weddings and baptisms. A typical poem was offered at a Brantford priest’s *bon voyage* party:

Dear Father we’re told
Where the Angels of Old
Left the temple of God in the east
Thus sad was the shrine
on the mountain of Zion
In the absence of prophet and priest
So lovely Saint Basil’s
Looks lonely tonight
Though bright were its altars today
For the hearts of your children are sad
at the sight of their fond father going away.

Other times the poetry could take quite a different form as, for example, a lament for a long-serving nun in 1866. As a singer, while Bishop, Dowling offered his talents at Saint Patrick’s Day celebrations, the annual concert put on by the inmates of Saint Joseph’s Orphanage, and at receptions for other Catholic groups. Newspaper accounts indicate that at such events it was expected that the Bishop would be called upon and on the odd occasion when he was not, he expressed disappointment.²⁷

In many ways the Hamilton years marked a continuation and expansion of the work Dowling had begun in Peterborough. Fiscal responsibility continued to be associated with the Bishop who never missed an occasion to remind the laity of their duty to support the Church. In a similar vein, he was also a consistent supporter of Catholic self-help groups such as the Catholic Mutual Benefit Association, though he reminded them that if they used the word Catholic they must be obedient to episcopal dictums.²⁸ He also continued to be devoted to the physical expansion of the diocese. In the first year-and-a-half alone, Dowling could boast responsibility for the construction of nine schools, six churches, three convents and an addition to an existing orphanage.²⁹ At the time of his death in 1924, the *Hamilton*

²⁷ See, for example, *Catholic Record*, November 30, 1895. The poem is found in A.D.H., Scrapbook, Unidentified Clipping, June 21, 1886.

²⁸ A typical example is found in A.D.H., Scrapbook, November 11, 1902

²⁹ *Ibid.*, January 17, 1891.

Spectator cited such activity as Dowling's most noteworthy achievement.³⁰ From an historical perspective, however, a greater contribution to Catholicism was Dowling's role in providing services "for the foreigners who are coming to us in large numbers."³¹ In the Hamilton diocese this meant, for the most part, Germans, Poles, and Italians.

Shepherd of Immigrants

The Germans were the least problematic of the three immigrant groups, although Dowling recognized that areas such as Waterloo County, Walkerton and Hanover required German-speaking clergy.³² To accomplish this, his first action was to issue a blanket *celebret* to the Congregation of the Resurrection, an order which had been established in France to minister to Poles but which in Canada had taken over what had originally been a Jesuit mission to the German Catholics of Waterloo County. He wrote to Canadian Resurrectionist Superior Father Louis Funcken, as he prepared to embark on a trip to Europe, "if you find me one or two good, healthy, zealous priests speaking German I shall be pleased to adopt them in good recommendation." Dowling, however, regarded this importation of priests as only a temporary measure. From his predecessors, he had inherited Saint Jerome's College, located originally in Saint Agatha, then moved to Berlin (present-day Kitchener). Run by Funcken and his brother Eugene, also a Resurrectionist, the college became a training centre for homegrown clergy and German was part of the curriculum. In 1908, the college was expanded specifically to facilitate this work.³³

The growing Italian community of the diocese was similarly well-served. In 1912, Saint Anthony of Padua was built in Hamilton and in a visit to Guelph the next year Dowling made a point of visiting the small but highly concentrated Italian population. Dowling not only celebrated Mass but led the Rosary and delivered the sermon in Latin, the closest he could come to Italian. Afterward he visited each household in the area, accompanied by an

³⁰ *Hamilton Spectator*, August 7, 1924.

³¹ A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Dowling to Monsignor Cronyn, March 11, 1912.

³² *Ibid.*, Circular Letter, 1893.

³³ The most up-to-date account of Father Funcken's work is James A. Wahl, C.R., "Father Louis Funcken's Contribution to German Catholicism in Waterloo County, Ontario," C.C.H.A. *Study Sessions* 2 vols. (1983), II, 513-531; Archives, Congregation of the Resurrection, Ontario-Kentucky Province, Father Louis Funcken Papers, Dowling to Funcken, June 12, 1889. There is also a copy of the *celebret* in the papers. I am grateful to my colleague Jim Wahl for bringing these documents to my attention.

Italian-speaking priest. By 1922, the community had grown sufficiently that a separate, predominantly Italian parish, Sacred Heart, was established.³⁴

Unfortunately, the Poles were not as easy to satisfy,³⁵ although in Berlin and elsewhere the Resurrectionist Order had already done some of the groundwork even before Dowling's episcopacy and continued their efforts after his arrival.³⁶ Despite their presence, however, there were problems with the Poles. These included internal rivalries within the Resurrectionists, the opposition of some pastors in Hamilton to the establishment of ethnically Polish parishes, the traditional linkages between Catholicism and Polish nationalism and fears that a schism which had arisen in such Polish-Catholic communities as Chicago and Buffalo might spread to Canada.³⁷

In particular, Dowling faced opposition from the pastor at Saint Anne's, the parish in which most Hamilton Poles lived. Father Englert became bitter that he had provided space in his Church for Polish services. He wrote Dowling,

Personally, I am convinced we owe nothing to the Polish people for three reasons, i.e. (a) they never paid their share towards the support of St. Anne's Church, (b) many of those who paid in my time are now away from here, (c) they expect nothing in Justice from us.³⁸

Despite such attitudes Dowling yielded to sustained pressure from the Polish community and in 1911 allocated a Hamilton lot at the corner of Barton and St. Ann Streets. A year later Sacred Heart parish on Shanley Street in Berlin was opened. Much to the surprise of the Catholic community, and despite the stated misgivings of Englert, the Hamilton Poles did surprisingly well. Although many of them had low-paying jobs, six months after Dowling granted permission for the parish, Mass was celebrated in the Church basement.³⁹ Under the direction of Resurrectionist Father Thomas Tarasiuk, who would remain until 1935, the parishioners paid for the church

³⁴ *Catholic Record*, June 7, 1913; Foyster, p. 30.

³⁵ Unfortunately the one complete study of Polish immigrants and the Church in Ontario remains unpublished: see Alex Bros, "Polish Immigrant Relations with the Roman Catholic Church in Urban Ontario 1896-1923," M.A. thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1986.

³⁶ For an exhaustive study of the origins of the Congregation of the Resurrection, including the early Canadian years, see John Iwicki, C.R., with James Wahl, C.R., *Resurrectionist Charism* (Waterloo, 1986).

³⁷ For a detailed analysis see Bros, pp. 62-79.

³⁸ A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Father Joseph Englert to Dowling, July 28, 1911.

³⁹ *Canadian Register*, December, 1956.

in 1918, though construction on the elaborate structure was not completed until 1927.⁴⁰

Less successful were Dowling's attempts to service non-Latin-rite faithful such as the Marianites. In one such instance Waterloo-County priest Theobald Spetz. informed Dowling that congregations in Berlin and Owen Sound needed a priest. The Bishop rejected one candidate, then accepted a second.⁴¹ However, the latter, and successive priests, found the Latin-rite pastor in Owen Sound antagonistic and repeatedly left. The long-term result was that Dowling was never able to fill the position.⁴²

Politics

Dowling, like his episcopal contemporaries, claimed to be "above and beyond the sphere of politics."⁴³ In reality, however, like his colleagues, Dowling was heavily involved at both the federal and provincial levels. With one lapse (in 1887 when he followed the lead of Archbishop Lynch and supported Edward Blake's Liberals), Dowling was a Conservative.⁴⁴ He worked quietly to obtain for Catholics what he considered to be their fair share of appointments.⁴⁵ That he did wield some influence at the federal level is demonstrated by his involvement in a judicial appointment in 1888. He asked Archbishop Lynch, who had by this time effected a *rapprochement* with Macdonald, to intercede and ensure that the Orange Order candidate for the position would be rejected. He also asked Lynch to inform the Prime Minister that this was an "opportunity afforded him of conciliating a young bishop whose people form his balance of power in several doubtful constituencies."⁴⁶ Although information on Dowling's specific actions is sketchy, it is clear that he intervened for the Tories in Northumberland and Haldimand Counties in 1887 and 1895 respectively.⁴⁷ He also played an

⁴⁰ R. Harney, "The Polish Canadian Parish as a Social Entity," *Polyphony*, v. 6 (1984), 37.

⁴¹ A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Rev. T. Spetz to Dowling, February 4, 1913.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Rev. T. Burke to Dowling, February 18, 1913; T. Spetz to Vicar-General Mahony, July 15, 1914.

⁴³ *Catholic Record*, May 11, 1889.

⁴⁴ Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (hereafter ARCAT), Archbishop John Joseph Lynch Papers, Dowling to Lynch, February 24, 1887.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Public Archives of Canada (hereafter P.A.C.), Sir John A. Macdonald Papers, Dowling to Macdonald, September 11, 1871.

⁴⁶ ARCAT, Lynch Papers, Dowling to Lynch, April 15, 1888.

⁴⁷ P.A.C., Macdonald Papers, Macdonald to Dowling, December 16, 1887; A.D.H., Dowling Papers, [Illegible] to Dowling, April 11, 1895; April 27, 1895.

advisory role for the federal Tories in the controversy which arose over the Jesuit Estates Act and the Manitoba School Question.⁴⁸ Perhaps the most telling indication that Dowling moved in inner circles came when D'Alton McCarthy threatened to tear the Tories apart, finally leaving to form his own party. It was Dowling to whom Macdonald turned to assist in assuring Catholics that McCarthy in no way spoke officially for the government.⁴⁹ Macdonald also used Dowling's sympathetic attitudes toward immigrants to his advantage. In 1891 parish priests in Waterloo County, in particular, were urged to sermonize on the evils of unrestricted reciprocity, which they were warned would lead inevitably to annexation by the United States and ultimately to the dilution of the rights of Canadian Catholics.⁵⁰

After Macdonald's death Dowling continued to serve the Tories and was especially pleased at the choice of John Thompson, a convert to Roman Catholicism and an ally of Bishop Cameron of Antigonish, as Prime Minister. At a Requiem Mass for Thompson, who died only a few months after taking office, Dowling described him as "a man deserving of every honour: for while Sir John Thompson earnestly and patriotically served his sovereign, he also found time to serve God."⁵¹ Dowling also found it possible to forge a political alliance with the semi-competent Mackenzie Bowell, former brand Master of the Orange Order.⁵² Even after the change in government in 1896, there was no relaxing of loyalties but a recognition that the reality was that one had to deal with the government in power.⁵³ There is, however, during Laurier's fifteen-year tenure no evidence of Dowling's political involvement, which perhaps explains why, with the election of Robert Borden's Conservatives in 1911, the Hamilton Bishop was readily able to reassert his campaign for favours for Roman Catholics.⁵⁴

Provincially Dowling, like his confreres, was much less consistent. As a priest and as Bishop of Peterborough he joined Lynch and Cleary in supporting what he described as "the Mowat Fraser" government.⁵⁵ However, after Mowat left for the federal scene in 1896 there was a marked deterioration in relations between Church and government. For Dowling this was particularly true during the short regime of Arthur Sturgis Hardy, when

⁴⁸ P.A.C., Macdonald Papers, Dowling to Macdonald, March 28, 1889.

⁴⁹ A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Macdonald to Dowling, July 5, 1890.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Macdonald to Dowling, February 15, 1891.

⁵¹ *Catholic Record*, January 10, 1895.

⁵² A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Mackenzie Bowell to Dowling, July 16, 1895.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Sir Wilfrid Laurier to Dowling, November 2, 1897.

⁵⁴ ARCAT, Archbishop Neil McNeil Papers, Dowling to McNeil, November 28, 1916; May 19, 1921.

⁵⁵ The phrase is used in retrospect in a 1916 letter, A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Richard Harcourt to Dowling, March 9, 1916.

the Bishop felt the Premier had snubbed him by not paying a courtesy call during a visit to Hamilton.⁵⁶ Under Hardy's successor George W Ross, the situation worsened as Dowling complained bitterly that Hamilton-area patronage appointments normally designated as "Catholic" were being meted out to Protestants.⁵⁷ By 1905, Dowling had joined with other members of the hierarchy in support of the Conservative government of James Pliny Whitney.⁵⁸

Supporter of Education

The Tory-Catholic alliance which ensued involved one of Dowling's great interests – the furtherance of Catholic education, an aspect of his career which was inevitably mentioned in complimentary addresses.⁵⁹ Much to Dowling's chagrin it was not a commitment wholly shared by either the laity or the rest of the episcopacy. In at least one case (and probably more) parishioners were less than enthusiastic in their support of separate schools.⁶⁰ Episcopal colleagues were apparently similarly unenthusiastic regarding such measures as the importation of an Irish priest to act as an instructor in Hamilton's separate schools.⁶¹ It might even be argued that Dowling was unusually foresighted when one compares his attitudes towards Catholic "upper schools" with those of other bishops. One of his first acts in Hamilton was to donate land for such a school.⁶² Dowling saw education as a means of mobility and wanted, therefore, to ensure that high standards were maintained. Any suggestion that separate schools were inferior immediately provoked a response and rectification of any obvious problems.⁶³

Inevitably this meant that Dowling became involved in the controversies surrounding separate schools in Ontario and the West, including the infamous Regulation 17. The first of these disputes was over the use of the secret ballot in separate school board elections. Dowling supported Toronto's Archbishops Lynch and John Walsh against the proposal put forth by Toronto's Irish-nationalist-dominated school board, but, unlike them,

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, A.S. Hardy to Dowling, April 1, 1896.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Dowling to Provincial Secretary Stratton, June 23, 1900.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of this transition, see Charles W. Humphries, "*Honest Enough to Be Bold*" : *The Life and Times of Sir James Pliny Whitney* (Toronto, 1985), pp. 42-44.

⁵⁹ See, for example, *Catholic Record*, October 10, 1908.

⁶⁰ A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Dowling to Monsignor Merry de Val, April 22, 1897.

⁶¹ *Catholic Record*, October 10, 1908.

⁶² *Hamilton Spectator*, December 24, 1889.

⁶³ See, for example, A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Sister Mary Ernesta, S.S.N.D., to Dowling, November 23, 1896.

conceded the inevitability of ballot introduction.⁶⁴ Dowling agreed with Kingston's Bishop James Vincent Cleary that the fight was "prejudicial to our school system, initiated by bigots who openly profess to have in view the gradual extinction of the separate system."⁶⁵ By 1894, however, Dowling realized the battle was over and argued that, rather than have further damage done, "if our people want the ballot they can have it but it should not be forced upon them."⁶⁶

Another controversy concerned the certification of Religious who taught in separate schools. Ironically the controversy arose when a Catholic layman in Ottawa, about to be displaced by a Christian Brother, charged that nuns, brothers, and priests were unqualified because they did not have to pass the same certification exams as lay teachers.⁶⁷ Though there is little documentation concerning Dowling's specific role in finding a solution to this problem, he apparently agreed with the charge, as summer schools to certify Religious in his diocese were established in Hamilton and Berlin.⁶⁸

The right of separate schools to expand beyond fifth form in order to train their own teachers also provoked Dowling.⁶⁹ He consistently denied that earlier prelates, in particular J.J. Lynch, had not wanted high schools at the time of their establishment and they therefore should not be established at a later time. However, in this case, Dowling's argument was rather specious. He claimed that, despite public statements against expansion, the real reason for Lynch's opposition was an objection to the concept of co-education.⁷⁰ Dowling also strongly supported more general education through the Catholic Church Extension Society.⁷¹ Later when other bishops questioned whether the Society was sufficiently effective to warrant continued support, it was Dowling who argued for its survival.⁷²

⁶⁴ ARCAT, Lynch Papers, Dowling to Lynch, April 27, 1888; ARCAT, Archbishop John Walsh Papers, Walsh to Dowling, January 22, 1890.

⁶⁵ A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Dowling to Cleary, January 17, 1890

⁶⁶ *Catholic Register*, March 8, 1894.

⁶⁷ The fullest account of this controversy is Katherine J. Barclay, "The Separate School Compromise of 1907," B.A. thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1986.

⁶⁸ Barclay, p. 31.

⁶⁹ University of Toronto, Robarts Library, Correspondence Concerning the Bilingual Issue, Dowling to Mr. Pyne, March 20, 1916.

⁷⁰ A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Memorandum, Dowling to Pyne, March 25, 1916.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Archbishop Fergus McEvay (Toronto) to Dowling, December 20, 1908.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Archbishop Neil McNeil (Toronto) to Dowling, January 17, 1913; Dowling to McNeil, January 10, 1913.

On matters involving French-language schools Dowling was less understanding of the French, but certainly not as extreme as some of his contemporaries, such as Bishop Michael Fallon. In both the Manitoba dispute of the 1890s and the Alberta-Saskatchewan question in 1905, Dowling's actions were cautious; some would say, from a French-Canadian point of view, they were close to obstructionist. Publicly his stance was hope that a compromise solution would be found, in the belief that such a move would also strengthen the position of Ontario separate schools.⁷³ However, after Laurier's election Dowling and the rest of the Anglophone hierarchy refused to join with their French-Canadian colleagues in protest.⁷⁴ A similar stance was adopted in 1905 when Dowling advanced the argument that "a half loaf is better than no bread."⁷⁵ While both incidents might simply be described as examples of political realism, the controversy over Regulation 17 seems to suggest this was not wholly the case.

This was a more complicated, and for an Ontario bishop, a more immediate problem. The law restricting the French language in Ontario schools split the Canadian Catholic hierarchy into linguistic camps. Dowling predictably followed supporters of the law led by London's Michael Fallon.⁷⁶ The problem itself was not solved until 1926 but it is clear that Dowling was much more willing to consult with his French Canadian colleagues and seek compromise but was overruled by Fallon and others.⁷⁷

Irish Interests

Given his parentage, Dowling's priestly career was predictably also marked by a consistent concern for the Irish. He was very much a subscriber to Thomas D'Arcy McGee's idea of a "new nationality."⁷⁸ As a parish priest in Paris in 1866, Dowling made his view on more radical solutions well known by acting as chaplain for the local militia.⁷⁹ Irish-Canadians, he argued, in a view somewhat akin to that of Halifax Archbishop Thomas Connolly and totally at odds with that of Toronto's Archbishop Lynch, "enjoy social, religious and political rights which they duly appreciate and

⁷³ A.D.H., Dowling Papers, Archbishop A.A. Taché (Saint Boniface) to Dowling, January 23, 1895; Walsh to Dowling, January 23, 1895.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Cleary to Archbishop Begin, January 7, 1897.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Dowling to Msgr. Merry de Val, March 28, 1905.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Dowling to Archbishop Charles Hugh Gauthier (Ottawa), August 18, 1910.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, Archbishop Neil McNeil (Toronto) to Dowling, July 25, 1914.

⁷⁸ There is a specific reference to this idea in A.D.H., Scrapbook, Unidentified Clipping, n.d.

⁷⁹ *Paris Star*, July 19, 1866.

which, in the hour of danger, they are both ready and willing to defend.” The Church condemned the Fenians and “I have yet to find the man amongst them who manifests sympathy with this mad movement,” reported Dowling.⁸⁰

Dowling’s solutions to the Irish problem were constitutional. He particularly praised the work of Daniel O’Connell, “the Great Liberator.” He spoke often on the Irish topic and took particular delight in the annual Saint Patrick’s Day celebration. He also recognized, especially after two visits to his homeland, that problems did exist; in a typical sermon he exclaimed:

How she has suffered. Black is her story. Bitter her lot. Did some new power arise to write an epic of Ireland since the days of Strongbow. What a drudge it would be of desolate hearths and weeping women! But, through it all runs the exultant note of a people never vanquished, a spirit never broken ...⁸¹

Two aspects of Irish life struck Dowling; the first was the piety of the people and their respect for authority.⁸² The other was their poverty, so extreme that he argued that even the landlords were poor by Canadian standards. This he blamed on the British decision, taken during the Irish administration of Robert “Orange” Peel, to operate a costly police force with few, if any, controls.⁸³

Although the Hamilton Bishop agreed that Irish Canadians were materially better off than their counterparts at home, Dowling supported the efforts of Archbishop Lynch and many American prelates to discourage what was termed “improvident emigration” to the cities. Hamilton’s ‘Slabtown’, as the Irish ghetto was known, was an example of what could go wrong. Dowling and Lynch both believed that immigration to rural areas was desirable but immigration to urban areas should be discouraged.⁸⁴ However, this question of Irish immigration during his Hamilton episcopacy became quickly eclipsed by the middle-European immigration alluded to earlier.

Conclusion

Dowling remained as Bishop of Hamilton until his death in 1924. At that time it was stated that he had refused the Archbishopric of Toronto three

⁸⁰ A.D.H., Unidentified Clipping, n.d.

⁸¹ *Catholic Record*, March 28, 1903.

⁸² *Ibid.*, March 25, 1897.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, September 14, 1889.

⁸⁴ ARCAT, Lynch Papers, Dowling to Lynch, January 4, 1884.

times; there is but one occasion on which it appears to have been a distinct possibility. In 1898, Dowling was rumored to be John Walsh's replacement in Toronto. However, he announced at that year's celebration of his ordination anniversary that he would remain in Hamilton.⁸⁵ In 1914, he was honoured on his seventy-fifth birthday, his fiftieth year as a priest and his twenty-fifth year as a bishop, with appointment as Assistant Bishop at the Pontifical Throne and Domestic Prelate.⁸⁶

After 1914, the absence of any substantial body of personal papers indicates a much reduced pace. By 1920, Dowling was publicly acknowledged to be in ill-health and the diocese was being run by an administrator with the episcopal functions such as administering confirmation being performed by missionary bishops. Three times Dowling was given Extreme Unction. When he died, on the eve of the sixtieth anniversary of his ordination, he was North America's oldest bishop.⁸⁷

Thomas Joseph Dowling's episcopacy was not without the problems which inevitably plague that office. Although the number of these problems seems to have been rather slight, they nevertheless did exist. He had, for example, in both Peterborough and Hamilton to deal with priests who were disobedient and whom it was feared would bring scandal to the Church.⁸⁸ However, it would be unrealistic to expect that anyone holding office for as long as Dowling did would not encounter such problems. Similarly, while from a modern perspective Dowling's alliance with Fallon and the other English-speaking hierarchy on the issues revolving around French-language schools may be distasteful, it is to be noted that, in comparison with many of his contemporaries, he was truly moderate.

By the most mundane of standards – the number of schools, churches, and convents erected – Dowling was a success. Similarly, his views on the promotion of Catholic education at both the secondary and postsecondary levels impart a sense of what the future might hold that some of his fellow bishops lacked. The same might be said of what was arguably his greatest achievement, the recognition that, with non-English-speaking immigration to Canada on a large scale, the ethnicity of the country and the Church was undergoing a rapid transformation which had to be recognized. This led to his quest to provide groups such as the Germans, Italians and Poles with the necessary priestly services. Even in 1917 when Dowling's episcopal career, for all practical purposes, was coming to an end, the Bishop was still seeking

⁸⁵ *Catholic Record*, August 13, 1898.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, December 26, 1914.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, August 16, 1924

⁸⁸ ARCAT, Lynch Papers, Dowling to Lynch, June 26, 1887.

priests “for foreigners in the east end.”⁸⁹ He also supported efforts to provide such services in other sees where early enthusiasm for such efforts had been non-existent.⁹⁰ Dowling recognized that the days of Canada as a British nation overseas were over and that the mosaic which Canadians claim as their unique heritage would mark the future. In this respect, despite his Irish birthplace, Thomas Joseph Dowling was truly Hamilton’s first “Canadian” bishop.

⁸⁹ ARCAT, McNeil Papers, Dowling to McNeil, June 5, 1917.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Dowling to McNeil, undated [1915?].