

The Oblates, the Métis, and 1885: The Breakdown of Traditional Relationships

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The Métis, or mixed blood population, emerged during the fur trade era as a result of the union of a French Canadian father and a Cree or Sautux mother. As “the first born of the faith in the West,” the Métis were very dear to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the dominant Catholic missionary order in the northern and western regions of Canada. The Oblates regarded the Métis as the mediator, the *trait d’union*, between themselves and the native populations.¹ Archbishop Taché of St. Boniface, the pioneer Oblate missionary, was well aware of the problems involved in evangelizing the native populations under his jurisdiction and he hoped to form a Métis priesthood to facilitate this objective. Consequently, in 1858, he sent three young Métis from Red River – Louis Riel, Louis Schmidt and Donald McDougall – to study in seminaries in the province of Quebec. Unfortunately, the high aspirations the Archbishop held for these young men were never realized and all three left the seminaries before completing their studies and, hence, were never ordained.

The failure of this experiment was a profound disappointment but not a complete surprise to the Oblates who had already observed that the Métis were indifferent to education, lacked a strong commitment to religious life, were improvident nomads and easily corrupted by exposure to civilization.² Nevertheless, the Oblates continued to make sacrifices to maintain schools

¹ *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée* [hereafter *Missions*], 1893, p. 358.

² *Missions*, 1863, p. 201; Archives Deschêtelets [hereafter AD], HE 2223 T12Z 3, V. Grandin to Mgr. et bien cher Père [Taché], 18 juin 1866; *ibid.*, HE 2221 T12Z 234. Sr. Slocombe to S.G. Mgr. Taché, 12 février 1864.

for Métis children because they were convinced that only through education could the Métis become truly civilized and Christianized.³

It was in Red River that the Oblates first began to accompany the Métis *à la prairie* as they went on their biannual treks in search of the buffalo herds. Father Henri Faraud appears to have been the first Oblate who ministered to the Métis hunters in 1847. After 1849 this practice was discontinued but, ten years later as a result of the earnest requests of the Métis hunters for a pastor, Father C. Mestre received his obedience to resume the ministry among them. In the period 1863-82, wintering camps in southern Manitoba, North Dakota and southern Saskatchewan were visited by missionaries from St. Boniface or Qu'Appelle.⁴ Oblates from Lac Ste. Anne in Alberta also ministered to the Métis hunters in their winter camps between Edmonton and Calgary. For their part, the Métis sought the presence of the missionary because it provided them with protection as well as spiritual comfort. In addition, the missionary's presence alleviated social tension and facilitated the grouping of extended Métis households.⁵ The Métis' desire for a missionary was equalled by the willingness of the Oblates to accompany the hunters because they literally had a captive audience for a prolonged period of time and this was useful for instructing the children. In addition, the hunters constructed a home and chapel for the missionary, fed him, provided transportation and gave him buffalo robes. This is in sharp contrast to the Indian missions where the Oblate had to provide everything as well as supply his own food and transportation.⁶

The missionaries who wintered among hunters very quickly realized that the buffalo were disappearing and that, consequently, the golden age of the Métis was drawing to an end.⁷ In an attempt to alleviate the sufferings of the Métis under his jurisdiction Bishop Vital Grandin of St. Albert recommended to the federal government that the privileges of the Manitoba

³ AD, HEC 3586 C47C 4, C. Mestre to Supérieur du Grand Séminaire de Bourg, 5 janvier 1861.

⁴ A.-A. Taché, *Vingt Années de Missions dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique* (Montréal: Librairie St-Joseph, 1888), pp. 34, 108; AD, L 301 M27R 19, Hivernements de la famille Grant; AD, L 301 M27R 18, Hivernements à la Montagne de Bois.

⁵ J. Foster, "Le missionnaire and le chef métis," paper presented before the first Oblate Symposium, Faculté St-Jean, Edmonton, 18 May 1989, p. 6.

⁶ *Missions*, 1930, p. 523; 1880, 175, pp. 197-98.

⁷ For comments on the status of the Métis consult AD, HEC 2642 J43C 14, J.-M. Lestanc to R.P. Maisonneuve, 4 novembre 1875; AD, HEB 3297 J94C 3, A. Philpott, Decorby ms., Decorby to Mon bien cher PPre, 3 juin 187[9?]1, p. 10; Provincial Archives of Alberta [hereafter PAA], Fonds oblat de la province Alberta-Saskatchewan [hereafter OMI], St-Laurent 5, Petite Chronique, 1875, p. 30.

Métis be extended to those of the Territories, that hunting laws be enacted to prevent the destruction of the buffalo and that assistance be provided to those Métis who wished to give up their nomadic lifestyle and become farmers.⁸ Grandin was also very much aware of the nefarious influence of the white presence on Métis society, and he urged the Métis to opt for reserves to protect themselves and their lands. He feared that the experience of the Manitoba Métis, who had abandoned their lands and retreated when confronted by an acquisitive white civilization, would be repeated in the North-West.⁹

As events were to prove, Grandin's fears were realized. In St. Laurent de Grandin the Métis were experiencing difficulties in having their lands surveyed into river lots and in confirming ownership of these lands. Former residents of Manitoba encountered problems in receiving the allotments they were entitled to under the Half-breed Grant. These administrative problems were compounded by economic distress in the region. Crops had been destroyed by drought, insect infestations and early frosts. The economic crisis had resulted in a considerable drop in freighting which was an important activity for the Métis.¹⁰ Grandin and the Oblates made numerous representations to the federal government on behalf of the Métis and, while they were able to obtain minor concessions, the Métis were becoming impatient and frustrated with governmental indifference and procrastination regarding their land claims.

Consequently, the Métis sent a deputation to St. Peter's mission in Montana to ask Louis Riel to return and champion their cause. Upon learning of this, Grandin remarked that the Métis had committed a *grosse bêtise*, and he feared that they would compromise themselves and alienate the government.¹¹ He also noted a growing excitement on the part of the Métis and the "extraordinary enthusiasm" with which they spoke of Riel.¹² In September, 1884, Grandin met Riel in St. Laurent and noted that the Métis leader was very excited during discussions on religious and political issues. While the bishop doubted Riel's sincerity he nevertheless urged him to use his influence to warn the Métis against having recourse to violence to redress their grievances.¹³

⁸ "Écrits de Mgr. Grandin" [hereafter "Écrits"], Vol. XVI, pp. 37-38.

⁹ AD, HE 2223 TI2Z 3, V. Grandin to Mgr. et bien cher Père [Taché], 29 août 1872.

¹⁰ PAA, OMI, St. Laurent 5, V. Fourrond, Petite Chronique, 1884, pp. 118-20.

¹¹ "Écrits," Vol. XVII, p. 212.

¹² AD, HE 2223 TI2Z 3, V. Grandin to Mgr. et bien cher Père [Taché], 8 septembre 1884.

¹³ Ibid.; "Écrits," Vol. XVII, p. 314.

While in St. Laurent, Grandin was visited by leaders of the Métis community who complained that the clergy were not supporting their association with Riel to redress outstanding grievances. Grandin replied that since he did not know what the Métis proposed to do, the Church could neither support nor oppose them, but he affirmed that the clergy would never approve of revolution and would favour only legitimate requests. In a conversation with Grandin, Riel accused the clergy of being the pawns of the government and of attempting to manipulate the Métis. Riel denied that revolution had ever been considered, and he asked that the Métis be given a patron saint like other nations. With Grandin's approval, Riel chose St. Joseph but since that feast-day would fall during Lent, the celebration of a votive Mass would not be possible and so it was decided that 24 July would be the national day of the Métis.¹⁴

On the eve of his departure from St. Laurent, Grandin again met with the Métis who repeated their grievances and demands. In a letter written to Archbishop Taché a few days later Grandin, mindful of his earlier conversations with Riel and reiterating the suspicions of the clergy, expressed the fear that Riel had not revealed fully his plans. Furthermore, if the government refused to accede to the demands of the Métis, Riel might incite them and Indians to revolt and lose control of the situation. The Métis were adopting Riel's views as well as his hatred of the government and, while Grandin was reassured concerning the Métis leader's good intentions, he entertained doubts concerning the future: "peu de choses pourrait, it me semble, mettre le feu aux poudres."¹⁵

In the meantime, Grandin was attempting to maintain the Métis in a state of obedience while trying to obtain justice for them from the government. He warned Sir Hector Langevin, the federal Minister of Public Works, against using force to coerce Riel because this would triple his influence among the Métis and recommended instead that the government imitate the policy of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Bay bought out its competitors and Riel, being a poor family man, might be willing to negotiate a settlement with the government. Grandin again affirmed that what most irritated the Métis was the conviction that the government scorned them and was purposely humiliating and alienating them. He urged the government to demonstrate its good intentions by granting the demands of the Métis that were just and reasonable.¹⁶

In dealing with Riel or commenting on his actions prior to the Rebellion, the Oblate missionaries had to be very reserved. As an indigenous leader Riel

¹⁴ "Écrits," Vol. IV, p. 315.

¹⁵ AD, HE 2223 T12Z 3, V. Grandin to Mgr. et bien cher Père [Taché], 8 septembre 1884.

¹⁶ "Écrits," Vol. XXII, pp. 222-23.

had made a significant impact on the Métis, and his words had struck a responsive chord in their hearts and minds. Furthermore, Riel had no association with the authorities and, hence, the Métis readily could identify with him. If the Oblates regarded Riel as becoming increasingly unorthodox and heretical, the Métis saw him as a Joshua, a prophet or a saint. Any criticism of Riel by the clergy was interpreted as an affront to the Métis and their growing consciousness as a distinct entity, and it eroded the traditional close relationship between the Métis and their pastors. Despite this growing polarization the clergy did not despair because they were convinced that the Métis would remain faithful to the Church and obey its dictates.¹⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the Oblates were becoming concerned with the turn of events and increasingly suspicious of Riel's motives. Father Vital Fourmond, for example, was favourably impressed when he first met Riel in St. Laurent but he noted that beneath the goodness, humility and modesty that Riel projected there was an anger that could be quickly aroused especially when his ideas were challenged. When Riel became excited he was no longer the same person, and Fourmond could not help but conclude: "Voilà un homme convaincu."¹⁸ For his part, Father Alexis André, after having met Riel for the first time, noted in his journal that the Métis leader's mystical appearance, his religious tone and mannerisms were affectations to mislead the "simple and ignorant." While the Métis might regard Riel as a hero and a saint, André claimed that he was motivated by a "diabolical pride" and "an unbounded ambition." Furthermore, André affirmed that Riel was jealous of the status and authority of the clergy and was attempting to turn the Métis against their religious leaders by suggesting that the clergy were the paid puppets of the government.¹⁹ As time passed, Grandin was not certain that he could prevent a rebellion because the situation was getting out of hand and it was impossible to control the Métis.²⁰

Once the hostilities had started, the federal government sought the assistance of the Oblates. The Prime Minister, Sir J. A. Macdonald, asked Father Lacombe to visit the Blackfoot and to reassure them.²¹ Lacombe accompanied the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories to Blackfoot Crossing for peace talks, and he reported that there were no signs of trouble or unrest among the Blackfoot.²² Some time later Lacombe

¹⁷ *Missions*, 1885, pp. 277-78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

²⁰ "Écrits," Vol. XXIV, p. 338.

²¹ PAA, OMI, PP, A. Lacombe 1885, A. Lacombe to Mes chers Pères Legal et Van Tighem, 26 mars 1885.

²² PAA, OMI, St. Albert 8, Codex Historicus, A. Lacombe to S. Gr. Mgr. Grandin, 10 avril 1885.

returned to Blackfoot Crossing because Cree rebels had arrived to provoke the Blackfoot and he continued on to Fort Macleod where the Indians were causing some anxieties to the authorities.²³ On the Peace Hills Reserve, Father Constantine Scollen met with the chief and headmen and used “the strongest language” to advise them to control their people. After the meeting Scollen was confident that regardless of the outcome of the rebellion, the Indians of the Peace Hills Reserve would not take part in it.²⁴

In view of the hostilities and the fear of a general Métis uprising, Archbishop Taché telegraphed Father P. St-Germain to return to Wood Mountain, and reassure the Métis who were living there.²⁵ Father R. Rémas was sent from St. Albert to Stoney Plain to prevent the Assiniboines from joining the revolt.²⁶ In the Muskeg Lake region, Father M. Paquette heard that some Métis were considering joining Riel. He went to speak with these individuals and was able to calm them, but he admitted that it was the threat of excommunication that forced them to desist from their undertaking. A few days later, Paquette heard that the Métis of Green Lake were also contemplating joining the rebel forces, and he left to speak with them. Once again the threat of excommunication convinced the Métis to renounce the taking of arms.²⁷

The Oblates did not escape misfortune and suffering during the North-West Rebellion. Father Paquette’s mission at Muskeg Lake was pillaged by Indians and his church destroyed while he was counselling the Green Lake Métis.²⁸ At Lac La Biche, the Hudson’s Bay Company fort was pillaged and there was a fear that the mission would suffer the same fate. In the midst of a general panic it was decided to evacuate the sisters and their pupils to an island on the lake.²⁹ The mission at Île-à-la-Crosse was abandoned because it was feared that Riel had given orders to the Métis and Indians to massacre the Sisters because he held them responsible for the death of his sister, Sara, a Grey Nun at that mission.³⁰ In Battleford, Father

²³ PAA, OMI, St. Albert 8, Codex Historicus, 18 mai 1885, A. Lacombe to Mgr. [Grandin], 11 mai 1885.

²⁴ PAA, OMI, St. Albert 8, Codex Historiens, 20 avril 1885, C. Scollen to Rev. and Dear Father, 14 April 1885.

²⁵ PAA, OMI, Administration St-Boniface, Correspondance de Mgr. Taché 1885-89, A. Taché to Bien Cher Père Lebret, 21 avril 1885.

²⁶ PAA, OMI, St. Albert 8, Codex Historicus, 9 avril 1885.

²⁷ PAA, OMI, Dossiers Personnels [hereafter DP], M. Paquette 1882-1903, M. Paquette to R.P. Soullier, 4 octobre 1885.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ PAA, OMI, St. Albert 8, Codex Historicus, D. Collignon to R.P. Lestanc, 4 mai 1885; H. Faraud to S. G. Mgr. Grandin, 4 mai 1885.

³⁰ AD, HEF 1345 J94C 6, J. Teston to Mon Rév. et bien cher Père Maötre, 20 juillet 1885.

A.-H. Bigonnesse was forced to take refuge within the fort for three weeks while Father L. Cochin remained with the Métis who remained neutral and who were guarding their animals and property.³¹ At Batoche, Fathers V. Végréville and J. Moulin and six nuns were held prisoner by Riel and his followers. The ultimate tragedy occurred at Frog Lake where two Oblates, Fathers F. Marchand and F. Fafard, were among the eight killed by Big Bear's Indians.

Despite their energetic denunciation of the Métis recourse to arms, the Oblates admitted that there were extenuating circumstances that had provoked the Métis. Grandin accused local English-speaking residents of having pushed the Métis to rebellion by attempting to steal their lands. He also claimed that the authorities purposely overlooked these illegal activities and this further exasperated the Métis.³² For his part, the author of the *Codex Historicus* of St. Albert claimed that the trouble and disenchantment in the North-West was due to the fact that the government had refused to employ the Métis on reserves or to use them as interpreters. He claimed that the Métis were well qualified to act as agents or farmers and, furthermore, they would not have required interpreters to carry out their duties.³³ There was a general consensus on the part of the missionaries that the government's procrastination in dealing with the legitimate grievances of the Métis had incited them to revolt.

On the subject of Riel's leadership, however, the clergy were unable to display the same magnanimity, and their views were not only negative but very hostile. To begin with, when Riel assumed the mantle of the prophet, he directly challenged the legitimacy and authority of the Catholic clergy. In qualifying Riel as a "false prophet" the Oblates were reiterating that they, and not Riel, were following in the footsteps of St. Peter and, as such, had been entrusted with the continuation of Christ's great commission of teaching and baptizing all nations. Thus, there could be no question of regarding Riel as an associate in the fulfilment of this divine mission. In denouncing Riel as a usurper of the priestly function the Oblates unwittingly acknowledged him as a competitor and recognized the serious challenge he presented to their missionary activities.³⁴ The Oblates also realized that Riel had succeeded in doing something they had not been able to do; he had indigenized Catholicism and expressed it in terms that were meaningful to the Métis as a community and relevant to the crisis they were facing.

³¹ PAA, OMI, St. Albert 8, *Codex Historicus*, 21 mai 1885, J. Bigonnesse to R.P. Supérieur [J. Lestanc], 25 avril 1885.

³² "Écrits," Vol. IV, p. 281

³³ PAA, OMI, St. Albert 8, *Codex Historicus*, 15 avril 1885.

³⁴ J.W. Grant, "Missionaries and Messiahs in the Northwest," *Sciences Religieuses! Studies in Religion* 9, no. 2 (1980), p. 135.

Under Riel's prophetic leadership, the Métis were able to appropriate Catholicism on their terms and, hence, they responded positively to his message. In addition, if Riel were a prophet, the Métis were God's chosen people, and the millenium was at hand.³⁵ This modification of traditional Catholic beliefs further infuriated the clergy who saw their own position and influence among the Métis being eroded and threatened by Riel's success as a prophet. Unable and unwilling to recognize Riel for what he purported to be, the Oblates viewed him as an apostate, the most fiendish of Satan's instruments. The clergy claimed that his religiosity was either a brilliant piece of theatrics to deceive and delude the Métis or the product of a deranged mind. On 26 March 1885, Father A. Lacombe affirmed: "Riel est un fou ainsi que tous ceux qui le suivent."³⁶

For his part, Father André noted that the families of the Métis who died at Duck Lake demonstrated no sorrow nor shed any tears during the burial services at St. Laurent. He claimed furthermore that the Métis were determined to continue the struggle and that they still had faith in Riel despite his earlier assurances that no blood would be shed. According to André, Riel had abandoned the mask of piety and religiosity, renounced the Pope and broken publicly with the Church. Despite this act of apostasy, the Métis regarded him as a prophet endowed with a divine mission.³⁷

Bishop Grandin elaborated on this theme in a letter to Archbishop Taché shortly before Riel's trial opened in Regina. Grandin claimed that Riel, unable to obtain the support of the clergy and cognizant of the religiosity of the Métis, had adopted a façade of religious piety and pretended to be inspired by God. He deceived the Métis and forced them to rebel without their realizing what they were doing. Having compromised the Métis, Riel frightened them by affirming that if they were not victorious there would be no future for them or their families. According to Grandin the Métis were terrified by Riel and his behaviour, the missionaries were under surveillance and every time they spoke out they were insulted and threatened by "ce fou furieux."³⁸

After the hostilities, Grandin drafted a profession of faith which enumerated the religious doctrines which Riel had denied and made the Métis deny. The document referred to the Métis as "'trompés et égarés" and to Riel as "un misérable orgueilleux." The Métis asked God to forgive their

³⁵ T. Flanagan, *Louis "David" Riel. Prophet of the New World* (Halifax: Goodread Biographies, 1983), p. 96.

³⁶ PAA, OMI, PP, A. Lacombe 1885, A. Lacombe to Mes Chers Pères Legal et Van Tighem, 26 mars 1885.

³⁷ *Missions*, 1885, p. 97.

³⁸ AD, HE 2223 TI 2Z 3, V. Grandin to Mgr. et bien cher Père [Taché], 14 juillet 1885.

faults which they profoundly regretted and asked again to be regarded as His children, “les enfants soumis de Votre Sainte Épouse l’Église Catholique, Apostolique et Romaine.”³⁹ In a letter to his clergy Grandin stated that the Métis, ordinarily so respectful and obedient, had rejected the advice of the clergy and followed Riel because they had been manipulated by an agent of Satan. The Métis had been terrorized by this madman who pretended to be a prophet but, fortunately, God struck and healed the Métis as they began to do evil deeds.⁴⁰ Grandin recommended that this profession of faith be explained to the Métis and renewed by them each year on the feasts of the Holy Trinity and the solemnity of St. Peter in the parishes of St. Laurent, Batoche and Saddle Lake.⁴¹

Bishop Grandin was keenly cognizant of his delicate position as a mediator during the Rebellion and the fact that his actions could compromise the clergy and the Church. Because the clergy were opposed to violence and extra-legal means, it was easy to convince the Métis and the Indians that the missionaries were the minions of the authorities. On the other hand, by supporting the interests of the Métis and the Indians, the Oblates were accused of inciting them to revolt.⁴² Thus, when Father M. Biais of Lamoureux wanted to take refuge with the police in Fort Saskatchewan in the event of an attack by Indians, Grandin informed him that such an act would confirm the opinion of many Métis and Indians that the clergy were traitors. The bishop advised the missionary to remain at his post and be at the disposition of everyone. Biais was to offer support to those who were discouraged, pacify the insurgents and prevent bloodshed.⁴³ The “indiscreet zeal” of Father Végréville, on the other hand, demonstrated how easy it was to compromise the clergy. After the hostilities he accepted a mandate that effectively made him a government commissioner and, consequently, several Métis who were only guilty of being misled by Riel were sent to jail. Grandin deplored this “tactless behaviour so unworthy of a missionary” which ruined Végréville’s popularity and influence in the St. Laurent district and harmed the reputation of the missionaries at large.⁴⁴

³⁹ PAA, OMI, St. Albert 8, Codex Historicus, 25 juillet 1885, “Acte de Foi et de Réparation.”

⁴⁰ PAA, OMI, St. Laurent 5, Petite Chronique, Vol. II, V. Grandin to Mes chers frères en religion, 12 juillet 1885, p. 3.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 2-4.

⁴² *Missions*, p. 311.

⁴³ C. Champagne, omi, *Les débuts de la mission dans le Nord-Ouest canadien. Mission et Eglise chez Mgr Vital Grandin, o.m.i., (1829-1902)* (Ottawa: Les Éditions de l’Université d’Ottawa, 1983), p. 182.

⁴⁴ “Écrits,” Vol. XII, p. 397.

After the rebellion, the clergy interceded on behalf of the Métis who had been incarcerated. On 24 May 1885, Father Lacombe sent a lengthy memorandum to H. Langevin, the Minister of Public Works, recommending ways of remedying the problems of the North-West. Lacombe also suggested that the law deal with the guilty as leniently as possible while at the same time serving as a deterrent to those who contemplated civil war or treason.⁴⁵ For their part, Grandin and his clergy sent a petition to the Minister of Justice claiming that the Métis had been forced to take up arms by a “miscreant” who used “a false and hypocritical piety” and threats to deceive them. Consequently, the Oblates urged the Minister to pardon “these poor ignorant people” and if punishment were necessary, to impose “the slightest penalty possible.”⁴⁶ Grandin also addressed letters to Macdonald and Alphonse Caron, the Minister of the Militia, in support of the petition because he felt that disastrous consequences would result if the Métis were punished severely. He reiterated his conviction that the Métis would never have rebelled if they had not been exploited by Riel who had undermined the “beneficial influence of their clergy” and “forced them to take up arms.”⁴⁷ In yet another private communication, this time to Sir H. Langevin, Grandin affirmed that there were only two guilty individuals: Riel and Gabriel Dumont and the latter was dominated by the former. According to the bishop a rigorous application of the law would cause the Métis to abandon the North-West in favour of the United States. It would also generate animosities because in Quebec it would be interpreted as a condemnation of the French Catholic element.⁴⁸

Grandin confided to Archbishop Taché that he had not hesitated to ask the authorities to be lenient with the Métis because they had been duped and terrorized. Grandin then made a very penetrating observation affirming that the Métis had taken up arms “croyant défendre leurs propriétés, leurs femmes et leurs enfants.” In an appendix to Grandin’s letter Father André informed Taché that the Métis prisoners were not allowed to see a priest. André urged Taché to intercede on their behalf claiming that it was Riel who deserved to be punished.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ AD, HEC 2142 A33L 29, A. Lacombe to H. Langevin, 24 mai 1885. The majority of Lacombe’s suggestions dealt with Indian policy.

⁴⁶ PAA, OMI, St. Albert 8, Codex Historicus, 25 juillet 1885, V. Grandin *et al.*, to The Hon. Sir A. Campbell, 10 July 1885.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, V. Grandin to Rt. Hon. Sir J.A. Macdonald, 11 July 1885 (private); V. Grandin to l’Hon. Carron, 12 juillet 1885 (privée).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, V. Grandin to Très Hon. H. Langevin, s.d. (privée).

⁴⁹ AD, HE 2223 T12Z 3, V. Grandin to Mgr. et bien cher Père [Taché], 14 juillet 1885.

After Riel's execution on 16 November 1885, Grandin pressured the government to reprieve the Métis prisoners and to grant an amnesty to those who had fled to the United States and he asked Taché to make a similar requests.⁵⁰ The following February, Grandin informed the archbishop that the authorities had begun to liberate the prisoners, and he expressed the hope that they would quickly all be reunited with their families and ready to sow their crops. Grandin was also concerned about the Métis who were living in exile in the United States because he feared that they would be exposed to dangerous influences. He claimed that, as far as he knew, neither Dumont nor the other exiled Métis were dangerous men.⁵¹ With respect to Maxime Lépine, a member of the Exovedate, who claimed to have used his position to prevent the execution of prisoners held by the Métis, the Minister of the Militia asked Grandin to obtain a written declaration to that effect from Lépine as well as assurances that he would use his influence to prevent a future uprising. A few days later, Lépine was released from jail.⁵²

Insofar as Riel was concerned, the Oblates could derive some consolation from the fact his confessor, Father André, reported that he had faced death courageously and as a Christian. André's close contact with Riel prior to the execution had altered his opinion of the Métis leader's motives. At first, André believed that Riel had affected a pious and religious behaviour to deceive his followers but discussions with Riel had altered his opinion. A few hours after the execution, André informed Archbishop Taché that Riel had been mentally unbalanced, the victim of hallucinations which prevented him from being rational on religious matters. André was convinced that Riel sincerely believed he was a prophet receiving divine communications.⁵³ The opinion of other Oblates, however, was not as generous. Father Lacombe, for example, described the imprisonment and execution of Riel as "une tragico-comédie." It was a farce because the scaffold allowed Riel, the most talented of actors, to play out his role to the end.⁵⁴

In the end, insanity became the official Catholic interpretation to explain Riel's actions in 1885. Since Riel had not been in possession of his faculties, he could not be responsible for his unorthodox religious views which were reduced to the rank of an inadvertent and temporary aberration from the true

⁵⁰ AD, HE 2223 T12Z 3, V. Grandin to Mgr. et bien cher Père [Taché], 27 novembre 1885.

⁵¹ AD, HE 2223 T12Z 3, V. Grandin to S. Gr. Mgr. Taché, 9 février 1886.

⁵² AD, HE 2223 T12Z 3, V. Grandin to S. Gr. Mgr. Taché, 7 mars 1886.

⁵³ PAA, OMI, DP, A. André 1865-85, A. André to Mgr. et bien cher Père [Taché], 16 novembre [1885].

⁵⁴ PAA, OMI, PP. A. Lacombe 1885, A. Lacombe to Mon bien cher Père Lestanc, 6 décembre 1885.

faith. As a Catholic apologist, the noted Oblate writer Adrien-Gabriel Morice went so far as to state that it was the fury and hatred with which Orange Ontario pursued Riel that caused his insanity.⁵⁵ Riel's reconciliation to Catholicism enabled the clergy to focus on the political antecedents of the Rebellion and to stress the legitimate demands of the Métis and the government's procrastination in dealing with these outstanding issues. The insanity theory also made it possible for the clergy to concentrate on Riel's contribution to the French Catholic cause in 1869-70, thereby diverting attention away from his leadership in 1885. In an attempt to minimize the extent of Riel's influence, the clergy tended to absolve the majority of the Métis of any serious complicity in the Rebellion. Bishop Grandin used the term "apostasie extérieure" to refer to the behaviour of the Métis of St. Laurent because he felt that less than ten of Riel's followers understood the consequences of their actions.⁵⁶ Grandin also felt that the Métis had been duped by influential English-speaking individuals who affirmed that the government was responsible for all the misery they were facing. According to Grandin, these same individuals were promoting their own interests by inciting the Métis to revolt. The Métis were also advised that they were poor because they allowed themselves to be led by the clergy and that emancipation would terminate this inferior economic status.⁵⁷

While Grandin's estimate of Riel's support among the Métis was reassuring, his comments on the changed relationships between the Métis and their missionaries were not. Shortly after the Rebellion, he noted that the Métis were tense and concerned about the future. More ominous was the fact that, contrary to past practice, the Métis no longer introduced themselves to the missionaries when they met and, furthermore, they were going out of their way to avoid meeting the clergy.⁵⁸ Father L.-J. Dauphin of Green Lake informed Grandin that the Métis in his district were being told that the missionaries were deceiving them, and that the clergy had provoked Riel to revolt to negate his influence over the Métis.⁵⁹ Father Fourmond lamented the fact that many Métis had not reconciled themselves to the clergy and were still infected with Riel's errors. Instead of uniting behind their dedicated clergy as they had done in the past, the Métis were divided and

⁵⁵ Provincial Archives of Manitoba [hereafter PAM], MG 3 DI, 451, A.-G. Morice to J. Riel, 15 avril 1907.

⁵⁶ *Missions*, 1886, p. 17.

⁵⁷ "Écrits," Vol. IV, p. 176.

⁵⁸ *Missions*, 1886, p. 17; AD, HE 2223 T12Z 3, V. Grandin to Mgr. et bien cher Père [Taché], 14 juillet 1885.

⁵⁹ PAA, OMI, DP, L.-J. Dauphin 1885-1930, L.-J. Dauphin to Mgr. et bien aimé Père [V. Grandin], 22 mars 1886.

being manipulated by various political agitators.⁶⁰ Even the venerable Father Lacombe was not immune to criticism as the Métis of Lesser Slave accused him of having sold their lands to the government.⁶¹

The situation did not improve with the passage of time. Commenting on the first time the Métis of St. Laurent participated in politics in 1887, Father Fourmond stated that the clergy had not succeeded in having them vote for the Conservative candidate because it was in their material interests to do so.⁶² From Batoche that same year, Father Moulin informed the Superior General that the Métis no longer had the same confidence in the clergy and that many of his parishioners had not been to confession since the Rebellion. Furthermore, since many of the Métis lived too far to attend church on Sundays and were illiterate, it was difficult to provide them with adequate religious instruction.⁶³ The following year, in 1888, Father Fourmond noted that it was impossible to get the Métis of St. Laurent to attend vespers or to receive communion frequently. Worse yet was the fact that the younger generation was adopting this behaviour and leading a life of dissipation.⁶⁴

In 1898, Grandin noted that the Métis still felt the effects of the Rebellion and were still prejudiced against the missionaries – so much so that they would believe any accusation levied against the clergy. In the Duhamel settlement, the Métis went so far as to confide the education of their children to a Protestant minister.⁶⁵ Reports from other missionaries such as Father Lestanc were equally disconcerting and caused Grandin to exclaim: “Que le bon Dieu leur pardonne et se souviene de leurs bonnes dispositions d’autrefois.”⁶⁶

While the spiritual interests of the Métis were Grandin’s primary concern, he could not remain oblivious to their material well-being. Most of the Métis were poor, and many were alienating their lands. Merchants had advanced credit to the Métis and obtained mortgages on their property. Consequently, the impoverished Métis went to establish themselves in unsettled areas. In these isolated regions, the Métis could continue to hunt and fish and grow barley and potatoes but Grandin predicted that sooner or later whites would move in and acquire these lands, and the original inhabitants would have nothing to show for their labours. The Métis who

⁶⁰ PAA, OMI, St. Laurent 5, “Petite Chronique,” Vol. II, p. 14.

⁶¹ PAA, OMI, DP, J.-J. Dupin 1871-90, J.-J. Dupin to Mon cher Père Lestanc, 28 juillet 1886.

⁶² PAA, OMI, St. Laurent 5, “Petite Chronique,” Vol. II, 1887, p. 19.

⁶³ AD, HEC 3926 J94C 9, J. Moulin to Mon T. R. Père [J. Fabre], 4 janvier 1887.

⁶⁴ PAA, OMI, St. Laurent 5, “Petite Chronique,” Vol. II, p. 39.

⁶⁵ “Écrits,” Vol. IV, 1 mai 1898, p. 136. *Missions*, 1898, p. 224.

⁶⁶ “Écrits,” Vol. II, 1 mai 1898, p. 331.

remained where they were vegetated around the towns and were addicted to drunkenness and debauchery.⁶⁷

In view of the fact that land claims had been one of the outstanding grievances that had precipitated rebellion the clergy not only urged the authorities to quickly resolve this issue after 1885, but they also advised the Métis to accept land scrip. Taché informed Father Lebreton of Qu'Appelle to reassure the Métis and have them place reasonable requests before the Scrip Commission. Such requests would be granted and Taché warned that afterwards no new ones were to be put forward.⁶⁸ In St. Albert, the Commission sat for three weeks in the bishop's residence and two Oblates helped Métis claimants by acting as interpreters and assisting in the preparation of claims by providing information from church records. The Oblates strongly recommended that the Métis not sell their scrip, but this advice was not heeded and, furthermore, most of the Métis opted for money scrip rather than land scrip.⁶⁹ Métis in the Onion Lake region experienced difficulty in validating their claims because the documentary evidence was destroyed when the church was burned at the time of the Frog Lake massacre.⁷⁰ In Cumberland, Father Ovide Charlebois lamented the fact that in opting for scrip the Métis no longer had a right to live on land set aside for Indians. Since there were no other unoccupied lands in the area, the Métis decided to go elsewhere and, consequently, the mission lost three quarters of its population.⁷¹ In 1909, the missionary at Pelican Lake noted that the scrip buyer had received bottles of brandy, an enticement which the Métis would find difficult to resist. The results were predictable: the buyer had been able to purchase seven of the eight scrips granted to the Métis.⁷²

Since the Métis were alienating their lands by selling scrip, the Oblates favoured the government's proposal to offer a block of land to the Métis of Duck Lake to establish a special colony to be administered by the Métis. Initially, the Métis were receptive to the plan and established a committee to study the matter. At the first meeting held in Batoche, three Oblates were present and some Métis affirmed that the clergy supported the plan because they sought to divert Métis lands to French Canadian farmers. Father Fourmond reassured the Métis and, at a subsequent meeting, a majority voted for the establishment of the colony. At a general meeting of the Métis of the district, however, the original opponents of the scheme again denounced the

⁶⁷ C. Champagne, *Les débuts de la mission*, p. 184.

⁶⁸ PAA, OMI, Administration St-Boniface Correspondance de Mgr. Taché 1885-89, A. Taché to Bien Cher Père Lebreton, 6 avril 1885.

⁶⁹ PAA, OMI, St. Albert 8, Codex Historicus, 7 juin, 11 juin, 30 juin 1885.

⁷⁰ PAA, OMI, Onion Lake 4, Codex Historicus, 9 septembre 1886.

⁷¹ *Missions*, 1901, p. 32.

⁷² AD, LC 6461 K26R1, Journal, 12 avril, 17 avril, 31 mai 1909.

motives of the Oblates and claimed that the colony would be nothing more than an Indian reserve. These arguments convinced a large majority to turn down the proposal.⁷³

It was this concern for the material well-being of the Métis that caused Father Lacombe to submit a memorial to the federal government on behalf of the Métis of Manitoba and the North-West in which he painted a very dark picture of their current status. To bring about this improvement in the well-being of the Métis, Lacombe asked the federal government to give four sections of land to the Episcopal Corporations of St. Albert, St. Boniface and Prince Albert to allow them to establish a religious settlement and an industrial school. The government was also asked to lease four townships to these institutions. This land would be subdivided into plots and distributed to Métis families to enable them to become self-supporting under the direction of managers appointed by the clergy. Lacombe also suggested that the government might also provide seed and implements to start this venture.⁷⁴ The Deputy Minister of the Interior shared Lacombe's concern for the worsening condition of the Métis despite the government's efforts to provide employment through the construction of roads and bridges. He recommended the implementation of Lacombe's proposal as "a final effort for the reclamation of these people." Furthermore, the plan required no financial obligation on the part of government and, hence, "there would be no great risk in giving the experiment a fair trial."⁷⁵ The plan was accepted by the government which set aside land for the reserve near St. Paul, Alberta.

In a letter to the Métis Lacombe announced his intention of beginning the reserve with a few families who would succeed as a result of their efforts, thus providing others with an example of what could be accomplished. If the Métis were once again willing to "listen to the priest who is your true friend," Lacombe promised that they would be happy and not be at the mercy of whites.⁷⁶ Lacombe then indicated the conditions for participating in his venture. The reserve's land would be under the control of the clergy who were to distribute it and utilize it as they saw fit to promote the interests of the colony. Only the landless Métis and those who did not know how to earn a living were invited to participate. Participants would not be able to sell their plots of land and if they left the colony, they could take with them only their possessions and cattle. Provisions and financial assistance could not be

⁷³ PAA, OMI, St. Laurent 5, "Petite Chronique," Vol. II, 1890, pp. 45-47.

⁷⁴ PAA, OMI, PP, A. Lacombe, St. Paul 1893-96, Annex "B" to P.C. 3723, 28 December 1896.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Annex "A," A.M. Burgess to Sir, 28 December 1895.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

promised but the clergy would do what they could to assist those who were “determined to work and live in good accord with the missionaries.”⁷⁷

For his part, Bishop Grandin was determined to encourage the Métis to settle in the colony, and in June 1897 he addressed a letter to the residents of St. Paul urging them to have confidence in themselves and reminding them that they were the equal of others. Grandin was convinced that if the Métis were courageous and energetic St. Paul would become a model colony and its residents would be worthy of admiration.⁷⁸ Grandin and the clergy held high hopes for the St. Paul colony because they were convinced that the Métis could be redeemed by removing them from the nefarious influence of civilization, settling them in groups, and offering guidance and encouragement.

While Father Lacombe was instrumental in planning the St. Paul reserve the actual operations were under the direction of Father J. A. Thérien who did not believe that the Métis should be given rations as were the Indians on their reserves. Thus, at St. Paul, the Métis were to live by the fruits of their labour and they were not to expect the reserve to support them. The Métis were given construction work because Thérien had no one else to turn to and when their assistance was no longer required, they would receive nothing from him. He categorically denied allegations that he was forced to support the impoverished Métis.⁷⁹ On the other hand, Father Lacombe became alarmed over expenses and wanted them reduced. This placed Thérien in an unenviable position because the Métis did not like his avaricious ways and they accused him of allowing large sums of money, destined for their use, to stagnate in the bank.⁸⁰

These rumours surrounding finances were an indication that the Métis were resentful of clerical control and influence. Thérien was forced to admit that the Métis no longer had confidence in the Oblates and were turning to others for leadership because they suspected the motives of the clergy. Thérien was convinced that the Métis could not be regenerated without regaining their confidence and that they had to be convinced of the necessity of uniting with the clergy. He felt that if the Métis petitioned for schools and colonies the government could not refuse to provide them with such institutions.⁸¹ Bishop Grandin was also saddened by the defiant attitude of the Métis and the “sordid motives” which were attributed to the clergy’s involvement in the colony. In the tradition of the apostle Paul, however,

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “Écrits,” Vol. XII, p. 554.

⁷⁹ PAA, OMI, PP, non-inventoriés, E. Legal Correspondance *re* St. Paul des Métis 1898-1902, J.A. Thérien to S.G. Mgr. Legal, 18 mars 1898.

⁸⁰ Ibid., J.A. Thérien to S.G. Mgr. Legal, 2 avril 1898.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Grandin was prepared to love the Métis more even if they loved him less. Grandin reiterated that the Oblates were not attempting to secure temporary remedies to alleviate the plight of the Métis but to provide them with effective assistance which would ensure a better future for them and their children.⁸²

It would appear, however, that many Métis did not share Grandin's lofty goal. In expressing his disgust with the bad conduct and dissipation of the Métis of Edmonton Father Leduc informed Lacombe that it was this very element that refused to profit from the advantages of St. Paul.⁸³ A short while later Leduc, as Vicar-General of the Diocese of St. Albert, voiced his concern over providing adequate resources for the Métis colony. The inhabitants of St. Paul could not be counted on for support, whereas the shortage of competent personnel made it likely that neither the farm nor the herd of cattle would be profitable operations. He hoped that the government would finally agree to provide a suitable annual subsidy.⁸⁴

This government grant, however, never materialized and the colony's financial status was precarious. In 1903, Father Lacombe was forced to appeal to the Superior General of the Oblates to obtain the services of lay brothers for the colony.⁸⁵ A few weeks later, Leduc informed Lacombe that despite special collections taken for the benefit of the colony, there was not enough money to meet current obligations.⁸⁶ The situation was rendered even more acute by the perennial shortage of skilled personnel. The colony, for example, had obtained from the Lac la Biche mission the machinery necessary to establish a saw mill, a flour mill and a threshing machine but there was no one who could erect the machinery and suitable buildings nor was there money available to employ others to do so. Consequently, the colony's grain had to be transported to Whitefish Lake to be ground and such a state of affairs did little to inspire the confidence of the Métis in the venture or the Oblates as managers.⁸⁷ The final blow occurred on 15 January 1905, when fire destroyed the colony's boarding school which housed 90 students. The fire, which claimed one life, had been set by students who no longer

⁸² "Écrits," Vol. XVII, "Documents collectifs," 7 mars 1899, p. 478; II Corinthians 12:15.

⁸³ PAA, OMI, PP, H. Leduc 1901-2, H. Leduc to Rév. & et bien cher Père Lacombe, 23 janvier 1901.

⁸⁴ PAA, OMI, PP, H. Leduc 1901-2, H. Leduc to Rév. et bien cher Père Lacombe, 25 novembre 1901

⁸⁵ PAA, OMI, PP, A. Lacombe 1903-6, A. Lacombe to T.R.P.G. Augier, 1 février 1903.

⁸⁶ PAA, OMI, PP, H. Leduc 1903-14, H. Leduc to Rev. et bien cher Père Lacombe, 18 février 1903.

⁸⁷ PAA, OMI, St. Paul 3, Codex Historicus, p. 4.

wanted to attend the institution.⁸⁸ Attempts were made to maintain the venture, but on 10 April 1909 the Oblates admitted defeat, and the colony was opened to French Canadian settlement.

The admission of French Canadian settlers and allegations that the Oblates had profited at the expense of the Métis in the St. Paul colony increased Métis disenchantment with and alienation from the clergy, which had been growing since 1885. Many Métis fell upon hard times after 1885 as a result of a recession aggravated by the CPR's decision to adopt a more southern route and the advancing agricultural frontier. Others like Louis Schmidt, Riel's school companion in eastern Canada and former secretary of the Provisional Government of Red River, had become successful farmers and were indistinguishable from the larger French Catholic community. Circumstances forced the Métis who had supported Riel or had sympathized with his views and message to keep a low profile after the Rebellion. Nevertheless, despite the military defeat at Batoche, the loss of Riel's leadership, the clerical condemnation, the absorption of élite elements into the French Catholic community, the economic distress and demoralization, the Métis did not pass into oblivion. The Métis also remained distinct from the Indian population despite similarities of culture and lifestyle and the pressure of the advancing agricultural frontier. Ironically the earlier presence of the Oblate missionaries among the Métis hunters had engendered a sense of distinctiveness among the Métis and made them resist assimilation into Indian bands.⁸⁹

As the generation after 1885 grew increasingly conscious of its heritage and identity it became resentful of clerical influence and direction and unwilling to accept traditional interpretations critical of Riel. The absence of written sources from within the Métis community makes it difficult to document the precise point in time this new attitude emerged or to identify its precise characteristics. The Oblates had noted a change in relationships between themselves and the Métis in the period following the Rebellion. By the early 1900s the suspicion of the Métis also was directed against those Métis who had spoken out against Riel and had supported the establishment. In 1909, for example, Louis Schmidt felt it necessary to preserve the honour of his family by formally refuting the 'odious calumny' that he had abandoned and betrayed the Métis cause in 1885. Schmidt, a pillar in the French Catholic community and confidant of the Oblates, had denounced Riel's call to arms and his prophetic role.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

⁸⁹ J. Foster, "Le missionnaire and le chef métis," pp. 1, 13.

⁹⁰ Archives of the Archdiocese of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T29881-840, L. Schmidt, Notes: Movement des Métis A St-Laurent, Sask., T.N.O. en 1884; Schmidt Family Papers, Déclaration, 16 décembre 1909.

Two years earlier in 1907, Father Adrien-Gabriel Morice engendered a controversy with the Métis of St. Vital when he wrote a series of articles dealing with the history of Manitoba. Morice had asked Joseph Riel, the younger brother of the Métis leader, to provide him with information. Joseph Riel's lengthy reply was very critical of Archbishop Taché's intervention in the events of 1870.⁹¹ A few months later another Métis, Ambroise Lépine, former military adjutant to the Provisional Government of Red River, alleged that the clergy had advised Louis Riel to execute Thomas Scott in 1870.⁹²

It was obvious that a proud and militant nationalistic consciousness had emerged within the Métis communities of Saskatchewan and Manitoba and the historical record would have to reflect this new sentiment. In fact, a meeting had taken place on 31 January 1909, at the home of Joseph Riel in St. Vital, where it was decided to establish "a clear record of the historical events of 1869-70 and 1885." Afterwards, documents in the possession of the Riel family were examined, participants were interviewed and the *Comité Historique de l'Union Nationale Métisse* was created to press for a more accurate representation of Métis history. Auguste-Henri de Trémaudan was engaged to prepare this history.⁹³

In the meantime, other issues came to the fore. The Riel family criticised the Archdiocese of St. Boniface for the way in which it disposed of the money that had been collected in Quebec for the support of Louis Riel's family and for keeping Louis Riel's papers.⁹⁴ Father Morice again contributed to the controversy between the Métis and the Church in 1921 when he affirmed that he knew the location of Thomas Scott's grave. His allegations suggested that a member of the burial party had broken the solemn oath of secrecy, and the Métis community understandably was very uneasy.⁹⁵ In February 1925 the *Comité Historique* prepared a report on the alleged errors contained in Morice's *Histoire abrégée de l'Ouest canadien* which reflected the traditional Catholic interpretation of the events of 1885.

⁹¹ PAM, MG 3 D 1, 616, J. Riel to A.-G. Morice, 20 mai 1907.

⁹² PAM, MG 3 D 1, 616, J. Riel to A.-G. Morice, 25 avril 1908; *ibid.*, 614, Winnipeg *Evening Telegram* clippings, 11 February, 13 February, 8 March 1909.

⁹³ A.-H. de Trémaudan, *Hold High your Heads (History of the Métis Nation in Western Canada)*, trans. E. Maguet (Pemmican Publications: Winnipeg, 1982), pp. xii-xiii.

⁹⁴ PAM, MG 3 D 1, 485, J. Riel to G. Clouthier, 20 septembre 1920.

⁹⁵ PAM, MG 3 D 1, 486, C. Teillet to A.-G. Morice, 31 janvier 1921. For a detailed discussion of the controversy between Morice and the Métis of St. Vital consult R. Huel, "The Clergyman as Historian: The Rev. A.-G. Morice, O.M.I., and Riel Historiography," Canadian Catholic Historical Association, *Study Sessions*, 1985, pp. 83-96.

This account was deemed unacceptable to the Métis, and he was asked to revise it accordingly.⁹⁶

The unveiling in Batoche on 10 July 1925 of a commemorative statue with a bronze plaque containing the word “rebel” by the Historical Sites Commission provided the *Comité Historique* with yet another challenge. The committee claimed that, during the ceremonies, the Métis had been vilified and their leader had been slandered. The committee also took exception to a discussion of the activities of the missionaries in 1885 and riposted that the Oblates had not waited for the outbreak of rebellion to denounce Riel to the authorities. The committee declared its intention of rendering justice to those who had participated in the events of 1869-70 and 1885 because the Métis had to take pride in their past and in those who had given their lives in defence of the Métis cause.⁹⁷

Since a revision of the historical record was essential to this process of rehabilitation, the Batoche affair provided the *Comité Historique* with an opportunity to renew its opposition to interpretations of the events of 1885 in Morice’s *Histoire abrégée*. Morice was asked to substantiate his allegations against the Métis and Riel and when he refused the controversy was carried on in the pages of *La Liberté* in August and September 1925.⁹⁸

Eleven years later, in 1936, with the posthumous publication of A.-H. de Trémaudan’s *Histoire de la Nation Métisse dans l’Ouest Canadien*, the final curtain fell on this drama. The *Comité Historique* had included a 45-page Appendix dealing with the 1885 Rebellion. In addition to suggesting that the missionaries had acted as agents of the government in 1885, the Appendix denied that the Métis had occupied and profaned the church at Batoche, that they had held priests and nuns prisoner, and that Riel had apostatized and founded a new cult.⁹⁹ As far as the Métis were concerned, this was the authoritative account of the events of 1885.

In the polemic surrounding Morice and the *Comité Historique*, the estrangement of the Métis community from the clergy had reached its apex. The Métis were no longer ashamed of their ancestry or of the fact that they had rebelled in 1885. They had rediscovered a glorious past as well as individuals who had defended the Métis cause. To the Métis, 1885 represented the legitimate defense of Métis rights and interests by the Métis nation led by an indigenous leader. Within this context, any interpretation of these events which cast aspersions on Riel’s leadership or questioned the legitimacy of the actions of the Métis or which attempted to incorporate the

⁹⁶ AD, HF 245 A24Z 8, A. Nault to A.-G. Morice, 10 février 1925.

⁹⁷ *La Liberté* [Winnipeg], 5 août 1925.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5 août, 19 août, 9 septembre, 23 septembre 1925

⁹⁹ A.-H. de Trémaudan, *Histoire de la Nation Métisse*, pp. 175-210.

conflict into the larger framework of French-English relationships in Canada, was unacceptable to the Métis. As a community, the Métis had come of age fully cognizant of the fact that their interests were not necessarily those of the larger French community which had sheltered them for many years and which had been their spokesman. For their part the Oblates, as clergymen, did not distinguish between Métis and French Canadian and, hence, initially did not fully comprehend this rising national consciousness within the Métis community or appreciate its significance.

In the decade after 1885, the Oblates were aware that the traditional relationship between themselves and the Métis had been altered profoundly, but they felt that this change was a temporary aberration and that the Métis would once again follow the direction of their pastors. In the twentieth century, however, the Oblates discarded this naive view of a return to the golden age. By then, the advance of civilization had completely undermined the socio-economic foundation of Métis society and even the northern regions of the prairie provinces and the Mackenzie basin were not immune to this influence. As these cataclysmic changes were taking place, society and government demonstrated little interest and concern for the Métis and their problems. The Oblates, however, did not abandon “the first born of the faith” as they continued to minister to their needs and bring their poverty and misery to the attention of government. It was this particular plight of the Métis as well as the fact that this group had been abandoned by society that stimulated the Oblates. In the twentieth-century Métis, the Oblates found the underprivileged community that was central to their existence as a missionary congregation.