

## **Bishop McNally and the Benedictines of Ampleforth**

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In April 1912 two Benedictine monks from Ampleforth in England arrived in Edmonton to study the possibility of establishing a monastic foundation in the western provinces. Father Oswald Smith, Abbot of Ampleforth Abbey, and Father Vincent Wilson had been invited to the “geographical centre of all the North-West”<sup>1</sup> by Bishop Emile Legal of St. Albert, who had in mind an institution of higher learning for Alberta.

According to Bishop Legal: “Here is an enormous continent newly open to colonization which is filling rapidly with [a] numerous and continuous onrush of land-seekers. The population is large already, but will increase rapidly.”<sup>2</sup> The desire of Catholics settling in western Canada, especially English-speaking Catholics, was to have a Catholic institution under the management of an English-speaking congregation.<sup>3</sup>

During the following year, the Benedictines began their “Canada College,” in Calgary rather than Edmonton. Within a year a mission was incorporated for the Congregation, plans for the proposed institution nearly finalized, and footings poured for one wing of the main building.

In March 1914, the Benedictines abandoned the Canadian project and eventually returned to Ampleforth. They had decided, as they explained to Calgary’s Bishop John Thomas McNally, that “our scheme of corporate life and collegiate work at Calgary is not practicable in this generation.”<sup>4</sup> Their departure from Calgary, a city with a largely English-speaking population, has been a puzzle, their reasons a well-kept secret. In light of new

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<sup>1</sup> Emile Legal, Bishop of St. Albert, to Oswald Smith, Abbot of Ampleforth, 6 November 1911, Archdiocese of Edmonton Archives (ARCAE).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Smith to John T. McNally, Bishop of Calgary, 27 November 1913, Diocese of Calgary Archives (DCA).

documentation, this paper examines the events that led to their leaving, seemingly a missed opportunity in the history of education in western Canada.

No one was more aware of the need of English-speaking educators than Bishop McNally, who had been handed the herculean task of organizing the Diocese of Calgary shortly after it was erected 30 November 1912, when the Diocese of St. Albert was divided into the dioceses of Edmonton and Calgary. Previously the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.), missionaries in the area for over fifty years, had been in charge of the larger centres and missions.<sup>5</sup> Their language of instruction was French. As McNally endeavored to integrate his non-English-speaking and non-French-speaking adherents, the diocese and the Benedictines became embroiled in the ethnic and cultural tensions that were prevalent between the two large linguistic groups in Canadian Catholicism.

John Thomas McNally was the first English-speaking Roman Catholic bishop of the prairies. A native of Prince Edward Island, he was forty-three years old and of Irish descent. He was an ultramontanist, a believer in an emphasis on the authority of Rome in matters of ecclesiastical government. He was also an imperialist, “proud of the great British Empire which encircles the globe.”<sup>6</sup> As such, he had the credentials needed to implement English as the language of instruction and communication in the Diocese of Calgary.

McNally was ordained in Rome 4 April 1896, a candidate for the priesthood from the Diocese of Ottawa. After receiving doctorates in theology and philosophy, he returned to Ottawa to serve as a curate for three years. He then applied for a transfer to Portland, Oregon, and became Secretary to Archbishop Christie for four years. After returning to Rome for two years of further study, he accepted pastoral appointments for the Diocese of Ottawa, at Old Chelsea, Quebec, and Almonte, Ontario. His experience with French-English relations was honed by an appointment to notary service at the Plenary Council of Canadian Catholic Bishops, held at Quebec in 1909. The Canadian Church looked forward with firm confidence to McNally’s “great achievement for the Church in Calgary.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Choquette, *The Oblate Assault on Canada’s Northwest* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995), 86-93; Donat Levasseur, O.M.I., *Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée dans l’Ouest et le Nord du Canada, 1845-1967* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1995), 211-28.

<sup>6</sup> *The Calgary Herald*, 20 November 1924.

<sup>7</sup> Most Reverend A. A. Sinnott to McNally, 24 November 1913, *Rappresentanza pont., Canada*, 1-.2, “Calgary-Collegio Benedettino (1913-1914),” Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV).

*En route* to the diocese after his consecration in Rome 1 June 1913, presided over by Diomed Cardinal Falconio, the first permanent Apostolic Delegate to Canada, Bishop McNally visited Francis Cardinal Bourne in London, and spoke to him about the Benedictine College.<sup>8</sup> Cardinal Bourne had been involved in the project from the beginning, when Bishop Legal asked him to use his influence “to decide the Benedictine Fathers first, to come, and second, to come to Edmonton.”<sup>9</sup>

The Archbishop of Westminster had travelled through Edmonton while touring the Dominion prior to the World Eucharistic Congress, held during September 1910 in Montreal. Cardinal Bourne’s interest in education was evident in a sermon he preached prior to the Congress in which he insisted upon the necessity of bringing the English language more and more into the service of Catholicism. He said:

The West is filling with people, and with people whose religious needs are clamorous for attention ... the newcomers are aliens to both languages, but the language they want is the language of their neighbors, the language of commerce and daily intercourse, and the language of the employment they seek.<sup>10</sup>

A few days later, Bourne defended an address on the same subject that he had presented to the Eucharistic Congress:

Briefly my thesis is this: there is a problem before the Church in Canada, and at the same time a great opportunity, both arising out of the rapid development of the West. Heretofore the language of the country has been mainly French, and entirely on the side of the Church. While this remains the case in the East, the immense influx of immigrants is forming a great English-speaking people in the West, and their language is not on the side of the Church, but for three hundred years has made discord in religious matters ... we are looking at the matter from the higher ground of the interests of religion and the Church at large, as well as of the spiritual welfare of the Dominion as a whole ... a non-Catholic English speaking people is growing up and the Catholic faith has somehow to be presented in their own tongue, as it is, and must continue to be presented and maintained among yourselves in your own tongue.<sup>11</sup>

An article in *The Tablet*, an English weekly, about Bourne’s controversial statements noted that “happily the situation is well understood in Rome. The Cardinal Secretary of State [Merry del Val], whose mission to Canada some years ago has left effaceable traces upon the ecclesiastical history of the

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<sup>8</sup> Smith to Clarkson, 17 July 1913, DCA; Smith to McNally, 17 July 1913, DCA.

<sup>9</sup> Legal to Francis Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, 6 November 1911, ARCAE.

<sup>10</sup> *The Tablet*, 17 September 1910, vol. 116, p. 441.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 October 1910, p. 552.

country, has had opportunities given to few of making himself familiar with the salient facts of the situation.”<sup>12</sup>

While in Montreal Bourne met with Father Philippe Casgrain, a Canadian who had been ordained in Lancashire, in England. Father Casgrain was employed by the Catholic Church Extension Society of Canada, a fund-raising organization established in 1908 and dedicated to the spiritual and material welfare of Catholic immigrants.<sup>13</sup> The Extension Society was an important part of English-speaking missionary endeavor in western Canada. It supplied vestments and altar linens, disseminated Catholic literature, subsidized the missionaries working with immigrants, and financed chapels and schools.<sup>14</sup> Bourne asked Casgrain to act as an emissary in his plan to have the English Benedictines establish their methods of teaching in the western provinces.<sup>15</sup> Casgrain contacted Legal when he was travelling through Edmonton arranging for the settlement of new Canadians.<sup>16</sup>

In Edmonton, Bishop Legal told Casgrain that he had already been busy devising a plan for the secondary education of Catholics. He had the assistance of Judge Nicholas Beck, a prominent Catholic layman who was on the Board of Governors of the Extension Society and also a member of the Senate of the newly-established University of Alberta. According to Judge Beck, their system of instruction was deemed satisfactory by the Senate:

The plan (matured after ascertaining conditions at Oxford and Cambridge) was that a Hall should be erected on or adjacent to the University grounds; that this Hall should be a compulsory place of residence for all Catholic students in residence, that it should be presided over by one or more Catholic priests who should be the spiritual directors, tutors and, in philosophy, from which the University would exempt them, the professors of the students ....<sup>17</sup>

Beck had initially tried to interest England’s Downside Benedictines in coming to Edmonton, but had been unsuccessful. When he learned about the Ampleforth Benedictines from Bishop Legal, he suggested that application should be made to them for the undertaking.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 17 September 1910.

<sup>13</sup> Mark G. McGowan, “‘Religious Duties and Patriotic Endeavors’: The Catholic Church Extension Society, French Canada and the Prairie West, 1908-1916,” *CCHA Historical Studies* (1984): 107-19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Legal to Aiden Gasquet, O.S.B., President General, 6 November 1911, ARCAE.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Beck to Bourne, 5 November 1915, ARCAE.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Abbot Smith had been aware of Cardinal Bourne's desire to have their Congregation in Canada and, upon receiving the invitation, answered that he had for some time been thinking about a foundation such as outlined by Legal; his main difficulty was in the number of men required for such a work.<sup>19</sup> He had also been considering a similar invitation from Archbishop Neil McNeil of Vancouver.<sup>20</sup> He noted as well that Abbot President General, Adrian Gasquet, had written from Rome that he would do his best to assist in any scheme for a Benedictine college and monastery in Canada.<sup>21</sup>

Smith made a tentative agreement with Legal and continued to honor it even though he received notification, upon arrival at Saint John, of a change in destination. They were asked to meet with Legal in Calgary, where they arrived 6 April 1912, and later proceeded to Edmonton.<sup>22</sup> According to Father Wilson: "Bishop Legal seems to have asked the S.J.s to come to Edmonton for a college so it is closed to us. Feeling between French and English at bottom of the hitch."<sup>23</sup>

On 5 September 1912 the Conventual Chapter of Ampleforth monastery empowered Abbot Smith to establish a school at Calgary and to undertake a mission.<sup>24</sup> Father Basil Clarkson and Father Benedict McLaughlin left Liverpool 5 November and "sighted the first lights of Canada about two hours before the close of the Feast of All Monks, a very appropriate day to see first the future sphere of our work."<sup>25</sup> In December they assumed responsibilities at the newly established parish, St. Benedict, north of the Bow River.<sup>26</sup>

Clarkson was determined to have the monastery built near the site of the proposed University of Calgary, not in the LaGrange area, north of St. Benedict, where Abbot Smith had earlier signed a provisional agreement for land. He preferred the proposal of "a very munificent gift" of fifty acres in the south-west, offered by Patrick Burns, a prominent Catholic, pioneer rancher and businessman, "purely in Catholic interests."<sup>27</sup> Clarkson and McLaughlin eventually decided on twenty acres near the Burns property, a gift from Mr. Hadfield, a land speculator. It was "most desirable, about three-

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<sup>19</sup> Smith to Legal, 21 November 1911, DCA.

<sup>20</sup> Legal to Neil McNeil, Archbishop of Vancouver, 10 September 1911, DCA.

<sup>21</sup> Gasquet to Legal, 24 November 1911, DCA.

<sup>22</sup> Richard M. D'Alton, O.M.I., to Smith, 24 July 1912, DCA; Vincent Wilson, O.S.B., *Diary: 22 March – 11 May 1912*, entry 6 April 1912, DCA

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Smith to Legal, 5 September 1912, DCA.

<sup>25</sup> Basil Clarkson, O.S.B., to Smith, 17 November 1912, DCA.

<sup>26</sup> Clarkson to Anselm Turner, O.S.B., 20 December 1912, DCA.

<sup>27</sup> D'Alton to Smith, 9 September 1912, DCA.

quarters mile from the University. *Deo gratias* and St. Theresa of the Infant Jesus and St. Scholastica. Feasts of our order seem marked days in our venture. What will St. Benedict bring us?”<sup>28</sup>

On 14 April Father Clarkson wrote again to the Abbot at Ampleforth: “St. Benedict, instead of bringing us help as we hoped, seems to have brought nothing but difficulties and troubles.”<sup>29</sup> The tenders for the College had been received on his feast day and were double the expected estimates. There were insufficient numbers of Catholics in their Mission to bear the burden of building a Church and rectory; for the time, they were renting from the Ukrainian Catholics for services. In addition, a cabled protest to Ampleforth from disgruntled Catholics who bought land in the LaGrange area, north of St. Benedict parish, persuaded the Council to order a delay in building “until they see the plans again.”<sup>30</sup>

The “boom” days in Calgary were rapidly drawing to a close and verbal promises of donations to the Congregation had not materialized.<sup>31</sup> Even Pat Burns, who intended to send his son to the Benedictines, was vague when pressed; his meat-processing plant had been destroyed by a fire in January and the “financial pinch” was evident.<sup>32</sup>

Clarkson, already behind in schedule because of a protracted winter and necessary modifications to plans, was dismayed by Ampleforth Council’s decision about the College, but remained convinced that the Congregation should not “skimp” on money or men as they had been tentatively offered the chair of philosophy by the promoters of a University in Calgary.<sup>33</sup> Commenting on the pending arrival of the Bishop, he confided: “I do not envy him the problems he will have to face in this Diocese, but I hope to goodness he will be a man with English ideas and customs.”<sup>34</sup>

McNally had been well versed in Rome about the Benedictine undertaking in his diocese. After meeting with Cardinal Bourne in London, he travelled to Ampleforth to attend a General Council meeting. At the meeting, Council members unanimously agreed that construction of the Canada College should

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<sup>28</sup> Clarkson, *Diary: 3 November 1912 – 14 October 1913*, entry 10 February 1913, DCA; Clarkson to Smith, 11 February 1913, DCA.

<sup>29</sup> Clarkson to Smith, 26 April 1913, DCA.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Clarkson to Smith, 25 March 1913, DCA.

<sup>32</sup> Clarkson, *Diary*, entry 11 January 1913, entry 7 April 1913; D’Alton to Smith, 9 September 1912; Clarkson to Smith, 30 November 1912, DCA.

<sup>33</sup> Clarkson to Turner, 3 January 1913, DCA.

<sup>34</sup> Clarkson to Smith, 25 March 1913, DCA.

be continued. Father Wilfred Darby was to be sent to “have supreme control of the Calgary venture, both school and mission.”<sup>35</sup>

One of McNally’s first acts after being installed as Bishop of Calgary 27 July 1913 was a visit to the site of the Benedictine College, accompanied by Bishop Pellegrino Stagni, the Apostolic Delegate. Father Clarkson reported that they expressed themselves as very pleased with it and anxious that the work should be “pushed on” as soon as possible, “and so I have given instructions to that effect and work will be recommended this week.”<sup>36</sup>

Father Darby, fifty-eight years old and previously the proctor at Ampleforth, related that upon his arrival in late August the Bishop was “most kind and has repeated, even more strongly, all he has said at Ampleforth about the Benedictines.”<sup>37</sup> McNally made no secret about being of the same opinion as Cardinal Bourne in regard to the language to be used in the Catholic schools. He was convinced that the system of establishing other religious communities who spoke French in an all English-speaking centre was foolish for the development of religion.<sup>38</sup>

Darby related to Abbot Smith that shortly after his arrival Father Henri Grandin, the Oblate Provincial, had visited Calgary “in the name of Archbishop Legal and some other Frenchmen,” to propose that the Bishops start a common seminary for the Western Dioceses, hiring “the best professors possible.” To McNally’s way of thinking, it meant “using French-speaking professors,” the names of whom he was familiar with “and disapproved.”<sup>39</sup>

According to Darby, the conversation upset the Bishop “terribly,” because he thought it “only a clever move to keep the West still in the hands or under the heels of the French.”<sup>40</sup> McNally then dropped a bombshell by telling the Provincial that he could not join in the plan because he had asked the Benedictines to take charge of his seminary in the new College and intended to keep to his word.<sup>41</sup>

Placing the Benedictines squarely in the midst of dissension that had been emerging between French-speaking and English-speaking Catholics in

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<sup>35</sup> Smith to Clarkson, 26 June 1913, DCA.

<sup>36</sup> Clarkson to Smith, 4 August 1913, DCA.

<sup>37</sup> Wilfred Darby, O.S.B., to Smith, 23 August 1913, DCA.

<sup>38</sup> Sacra Congregazione Concistoriale Relationes, 169, *Calgarien*, p. 26, ASV.

<sup>39</sup> Darby to Smith, 23 August 1913.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

Calgary since his arrival, McNally suggested that Father Darby go with him to the Bishops of Vancouver and Victoria and to Three Falls and some other border Bishops in the United States to interest them in the project of an English Seminary in Calgary under the Benedictines.<sup>42</sup> He felt that “if they do and one or two other Bishops join it will be *the* Seminary of the West and be independent in a few years.”<sup>43</sup>

McNally also hoped that Father Darby might “beg” Abbot Smith to appeal to Cardinal Bourne, who could “represent the case” before the Duke of Norfolk to see if he would “do something handsome.” He thought that “possibly if the English character of the thing were explained it might appeal to him – especially as there are no politics mixed up in it and it seems the only way to save religion among our people.”<sup>44</sup>

For Father Darby, a main difficulty was “to know the mind of the Bishop.”<sup>45</sup> Day by day McNally had changed his opinion about the site of the College, at first arguing strongly for the North (LaGrange) area, having been influenced by speculators, though he would not admit it. Then he seemed to veer round to the Western site, and even proposed that the Benedictines should take a mission in that area. Always he returned to a pet idea, that of having a day school at the Cathedral, and often suggested that the Benedictines should buy the house and land near St. Mary’s from the Oblates.<sup>46</sup>

The issue of “land near the Cathedral” had plagued McNally since he arrived in Calgary. One look at the “St. Mary Hall” sign on the building adjacent to the Cathedral Church had convinced him that he had the place for a seminary-day school in which to begin a long-range plan for completely English-speaking clergy in the Diocese. The Oblates had sold the Hall, a beautiful stone building, to the Canadian Northern Railway.<sup>47</sup>

Claiming that it had been sold “against the wishes of the people,” within a week of his arrival McNally travelled to Winnipeg (with the Apostolic Delegate who was returning to Ottawa) to try to buy back the building, or at least to lease it for a year.<sup>48</sup> He was unsuccessful. He would later say that for this reason he began to question the Oblates; the questions led to major difficulties in the parish.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Darby to Smith, 6 September 1913, DCA.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Calgarien, p. 29.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

The Oblates had vacated St. Mary Church when McNally arrived because it had been designated a Cathedral. He thought that their selling price for the surrounding lots that pioneer Fathers Albert Lacombe and Leon Doucet had secured with homestead claims was prohibitive. When he tried to negotiate a settlement, one that included some of the buildings on the land at issue, he was again unsuccessful. Nerves completely frayed, he was confined to Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary but was determined to continue with his plans.

According to Father Darby, McNally had decided that he wanted, and “must have at once,” a school for the Catholic boys who were going to Protestant schools.<sup>50</sup> Darby said that “he sent for me to-day in great glee to tell me that P. Burns had bought the land and was going to buy the house and give them to the diocese ... and we could begin to build and open a school at once; the present house to do for the professors, and if need be, for any boarders *pro t'e'm*.”<sup>51</sup> But Darby spoke his mind, emphasizing that they were urged by Cardinal Bourne to open a College on similar lines to Ampleforth, that they had been perfectly straight about their plans “to spend ten thousand pounds all told and no more, and that they would send three priests next year, but could promise no more at present.”<sup>52</sup>

McNally claimed that Father Darby had promised to meet with him after their encounter at the hospital and “the next day came and went, but no word was spoken and no further light was vouchsafed me from that quarter.”<sup>53</sup> Darby, using a letter to the Abbot as his method of communicating with the Bishop, airily dismissed his own behavior commenting “after I told him I had referred the matter to you I had nothing further to say to him. I doubt more and more whether we could ever get on with him.”<sup>54</sup>

The Benedictines realized that it would be foolish and probably useless to found a College in the face of the Bishop’s opposition. Father Clarkson noted in his diary that the indecision of the Bishop was “something incredible,” almost to a point of jealousy and selfishness.<sup>55</sup> Clarkson felt that McNally wanted the Benedictines to use their money and resources purely to carry out his new ideas and schemes without much prospect of any return for their capital.<sup>56</sup> He said that McNally was manifesting such a domineering and autocratic disposition that he felt sure that the Fathers would not be able to work amicably with him along their own lines and then they would be at his

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Darby to Smith, 6 September 1913.

<sup>53</sup> McNally to Smith, 29 October 1913, DCA.

<sup>54</sup> Darby to Smith, 10 September 1913, DCA.

<sup>55</sup> Clarkson, *Diary*, entry 27 August 1913.

<sup>56</sup> Clarkson to Smith, 8 September 1913, DCA.

mercy. “Everything at present is very depressing, disheartening and disappointing, and I think the sooner we are out of it and cut our losses the better,”” he added.

Darby feared that, even while making allowances for McNally’s state of nerves, and in spite of his professed “admiration” for Benedictines, he would be a difficult man with whom to work. “He is young and raw and inexperienced. I think under these conditions if we proceed with the West College we shall lose his support, even if he is not actively hostile. That would be fatal, and I would much rather we gave up altogether than began in opposition,”<sup>57</sup> he said. In addition, Darby thought that if the Benedictines operated their College near the Cathedral “it will be his land. We shall be under his thumb, and interference morning, noon and night, and the situation will not be very tolerable. We shall never be an autonomous College.”<sup>58</sup>

At a meeting of the General Council at Ampleforth 25 September 1913, the members decided to approve Father Darby’s recommendation to once again endorse a work stoppage. In view of the opposition and coldness of the Bishop, the hostility of a section of the townsfolk in the LaGrange area, the fact that probable outlay might far exceed the amount they were prepared to spend, and the very doubtful prospect of any early remuneration, the Council concluded that they “could not sink any more money at present.”<sup>59</sup>

Yet, an examination of subsequent correspondence indicates a reluctance on the part of the Council to withdraw completely from Calgary: “Such a course might do us much harm in the eyes of the world.”<sup>60</sup> More important, it was not clear that the situation was hopeless. The minutes of the meeting of 25 September included the following observation:

If we waited for a time, holding on as far as possible, the way might yet be opened to us. In the meantime we were prepared to negotiate with the Bishop and seek to meet his wishes as to educational work other than the College. But he was to understand clearly that we were now to expend none of the capital voted for the College and that we should expect him to finance such an undertaking as a day school.<sup>61</sup>

If the Bishop objected to making a firm commitment, the Council could not be expected to spend men and money on a gamble.

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<sup>57</sup> Darby to Smith, 6 September 1913.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Justin McCann, O.S.B., General Council Secretary, *Council Minutes*, 25 September 1913, DCA.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

The “waiting period” allowed McNally to place the future of the College in jeopardy. Referring to the situation Darby wrote: “He has never spoken again about the business though he had many opportunities.”<sup>62</sup> Silent and seemingly indecisive, preoccupied with building a new rectory and recruiting secular clergy to replace the French-speaking Religious of the Diocese, McNally delayed any decision-making by leaving Calgary for an extended period. His frequent absences soon had him known, by his parishioners, as “the Bishop from Calgary.”<sup>63</sup>

The Bishop knew that he had the upper hand since he was not obliged to endorse Archbishop Legal’s vague invitation to the Benedictines. The scheme had been approved by the Conventual Chapter on the personal recommendation of Smith and Wilson with no more security than the spoken word.<sup>64</sup> Yet when questioned by Legal he steadfastly maintained that he wanted the Benedictines to remain and go on with their undertaking.<sup>65</sup>

When word began to circulate that the Benedictines were leaving Calgary, Legal wrote to Father Clarkson, saying that it was no longer his business but he would consider it as a great mistake if they made a too hasty decision, adding: “The college is already a great need, just at present, and it will become a more and more urgent necessity in a short while, so I hope that you will reconsider your decision, if you had, at anytime, the idea of abandoning the project.”<sup>66</sup>

Bishop McNally had gone to eastern Canada, ostensibly for meetings, but while there he took his concerns about the Benedictines to Father Gasquet, the Abbot President, who was in Newark for reasons of health. He, in turn, contacted Bishop Stagni, the Apostolic Delegate, about the relations existing between the Benedictines and the Bishop.<sup>67</sup>

Gasquet and Stagni agreed that McNally seemed to be desirous of doing everything in his power to help the Benedictines. In a report to Abbot Smith, Gasquet expressed McNally’s concern about the rumor that the Fathers were returning to England. He commented: “In view of the curious position between French and English, this he thinks would be a serious set-back to the

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<sup>62</sup> Darby to Smith, 27 September 1913, DCA.

<sup>63</sup> Patrick Harcourt-O’Reilly to Smith, 14 March 1914, DCA.

<sup>64</sup> Ildephonsus Cummins, O.S.B., *Notes: Ampleforth General Council Meeting*, 25 September 1913, DCA.

<sup>65</sup> Legal to Clarkson, 26 October 1913, DCA.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Sinnott to McNally, 24 November 1913, “Calgary-Collegio Benedettino (1913-1915),” ASV.

policy which put him as an English speaking Bishop at Calgary.”<sup>68</sup> Gasquet told Smith that McNally gave an impression of meaning well and was anxious to pacify the Benedictines. In his assessment of the situation, Gasquet decided, “He is somewhat excitable and colonial, but can be managed quite well if people are not too thin skinned.”<sup>69</sup>

A.A. Sinnott, Secretary to the Apostolic Delegate and future Archbishop of Winnipeg, wrote to his friend McNally about the idea of a day school and said that it was absolutely distinct from the purpose for which the Benedictines went to Calgary and had nothing to do with the project. He suggested that although day schools did not come within the line of their work, an offer of a Bishop would naturally receive every consideration from them after which there could be room for a new understanding in which the conditions mutually accepted would be clearly specified.<sup>70</sup> “There do not seem to be insuperable difficulties in arriving at a complete settlement,” he added.<sup>71</sup>

Sinnott advised that McNally should be clear about the main point (i.e., the original contract). He reminded him that the Benedictines came to Calgary with some definite understanding between them and the Diocesan authority of the time as to the work they were to undertake. “Even if this understanding did not take the form of a written contract, it should not be hard to determine what it was from the correspondence which passed between the two parties,” he pointed out, adding that McNally had no right to complain if the Benedictines lived up to the contract even though he might regret what has been done.<sup>72</sup> Sinnott emphasized that “the important thing is to come to some prompt decision.”<sup>73</sup>

For McNally, however, the difficulties did seem to be “insuperable.” While still in Montreal, he had received from Father Darby a letter containing a copy of resolutions passed by the Ampleforth Council:

Resolved: 1. To instruct Father Wilfrid Darby to cease work on the West site. 2. To instruct him to inform the Bishop that we shall spend no more capital for the present. 3. That we are not prepared at present to consider the undertaking of any educational work, unless the Bishop will finance it. 4. That in the event of the Bishop taking financial responsibility, we are prepared to consider his proposals, as a temporary expedient with a view to a monastic foundation.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Gasquet to Smith, 25 October 1913, DCA.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Sinnott to McNally, 24 November 1913, “Calgary-Collegio Benedettino (1913-1914).” ASV.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> McNally to Smith, 29 October, 1913, DCA.

To McNally, this letter was an admonishment. On returning to Calgary, he summoned Darby “clenching his fists and grinding his teeth” while exclaiming “a Bishop counted for something yet and he would show that he was Bishop in his diocese and defend his right to the end.”<sup>75</sup> On a calmer note, he instructed that he did not want the Benedictines to have anything to do with the day school and, as for the College, “they could do as they liked.”<sup>76</sup> When Darby [speaking out, finally] said that they could not attempt a College without the Bishop’s goodwill, McNally “simply shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.”<sup>77</sup>

The Bishop’s stance of silence about the issue continued for two months, despite the fact that Darby was, for the most part, still living at the Cathedral rectory and taking meals regularly with the Bishop. At one point, Darby wrote to McNally about giving support to a public appeal that would perhaps help the Benedictines to resume building the College. The letter remained on McNally’s desk, opened but unanswered. Six weeks later, on the advice of Judge Beck, he sent another letter asking, “Would your Lordship still be disposed to issue a letter of authorisation as you kindly proposed to do in the first instance?”<sup>78</sup>

Bishop McNally reserved comment, but Darby learned that he had written to the Ampleforth Council complaining that he did not understand the meaning of their statement of conditions much less the reason for its existence. He said that on the occasion of his visit to Ampleforth the “Calgary question” was openly discussed, and, to his mind, a working understanding was decided upon. He reminded the Fathers that they had been prepared to put ten thousand pounds into the building of a College, to be enlarged and increased in capacity as time, needs, and possibilities might warrant. It was thought wise to begin at once to teach a day school, if a suitable building could be procured. A priest was to be sent out as soon as possible, “entrusted with responsibility and instructed to work in harmony with and give all possible help to the organising efforts, especially educational, of the Bishop of the new See of Calgary.”<sup>79</sup>

McNally went on to say that he had gone to Calgary buoyed up, “after my trust in God, with the promise inspired by the assurance of most efficacious cooperation on the part of the English Benedictine Fathers. It was the only

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<sup>75</sup> Darby to Smith, 18 November 1913, DCA.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Darby to McNally, 13 December 1913, DCA; Darby to McNally, 3 January 1914, DCA.

<sup>79</sup> McNally to Smith, 29 October 1913.

human comfort I could look forward to amid a wilderness of difficulties.”<sup>80</sup> He explained that the delayed action in the matter of the College was because he had waited until the arrival of the Father empowered to act with responsibility: “When he came I treated him as a counsellor and confidant, discussing and planning for the future, especially with regard to education.”<sup>81</sup> Adding that the “strain of worry and work” had forced him to confinement in a hospital, McNally claimed that the whole proceeding “mystified” him. “But my health was in such a precarious condition that a complete breakdown could be avoided only by perfect rest and the greatest care, so that I had to put it aside and try to forget it,” he added.<sup>82</sup>

McNally wished to make it plain that he had never changed his intention of fulfilment of the agreement with the Benedictines other than to conceive greater possibilities for their work, and to devise greater schemes to help them in it. He said that if his plans were not made plain to Father Darby, the reason was that they were still at the stage of discussion as to what was best to do: “I asked (i.e., I insisted upon) nothing. I simply proposed for discussion some possible evolution of our educational hopes.”<sup>83</sup> He said that when doubt or difficulty had presented itself he wished to talk it over until they could arrive at some practical course of action and proceed to carry it out. “Instead of that I was eliminated from the discussion, a report was sent away of whose contents I know nothing, and now I am served with an ultimatum which the dignity of my office as well as the integrity of my intentions forbid me either to accept or to consider,” he stated.<sup>84</sup>

Father Arthur Hetherington, McNally’s Secretary, had seen the letter when the Bishop returned to Calgary. He said that the forwarding of the “bald” resolutions, “without any summary of the questions to which they were an answer and without any elucidation of their precise bearing,” indicated that Father Darby had lost all interest in the matter and had given up hope of bringing negotiations to a successful ending.<sup>85</sup>

Hetherington’s observation was insightful. As much as Father Darby tried to speak of the chief difficulties in their way (finances and staffing) in an impersonal way and apart from his feelings about McNally, he admitted that he had lost hope of “doing any good” along the lines that had been laid down

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Reverend Arthur Hetherington, *A Memorandum on the Failure of the Negotiations to Establish a Benedictine College in the Diocese of Calgary*, “Calgary-Collegio Benedettino (1913-14).”

for them (i.e., working cordially with the Bishop). Darby said that he did not want to “turn tail,” and yet “I’m not in love with it, nor have I found my feet yet.”<sup>86</sup> He wrote to a fellow Benedictine: “I feel like one who has fallen into a lot of machinery – helpless to get out or do anything and waiting for someone to release me.”<sup>87</sup>

Upon learning of a cable from Ampleforth 2 February 1914 stating: “Better come back both,” McNally wrote to Darby expressing his disappointment but maintaining that the scope of their education plans would have been of little help in the Diocese.<sup>88</sup> He said that had they accepted temporarily the school he wished to provide for them, and waited for the realization of a university and communication to the city from their intended location, they would have helped “the work of religion in Calgary” and had no interference with the future success of their own interests. “I said that before,” he said, “not ‘sneeringly,’ as you told me to my face, but in all seriousness. (My work is too responsible for sneering; even were I given to such, as thank God, I am not).”<sup>89</sup> How then, he went on to ask, could I lend “the authority of my name as Bishop to ask my people to contribute towards an institution that would benefit only the few rich among them, and at the same time look to them to maintain another college within reach of their homes and their means?”<sup>90</sup>

In the days that followed, Father Hetherington sought to clarify certain points on which “the Bishop’s attitude in the matter has been misunderstood.”<sup>91</sup> Writing to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation “only on facts that came directly under his observation,” Hetherington stressed that even before McNally came to Calgary (at Westminster) he told him that the first thing he intended to do was “search out a hall or other building suitable for a day school, where the Benedictines might make a start at once, while their college was in course of erection.”<sup>92</sup> The Benedictines were only to staff the school, and that temporarily, if they did not see their way to continue the arrangement after their own boarding school on the Western Hill would be complete.

Hetherington said that not only was McNally whole-heartedly with them in their plan to found a college, but conceived the idea of building and endowing a seminary to be placed in their charge. “But Father Darby never

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<sup>86</sup> Darby to Reverend Austin, O.S.B., 18 December 1913, DCA.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., also see “Calgarien,” p. 11.

<sup>88</sup> Smith to Darby, 2 February 1914, DCA; McNally to Darby, 11 February 1914, DCA.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Hetherington, *Memorandum*.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

returned for a second interview in which this might have been made definite and precise. He felt he could do nothing further until he had received an answer from Ampleforth,” he added.<sup>93</sup>

Darby was able to “hold ground” by placing the affairs of the College completely in the hands of the General Council at Ampleforth. At the same time, the “strain of work” took its toll on the Bishop to such an extent that A. A. Sinnott sent a note with advice to his friend, “for goodness sake do not worry your head off. Your last indisposition was pure nervousness brought on by worrying.”<sup>94</sup>

Bishop McNally had looked forward to having a Benedictine monastery in his Diocese as a great educational centre. He told Darby that if as Bishop he failed with the Benedictines, he “fails altogether and will be misrepresented in Rome as all that is bad.”<sup>95</sup> Even when negotiations had ceased to work smoothly, he did not attribute the failure to the Benedictine Order, saying on one occasion: “I wonder if the Abbot would send out other men in place of these, with whom it would be easier to work.”<sup>96</sup>

But McNally was not willing and, in his mind, not able to incorporate the Benedictine method of teaching into his educational scheme. He wanted to be able to exert his episcopal authority into every aspect of education in the Diocese. The Benedictines decided that any school owned and financed by Bishop McNally would place them under his eye every moment. They would be “only tame mice working the wheel, and liable to be turned out any minute he likes” which would be quite contrary to their goal of having a school quite independent of episcopal control.<sup>97</sup>

The departure of the Benedictines left the prominent Catholic laity of Calgary saddened but not surprised. Many had enrolled their sons in the College. Pat Burns promised that if they left it to him, “in two years time or thereabouts things would be better” and he would “personally interest himself and get us fifty acres of land nearer the city and give us not ten percent of our outlay but twenty-five percent or more and if we would keep in touch with him would advise us the best time to come out.”<sup>98</sup> Darby commented wryly that the comments were like starving a man to death and then giving him a grand funeral.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Sinnott to McNally, 24 November 1913.

<sup>95</sup> Darby to Smith, 23 August 1913.

<sup>96</sup> Hetherington, *Memorandum*.

<sup>97</sup> Darby to Smith, 10 September 1913.

<sup>98</sup> Darby to Smith, 23 February 1914, DCA.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

Patrick Harcourt-O'Reilly, legal advisor for the Benedictines, felt that he was in a position to give an "audience" opinion of the situation. He thought that Darby was very suitable and "it is ten thousand pities that he was not here at the beginning of things. I have had him meet at my own home people of all denominations and everybody just loved him."<sup>100</sup> He added: "And if the work which has been interrupted, temporarily I hope, is resumed his guidance in the matter will be a *sine qua non*."<sup>101</sup> Harcourt-O'Reilly considered Bishop McNally to be a hopeless failure. "I do not think he will hold out here very long ... it is difficult to explain or to account for this behaviour, and it is best said that it is just the character of the man. Need I say more?"<sup>102</sup>

Judge Beck wrote to Cardinal Bourne asking for a general investigation of the affairs of the Diocese from the time of Bishop McNally's arrival. He thought it was important that "someone whose word will carry influence in Rome," for instance the Cardinal, should be able to speak with knowledge of "the facts connected with cases" brought to the attention of the Roman Congregations.<sup>103</sup> Beck's letter was a severe criticism of Bishop McNally's dealings with the teaching orders in the Diocese. He said that he had taken upon himself the responsibility of writing because what took place in Calgary had an important bearing on similar institutions in the Archdiocese of Edmonton, both being within the same Province and governed by the same laws. Beck had earlier been engaged by the Federal Government to advise on the education clauses of the autonomy bills for Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Beck said that he could not go through the regular channels, that is, write to Bishop Stagni because his Secretary, Bishop Sinnott, "was and is" a personal friend of Bishop McNally. Also, Sinnott had been Secretary to the previous Apostolic Delegate, Bishop Sbarretti, who went on to be the Secretary of the Congregation for Affairs relating to Religious Orders in Rome. He added that it was undesirable to go through the Secretariat of the Cardinal Secretary of State because it was known that McNally was a friend of the Secretary to the Undersecretary of that office.<sup>104</sup> Beck added: "The Bishop has in fact boasted that no one can hurt him in Rome."<sup>105</sup>

Beck did not hesitate to say that Bishop McNally was wholly responsible for the "gross injustice" to the Benedictines and "for the grievous loss to the

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<sup>100</sup> Harcourt-O'Reilly to Smith, 14 March 1914.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Beck to Bourne.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Catholic body” in losing them as teachers and losing a centre of learning and influence that would have given the Catholics of the Province a prestige the worth of which could not be calculated.<sup>106</sup> He regretted that the Benedictines, “restrained by a desire for peace,” had refrained from insisting upon their rights and from taking steps in the Ecclesiastical Courts to secure justice. He said that their case was so strong that they were certain of a decision that would have been “a most salutary restraint upon the Bishop who has in that instance and in a number of others” shown himself to be antagonistic to all religious orders.<sup>107</sup>

Beck emphasized that there was not the slightest foundation for any suggestion “if it should be made” that the question of language or nationality was in any way involved in the issues at hand. He assured Bourne that “the English speaking Catholics are quite as much incensed at the Bishop as the French speaking Catholics.”<sup>108</sup>

McNally’s failure to negotiate a satisfactory settlement of what were, in fact, less than “insuperable” differences with the Benedictines is less of a surprise when placed within the context of his handling of the other teaching orders that had been invited to the diocese by Bishop Legal. One by one they became victims of either McNally’s authoritarian attitude or his belief that dioceses using the French language “simply cannot do justice to a population that is in vast majority and destined to be increasingly so, of the English tongue, whether by birth or by adoption, or by the unavoidable force of circumstance.”<sup>109</sup>

A dispute between the Bishop and the Faithful Companions of Jesus, the order that had established School District Number One in Calgary after fleeing the Northwest Rebellion, led to a decrease in the wages of the Sisters and demotion of the principal and assistant principal of St. Mary’s high school in Calgary.<sup>110</sup> McNally’s interference in Separate School Board issues resulted in the dismissal of a member of the Ursulines de Chavagne at Sacred Heart School in Calgary and, in turn, the expulsion of the Oblates at Sacred Heart parish, a case that was eventually settled in Rome (in McNally’s favor).<sup>111</sup> The Sisters of Charity of St. Louis, at Medicine Hat, withdrew three

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> McNally to Peter di Maria, Apostolic Delegate, 29 January 1919, *Rappresentanza pont., Canada*, 10.11, “Calgary – Questione bilingue (1919),” ASV.

<sup>110</sup> Beck to Bourne.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.; also see “Calgarien,” pp. 26-33.

teachers from St. Louis school after McNally presided at a conference that questioned their quality of teaching.<sup>112</sup>

At one point, Bishop Stagni suggested that McNally should settle his dispute with the Oblates in Lethbridge by simply writing of the situation to Cardinal De Lai, Prefect of the Consistory, to at least try to maintain “the status quo” for a period.<sup>113</sup> Allegations against and from McNally were literally “piling up” in the Roman courts. Patrick Harcourt-O’Reilly thought that “certainly something should be done to remove this man to a sphere where his activities would be more appreciated or at least less harmful ... all he seems to do is to show the most utter want of tact – and then get out of the city.”<sup>114</sup>

And yet, during his eleven years in Calgary Bishop McNally became known for his “tireless assault on parochiality as a barrier to national interests.”<sup>115</sup> In the more than forty English-speaking parishes he established in southern Alberta, there were ample facilities for the education of youth. He did realize his dream of a diocesan school with the opening of St. Mary Cathedral College in 1919. Billed as “first-class,” it operated as a boarding school with classes in the former Bishop’s residence, originally an Oblate building. The College failed to attract much interest throughout the diocese, however, and closed its doors within two years.<sup>116</sup>

More of a legacy was McNally’s establishment in 1921 of a permanent noviciate for English-speaking Ursulines. He had solicited postulants for the new community through the Extension Society, which printed an open letter in its publication, the *Catholic Register*. In the appeal, McNally noted that the “saving of children, yes and parents as well of the considerable numbers of Catholics, often those known as Foreigners” depended upon the opening of schools taught by English-speaking religious.<sup>117</sup> The noviciate was to exist exclusively for, and within the limits of the Diocese of Calgary. It thrived under McNally’s guidance but later joined the Ursulines of Chatham because of financial difficulties.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> “Statements of Medicine Hat Separate School Board,” 29 October 1917, in McNally papers, DCA.

<sup>113</sup> Pellegrino Stagni, Apostolic Delegate, to McNally, 6 September 1915, DCA.

<sup>114</sup> O’Reilly-Harcourt to Darby, 24 November 1915, DCA.

<sup>115</sup> Very Reverend Thomas O’Donnell, President, Catholic Church Extension Society, statement in Extension Society file in McNally papers.

<sup>116</sup> “St. Mary College” file in McNally papers.

<sup>117</sup> McNally to O’Donnell, 4 July 1921, DCA.

<sup>118</sup> “Ursuline” file in McNally papers.

McNally's relations with the civil authorities were generally positive, particularly during his later years in Calgary. His perspective was largely that of the government. The Department of Indian Affairs, for example, objected to French-speaking teachers in its classrooms. Duncan C. Scott, Deputy Superintendent, wrote to McNally about Father Grandin's choice of Father A. Naessens, O.M.I., as principal for St. Joseph's Industrial School. He said that because the school was no longer a "potent factor" in Indian education, the Department "must insist upon the employment of teachers who are thoroughly qualified to give instruction in English, so that the pupils may have the opportunity of obtaining a thorough English education and learn to speak the language fluently."<sup>119</sup>

McNally was praised for his part "in the work of empire building in the West," by Honorable Perren Baker, Minister of Education, at a civic function before he left Calgary to become Bishop of Hamilton in 1924.<sup>120</sup> At the same time, Honorable R. B. Bennett, McNally's friend (and solicitor) who later became Canada's prime minister, applauded "that love of country, that desire to build up a real people, that ideal he has striven for of a united country of Canadians and Britishers."<sup>121</sup> Bennett said that he had great admiration for McNally, adding that the Bishop had influenced the formation of the province and Catholics in Calgary were bettered by his appointment. He recalled that he had opposed the idea of Catholic schools because he feared "any tendency to depart from efficiency."<sup>122</sup> McNally had assured Bennett that he meant to make the Catholic schooling efficient or consider himself failed. He had said: "If my schools are not the equal of yours, then our children are handicapped and I do not propose that they shall be."<sup>123</sup>

McNally ensured that Catholicism would be an effective force in southern Alberta by placing his allegiance squarely on the side of the majority, of the strongest. His methods were not delicate but they were effective. While most of his dealings with the teaching orders in the diocese were representative of the antagonism that existed between English-speaking and French-speaking Catholics, his failure to negotiate a satisfactory settlement with the Benedictines indicated that the interests of both English-speaking and French-speaking Catholics would be sacrificed to sustain the policy that would ensure protection of episcopal authority in the Canadian Church.

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<sup>119</sup> Duncan C. Scott to McNally, 27 February 1919, DCA.

<sup>120</sup> *The Calgary Herald*.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*; also see R. B. Bennett to McNally, 1 January 1916, Allegati, "Calgarrien."

<sup>123</sup> *The Calgary Herald*.