

Archbishop Taché's Relations with the Oblate General Administration

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In carrying out their responsibilities Oblate bishops in the Canadian North West exercised the same functions as a contemporary chief executive officer of a large corporation. These bishops had to prepare strategic plans, recruit personnel, process requests for supplies, prepare budgets, and seek operating revenue. The relationship of these bishops with the Oblate General Administration in France suggests an additional comparison with contemporary corporate structures and practices. As a consequence of serving in a number of countries, the Oblates could be regarded as an early example of a multinational corporation and, in turn, Oblate bishops could be deemed to be managers at the national or regional level. Since the parent institution in Paris supplied a large part of the personnel and resources in the pioneer missionary era, good relationships between Paris and its “managers” were essential to the success of the missionary enterprise.

The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the relations of Bishop Alexandre-Antonin Taché of St. Boniface with the Oblate General Administration in Paris. Taché was the first Canadian Oblate to serve in the North West and the first Oblate bishop in that vast region. In his monumental two-volume, 1546-page biography of the pioneer prelate, Dom Paul Benoît, C.R.I.C., hints that there were disagreements between Taché and the Oblate General Administration and suggests that these misunderstandings could have been resolved had Taché been able to speak directly to the Superior General and his council rather than rely on written communications.¹

Be that as it may, the sources of discord between Taché and the General Administration transcend distance and problems associated with written

¹ Dom Paul Benoît, *Vie de Mgr Taché Archevêque de Saint-Boniface* (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1904), 2:530.

communications. In the background to these difficulties one finds issues that were beyond Taché's control, such as the rivalry between French and French Canadian Oblates, and the notion that the Oblate who became a bishop was ipso facto no longer a "true" member of the Congregation. Illness was certainly a contributing factor to the strained relationships, especially in the last decade of the archbishop's life when he was prevented from travelling to Europe. Furthermore, as the guardian of French and Catholic interests in the Canadian North West, Taché was preoccupied constantly with preserving and enhancing those privileges. These contributing factors coalesced with administrative decisions made by Taché to ensure the efficient operation of his diocese and the resulting amalgam complicated his relations with the General Administration. Last but not least, certain of Taché's personal traits also contributed significantly to his difficulties with the General Administration.

Taché was exposed to the nationalistic rivalry between French and French Canadian from the very moment he decided to enter the Oblate order in 1844. Friends and even members of his family suggested that he join the secular clergy to avoid having to live with Frenchmen who possessed a mentality and mores different from those of French Canadians.² Taché's relations with the Oblate General Administration began on a discordant note a few years later, in 1850, when he was nominated coadjutor to Bishop Joseph-Norbert Provencher. While Taché's nomination reflected the reality of circumstances in Red River, it had been made without consulting Bishop Eugène de Mazenod, the Oblate Superior General, who expressed surprise and consternation upon hearing the news from third parties.³ Fortunately for Taché, the news of his nomination reached Paris at the time when Mazenod was about to recall the Oblates from Red River because the future of those missions inspired little optimism. In view of these circumstances, Mazenod came to regard Taché's nomination as a providential act that would bind the missions of Red River to the Congregation.⁴ The Superior General insisted on consecrating Taché in Marseille to facilitate and strengthen this union and to make Taché known to the French Oblates and clergy upon whom he

² Ibid., 28.

³ Gaston Carrière, "Mgr Provencher à la recherche d'un coadjuteur," *Société Canadienne d'Histoire de l'Église Catholique, Sessions d'Étude* 37 (1970): 75-81. It should be noted that Taché had been appointed because he was Canadian and an Oblate when ill health caused *abbé* Louis-François Laflèche to decline. Furthermore, Provencher was convinced that the Hudson's Bay Company would never accept a French prelate and that only a religious congregation could supply the clergy required for the missions of Red River.

⁴ E. de Mazenod, *Lettres aux correspondants d'Amérique 1851-1860*, Collection *Écrits oblats* II (Rome: Postulation générale O.M.I., 1977), E. de Mazenod to [F.-X.] Bermond, 26 May 1854, 78.

would depend for financial resources and personnel.⁵ As Bishop of Marseille, Mazenod saw no incompatibility between being an Oblate and a bishop and he instructed his Oblates to accept episcopal office when they were nominated. As proof of his confidence in Taché the Superior General appointed him Vicar of Missions or superior of all Oblates in the Canadian North West.⁶

Unfortunately, not all the Oblates shared Mazenod's views concerning Taché's nomination. Some of the French Oblates serving in western Canada were taken aback by the news and felt slighted that a younger person, and worse a Canadian, had been chosen.⁷ Additional ill will was generated by the presence at the Lac Ste. Anne Mission of Albert Lacombe, a French Canadian priest who wished to join the Oblates. There were allegations that Taché had forced the French Oblate serving at the mission to accept Lacombe as a novice in order to be able to select him as his coadjutor at a later date and that Taché and Lacombe would manage affairs in a "Canadian manner."⁸ Taché was hard pressed to overcome these nationalistic rivalries and even the Superior General had to intervene to reprimand Taché's detractors and to express his displeasure for what they had done.⁹ Mazenod also took it upon himself to speak to Oblates being sent to the Red River missions and to advise them of the situation in order to prevent them from being drawn into the opposition against Taché.¹⁰

In addition to the insubordination of the some of the French Oblates in the Red River missions, Taché also faced a host of other problems associated with finances, shortages of personnel, and requests for the services of lay brothers. Taché realized that a letter he had written to the Superior General and his council on these matters had been "*un peu forte*" and, consequently, that he may have lost their esteem. Nevertheless, he justified his actions on the grounds that he was acting for the greater good of the missions. Taché feared that complaints against him might convince Mazenod that his administration was a tyranny and, consequently, additional personnel that

⁵ Ibid., E. de Mazenod to [A. Taché], 19 January 1851, 9; E. de Mazenod to [J.-E. Guigues], 8 October 1852, 45.

⁶ A.-A. Taché, O.M.I., *Vingt années de mission dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique* (Montréal: Librairie Saint-Joseph, 1888), 51.

⁷ Provincial Archives of Alberta [PAA], Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Alberta-Saskatchewan Province [OMI], *Écrits de Mgr Grandin* [Grandin Écrits], vol. 5, "Quelques notes pour Dom Benoît," 274, 278-79.

⁸ Archives Deschâtelets [AD], AG Mackenzie, A. Taché to H. Faraud, 3 July 1854.

⁹ Mazenod, *Lettres 1851-1860*, Mazenod to [J. Tissot and A. Maisonneuve], [June 1853], 60.

¹⁰ PAA, OMI, Grandin Écrits, vol. 5, "Quelques notes," 209.

were needed urgently would not be sent.¹¹ Taché admitted to J.-E. Guigues, the Oblate bishop of Bytown, that being bishop and superior were not a guarantee that things would function as well as one desired. Nevertheless, Taché derived encouragement from the thought that when he did what was humanly possible he was accomplishing his duty.¹²

With the death of Bishop Mazenod in 1861, Taché lost his strongest supporter in the Oblate General Administration. A secular bishop was appointed to the see of Marseille and he sought compensation from the Oblates for diocesan funds which he alleged his successor had willed to the Oblates and threatened to close Oblate residences in his episcopal city if his demands were not accepted. As a result of this bitter dispute, the new Superior General, Joseph Fabre, relocated the Oblate General Administration to Paris and, henceforth, insisted on a complete separation of ecclesiastical and religious resources insofar as the Oblates were concerned.¹³ As a result of this experience, Fabre was not as sympathetic as Mazenod to Oblates becoming bishops and this would complicate his relations with Taché. To make matters worse, an incident happened the very first time Taché and Fabre met in 1851 and these first impressions contributed to straining their relations over the next three decades. While in Marseille for his consecration, Taché was in need of the appropriate hat and stockings, and when these items were presented to him he believed that they were a gift from the residence to a poor missionary from a foreign country. When Taché was presented with a statement for these items upon his departure, he was insulted and impulsively informed Fabre, then the Congregation's procurator, that should he ever visit St. Boniface and be in need of similar items the missionaries there, despite their poverty, would not expect to be reimbursed. This episode convinced Fabre that Taché was incredibly naive and easily offended.¹⁴

In May 1863, Fabre, as Superior General, wrote Taché stating that he had to speak openly on an important matter. A Catholic periodical, *Le Rosier de Marie*, had recently published an “interesting article” on the missionaries in Red River. The Superior General stated that this article had “painfully surprised” the General Administration, which desired a copy for inclusion in its own new journal, *Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, and he claimed that no report

¹¹ AD, AG Mackenzie, A. Taché to H. Faraud, 3 July 1854.

¹² Archives of the Archdiocese of Ottawa, Lettres de Mgr Guigues, vol. 4, cahier 2, 254, A. Taché to Mgr de Bytown [J.-E. Guigues], 11 May 1852.

¹³ Donat Levasseur, O.M.I., *Historie des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée. Essai de synthèse*, vol. I, 1815-1898 (Montréal: Maison provinciale OMI, 1983), 176-77.

¹⁴ PAA, OMI, Grandin Écrits, vol. 5, “Quelques notes,” 204.

had been received from Red River despite the fact that superiors were to send an annual account of their activities. The Oblates were going to reproduce the article in question in *Missions*, but Fabre admitted that he was distressed to have to borrow from strangers material which the Oblates regarded as being the property of the family.¹⁵

The division of Taché's diocese in 1862 and the subsequent creation of the Vicariate Apostolic of Athabasca-Mackenzie set in motion a chain of events that would create additional frustration between Taché and Fabre. Henri Faraud, the Apostolic Vicar of Athabasca-Mackenzie, was a shrewd businessman and, while in France for his consecration, he met with the governing council of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith and asked that his vicariate be given a financial allocation separate and distinct from that given to St. Boniface. The Association agreed to do so, but decided that it would reduce the general allocation accorded to St. Boniface by the amount granted to Athabasca-Mackenzie.¹⁶

As could be expected, Taché was shocked by the reduction in his allocation and he suspected that the General Administration and Faraud had plotted against him. Mark Sardou, the Congregation's bursar, admitted that, in defending his interests before the Association, Faraud had prejudiced Taché's, but that he had done so without the support or approbation of the General Administration. Sardou met with the directors of the Association and explained the consequences of reducing Taché's special allocation and he succeeded in having the original decision reversed.¹⁷

The creation of the Vicariate Apostolic of Athabasca-Mackenzie generated an additional complication in that it introduced confusion in the orders for goods placed by Athabasca-Mackenzie and St. Boniface and in the transportation of those goods to their proper destination. To conciliate the interests of the two vicariates and ensure the sending of supplies to the northern missions, Fabre sent Florent Vandenberghe on a regular canonical visit to western Canada.¹⁸ After Vandenberghe's visit Taché complained to Fabre about matters which were causing him considerable grief and he was asked by the Superior General to identify the cause. In an emotional reply, Taché identified the principal source of his sorrow to be certain administrative acts made or ordered by the Superior General. Taché took particular exception to the establishment of the office of special procurator as had been

¹⁵ Société Historique de Saint-Boniface [SHSB], Archives de l'Archidiocèse de Saint-Boniface [AASB], Fonds Taché [FT], T 2166-167, J. Fabre to Mgr et bien bon père [A. Taché], 17 May 1863.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, T 3255, M. Sardou to Mgr et bien aimé père [A. Taché], 17 May 1865.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, T 3508-09, 9 August 1865.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, T 2687, J. Fabre to Mgr et bien bon père [A. Taché], 6 March 1864.

recommended by the canonical visitor to protect the material interests of the Congregation. Taché was especially perturbed that the position had been created without consulting him and he contended that an agency established outside the bishop's palace contradicted the policy established earlier by Mazenod. Taché claimed, furthermore, that the new directive undermined his authority as bishop by suggesting to his missionaries that the Congregation had no confidence in his ability to direct the temporal affairs of his vicariate.¹⁹ Taché also complained that the General Administration had made no remarks to him concerning anything reprehensible in his conduct and he claimed that the General Administration's silence was denying him the opportunity to defend himself.²⁰

Fabre advised Taché that the office of special procurator had been established to manage the affairs of the Congregation and to ensure that these interests were not being sacrificed. The Superior General affirmed, furthermore, that the authority of the bishops had not been limited because they still authorized all expenses and managed their affairs. The procurator's function was to fill the orders that were received and keep the accounts in order; he had no authority over the bishops. In St. Boniface, the procurator was given special duties because of the unique situation of the Vicariate of Athabasca-Mackenzie which needed someone in St. Boniface to look after its affairs on a full time basis.²¹ Fabre attempted to reassure Taché by declaring that the General Administration's sole desire in appointing a procurator was to consolidate the Oblate presence in St. Boniface and reduce Taché's responsibilities and concerns. Mindful of the Marseille, controversy the Superior General declared that someday the Bishop of St. Boniface might be surrounded by a secular clergy and that it was preferable to establish an institution that belonged to the Oblates now when they were in a majority rather than later when conflict might arise.²²

During this time Taché sought to implement a plan he had developed earlier to ensure that the northern missions received the supplies and provisions they required. This plan involved making the Lac La Biche mission a base of supply and point of transshipment for the Mackenzie missions. Taché suggested that the mission, which was in the newly created Vicariate of Saskatchewan, be transferred to Faraud's jurisdiction if the latter deemed it useful for his missions. Taché's coadjutor, Vital Grandin, who was also religious superior of that vicariate, did not object to the

¹⁹ SHSB, AASB, FT, Ta 3861-69, A. Taché to Mon révérendissime et bien cher père [J. Fabre], 2 February 1866.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Ta 3863.

²¹ *Ibid.*, T 4260-61, J. Fabre to Mgr et Bien bon père [A. Taché], 26 September 1866.

²² *Ibid.*

transfer and Fabre approved the proposal. Consequently, Taché formally offered the mission to Faraud, who carefully considered his options before accepting.²³ Unfortunately, at this point Grandin began to have second thoughts about the cession of the Lac La Biche mission to Faraud and this dissatisfaction increased when the former was named Bishop of the newly created Diocese of St. Albert in 1871.²⁴ The exchange of disparaging correspondence between the two protagonists did not escape the notice of the General Administration. For his part, Taché informed Pierre Aubert, a member of the Superior General's council, that he did not wish to meddle in the affairs of his suffragans.²⁵

Since Taché refused to intervene, Grandin and Faraud approached the General Administration with their respective claims and accusations.²⁶ Consequently, in 1876, the Superior General sent Louis Soullier, one of his assistants, as a canonical visitor to Canada. In St. Boniface, Soullier met with Taché, Grandin, and Faraud's representative, and everyone agreed that the existing convention was a source of controversy and that it was necessary to separate the financial interests of the two vicariates.²⁷ However, neither Grandin or Faraud would completely accept the recommendations that were made, and the sharing of transportation costs continued to exacerbate relations between the two bishops.²⁸ Taché probably would not have agreed to act as arbitrator had it not been for a directive from Fabre naming him special canonical visitor to the two vicariates in question. The Superior General not only accorded Taché the authority to resolve the outstanding issues but also accepted in advance whatever solution Taché proposed.²⁹

Taché's analysis of the problem and the solutions he proposed indicated that he comprehended the complexity of the issue and the narrow line between ecclesiastical and religious jurisdictions when the prelates themselves happened to be Oblates. In an attempt to prevent future quarrels, Taché stipulated that any alteration to his decision required the approval of the Superior General.³⁰ Taché's decision effectively ended the sources of discord, but after years of controversy suspicions lingered in the minds of those who had been involved. In Canada, there were allegations that Taché's

²³ AD, L 2381 A33R 6, "Mémoire et décision de Mgr Taché au sujet de la mission Notre-Dame des Victoires du lac la Biche, 8 June 1877" ["Mémoire"], 4-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, HE 2223 T12Z 3, V. Grandin to Mgr A. Taché, 15 December 1873.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, G LPP 2814, A. Taché to Bien cher père Aubert, 18 December 1873.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, G LPP 1653, H. Faraud to Mr l'abbé Fabre, 17 September 1876.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, L 2381 A33R 6, Taché, "Mémoire," 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-30.

decision had caused Faraud to triumph at Grandin's expense and that Faraud was manipulating Taché to transfer personnel to his vicariate.³¹ In France, the General Administration undoubtedly was pleased that the matter finally was resolved but the appeals made by Grandin and Faraud had generated doubts as to Taché's ability as an administrator. In addition, Taché's initial decision not to become involved in the affairs of others was regarded as a sign of weakness.

In the meantime, the Superior General was quite perplexed over accusations made by Joseph Lestanc, a French Oblate serving in the Diocese of St. Boniface. Lestanc anxiously awaited the General Chapter of 1873 because for the first time the Oblates of the Diocese of St. Boniface would elect their delegate and would be represented by someone other than Taché. Lestanc hinted that Taché was opposed to the election of a delegate on the pretext of reducing "useless" voyages because he wanted to return with a new mandate as Vicar of Missions.³² Lestanc was also very critical of Taché's administration and he alleged that there was no longer any evidence of religious or community life in the diocese because the bishop's palace was the perfect example of disorder and disorganization.³³

When Lestanc's allegations reached Paris, the Superior General wondered what motivated Lestanc to make these unsubstantiated accusations since Taché had expressed his complete confidence in him. Fabre was also perplexed because Taché had done nothing to censure Lestanc.³⁴ Taché was so distressed at these events that he did not attend the sessions of the General Chapter. For his part, Joseph Antoine, the representative of the Montreal Oblates, defended Taché before Fabre's council. When Antoine alleged that the General Administration was neglecting Taché and had not communicated with him for some time, he was advised that the General Administration could make the same complaint with respect to Taché and that his letters, although rare, always received a reply.³⁵

Given the distance between St. Boniface and Paris, there were inherent difficulties in communicating but these were exacerbated by Taché's tendency to procrastinate in preparing reports, to brief his agents adequately,

³¹ PAA, OMI, Dossier du Personnel, A. Blanchet to Mon R.P. Végréville, 12 July 1877.

³² SHSB, AASB, FT, T 10710-711, J. Lestanc to S. G. Mgr A. Taché, 28 July 1872.

³³ *Ibid.*, T 10763-765, 8 August 1872.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, T 11541-542, J. Fabre to Mgr et bien bon père [A. Taché], 20 January 1873.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, T 11473-474, J. Antoine to Mgr [A. Taché], 4 January 1873.

or supply them with proper documentation. In 1878, for example, Marc Sardou, the Congregation's bursar, reminded Taché that he had to complete the report desired by the Association for the Propagation of the Faith because the association's subventions for missions for the following year were contingent upon receiving the report.³⁶ Illness prevented Taché from attending the 1879 General Chapter and he informed the Superior General that he would be represented by Albert Lacombe. At the beginning of the chapter, the credentials of the delegates were scrutinized and only Lacombe's were found lacking. Consequently, Fabre had to inform the assembly that Taché had indicated that he would be represented by Lacombe but had sent no official document to that effect and, hence, Lacombe could not attend.³⁷ Lacombe had to suffer other embarrassing moments as Taché's agent. In Rome, Lacombe met with the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda, who asked him if Taché had sent the replies to the questionnaire sent to missionary bishops by Rome the previous year. Lacombe, who knew nothing about the matter, replied that Taché must have sent it, but it could not be found in the Congregations' offices or in its archives. Lacombe was then given a copy of the questionnaire and told to formulate the replies.³⁸

Decisions concerning the allocation of personnel were also a source of contention between Taché and the General Administration. The staffing of St. Mary's Parish in Winnipeg was particularly vexing for Taché. In view of the General Administration's desire that there be a separation between ecclesiastical and religious interests, St. Mary's had replaced the bishop's palace as the Oblate provincial house. More important, however, was the fact that St. Mary's was an English parish and its influential parishioners insisted on a pastor who could speak English. Taché was hard pressed to find an English-speaking Oblate, and he was convinced that the Oblate Province of Canada could provide such a person in the event that the General Administration could not.³⁹

For his part, Taché complained that he was not receiving sufficient personnel for his vicariate and especially St. Mary's. On the other hand, the General Administration hinted that Taché asked for and brought Oblates with him to St. Boniface and, when he was no longer content with them, he wanted to send them back immediately when they became demoralized. There were also allegations that Taché had asked for one of the very Oblates

³⁶ Ibid., T 19888, M. Sardou to Mgr et bien aimé père [A. Taché], 8 January 1878.

³⁷ Ibid., T 22259, A. Lacombe to Mgr [A. Taché], 30 July 1879.

³⁸ Ibid., T 22041-042, 26 June 1879.

³⁹ Benoît, *Vie de Mgr Taché*, vol. II, 333, A. Taché to L. Soullier, 1 June 1878.

he now wanted removed from St. Boniface.⁴⁰ Taché was convinced that competent personnel were available but that the Province of Canada was making little effort to send them to St. Boniface.⁴¹

St. Mary's experienced a personnel crisis in 1882 when Lacombe, who also acted as its parish priest, returned to the Diocese of St. Albert. In December of that year, Taché informed Antoine that Lacombe's replacement had left St. Mary's without informing him but that all the parishioners were aware of his departure. Taché had appointed a temporary superior but this individual was reluctant to assume the position. Claiming that the honour of the Oblates was at stake in Winnipeg, Taché implored Antoine to send him someone who could assume the responsibility for St. Mary's.⁴²

The following year, 1883, Taché complained about the lack of personnel to Marc Sardou of the General Administration. The difficulties at St. Mary's had not been resolved, and Antoine had not found an English-speaking Oblate for the parish. Taché affirmed that in sixteen years he had received only one Oblate from France and that the Province of Canada had not furnished many subjects to his diocese. Taché maintained that he was in the "humiliating position" of a person in whom the Congregation had no confidence and to whom it would not provide personnel. Taché's exasperation is evident in his request that he be relieved of his function of Vicar of Missions for St. Boniface and replaced by someone who was "younger, more active and more energetic."⁴³ A short while later, Taché reiterated his request "with even more insistence," but the General Administration refused to relieve him of his function of religious superior.⁴⁴

In the meantime, Taché continued to request personnel from the Province of Canada. He informed Antoine that he needed three Oblates for the summer of 1883. Furthermore, there were only two Oblates at St. Mary's and Taché claimed to have been informed by well placed sources that the personnel were available and, hence, he was waiting "with impatience." After years of pleading for personnel for St. Mary's, Taché vented his frustrations in a scathing letter to Célestin Augier, the new Provincial of Canada. Augier addressed the scornful tone of Taché's letter and com-

⁴⁰ SHSB, AASB, FT, T 22375-376, A. Lacombe to Mgr [A. Taché], 13 August 1879.

⁴¹ Archives Oblates de Montréal [AOM], Saint-Boniface 1881-1885, A. Taché to Mon bien cher père [J.-E. Antoine], 18 July 1884.

⁴² *Ibid.*, A. Taché to R. P. Antoine, 10 December 1882.

⁴³ SHSB, AASB, FT, Ta 1439-442, Taché to Mon R. P. [M. Sardou], 29 March 1883.

⁴⁴ PAA, OMI, Grandin Écrits vol. 14, 405, V. Grandin to Mon révérend et bien cher père [J.-E. Antoine], 10 June 1883.

plained that he had been gratuitously and unjustly accused. Turning to the issue which had provoked Taché's communication, Augier suggested that it might be possible to send an Oblate teaching at the University of Ottawa to St. Mary's. The provincial declared that he wished to forget Taché's last two letters in order to remember only the fraternal and affectionate respect that bound them as Oblates.⁴⁵

Even Albert Lacombe became involved in a dispute with Taché concerning his services. At Taché's request Lacombe had been transferred, in 1874, from the jurisdiction of the Diocese of St. Albert to St. Boniface in order to assist Taché in the promotion of French Catholic immigration to Manitoba. While in Manitoba Lacombe became Taché's confidant and it was not surprising that the archbishop was reluctant to part with his services. In 1877, Grandin requested that Lacombe be returned to serve the Diocese of St. Albert and Taché agreed to do so if a suitable replacement could be found.⁴⁶ Taché, however, did not follow up on his promise and, in 1881, Grandin wrote Fabre and requested Lacombe's return. This request placed the Superior General in an embarrassing position since he did not know which party to support, but eventually he decided to support Grandin's request and he asked Joseph-Eugène Antoine, the Provincial of Canada, to provide Taché with a replacement for Lacombe.⁴⁷

Taché was quick to inform Antoine that it was not any ordinary Oblate who could replace Lacombe: it had to be one of the most competent Oblates in Antoine's province.⁴⁸ Taché was naturally angered when the provincial replied that he had no one to replace Lacombe. Taché claimed that in view of the fact that there was not a sufficient number of Oblates in St. Boniface, Antoine was being presumptuous in asking him to allow Lacombe to leave and to suggest that someone would be sent to replace him at a later date.⁴⁹ Taché also accused Lacombe of having acted out of self interest in seeking to return to St. Albert. For his part, Lacombe claimed that Taché seemed so prejudiced against him that he had been tempted to ask for his transfer.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ SHSB, AASB, FT, FT, T 41933-934, C. Augier to S. G. Mgr Taché, 8 April 1890.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, T 19371-372, V. Grandin, H. Leduc, J. Lestanc to Sa Grâce Mgr Taché, 30 July 1877.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, T 25927, J. Fabre to Mgr et bien bon père [A. Taché], 14 October 1881.

⁴⁸ AOM, Saint-Boniface 1881-1885, A. Taché to Bien cher père Antoine, 5 November 1881.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 November 1881.

⁵⁰ SHSB, AASB, FT, T 26018-020, A. Lacombe to Mgr [A. Taché], 20 November 1881.



Mgr Alexandre-Antonin Taché, Archbishop of St. Boniface (1853-1894)

Archives de la Société de Saint-Boniface

Collection Musée de Saint-Boniface 0364

In addition to finding staff for the missions and St. Mary's Parish, Taché was also plagued with perennial personnel problems at the St. Boniface College, an institution established by his predecessor. The Brothers of Christian Schools had been responsible for providing instruction at the college and, after the departure of that teaching community in 1860, Taché attempted to secure the services of Oblate brothers to teach in the College, but he was unsuccessful. Instruction was provided by a succession of Oblates, diocesan clergy, and seminarians.⁵¹ Since the College was central to Taché's plans for education he went to extraordinary means to supply it with faculty. He used his authority both as an ecclesiastical and religious superior to attach clergy to the institution, often against the wishes of the individuals concerned. Requests to be removed from the college, or from other postings for that matter, and to be assigned elsewhere were met with a blunt refusal on Taché's part and the words: "*Tu es là, tu y crèveras.*"⁵²

Despite these draconian measures and the hope that the General Administration would come to his assistance, Taché finally was forced to admit that he could no longer maintain the college. Consequently, he began to look for a religious teaching community that would assume responsibility for the institution and, in late 1884, the Society of Jesus indicated its willingness to do so.⁵³ Although Taché had informed the General Administration of his intention to confide the direction of the College to the Jesuits, he received a stinging rebuke from the Superior General after the transfer was completed. Fabre informed Taché that the news had caused him much grief and he hinted that the transfer of jurisdiction had the potential for "painful consequences" for the Oblates. The Superior General even wondered whether the Oblates could remain in St. Boniface. Taché defended his actions by recalling all his unsuccessful attempts to secure competent personnel from the Congregation and by declaring that all the Oblates in St. Boniface approved of the transfer and had pressed him to act in the way in which he had. He claimed that the Jesuits had simply replaced the secular clergy at the college and that they were limited to their educational work and played no part in the administration of the diocese. In reply to Fabre's query as to whether the Oblates could remain in St. Boniface, Taché declared that the Archbishop of St. Boniface was an Oblate as was his

⁵¹ Luc Dauphinais, *Histoire de Saint-Boniface*, Tome I, _ *l'ombre des cathédrales. Des origines de la colonie jusqu'en 1870* (Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions du Blé, 1991), 235-41.

⁵² SHSB, AASB, FT, T 27629, J.-A. Dupont to S.G. Mgr Taché, 29 March 1883.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, T 5923-924, H. Hudon to Sa Grâce Mgr Taché, 29 December 1884.

secretary. Furthermore, that Oblate archbishop was requesting the appointment of an Oblate grand vicar and an Oblate successor.⁵⁴

Taché could not have chosen a more inappropriate moment to formally seek the nomination of a grand vicar and successor, because the General Administration was very apprehensive about committing itself to an Oblate succession in St. Boniface. In March 1886, Taché again raised the matter of a coadjutor with Fabre, stating that he was waiting with “a respectful impatience” for a reply to his request.⁵⁵ The Superior General’s reply must have devastated Taché, who felt marginalized from the General Administration in the best of circumstances. Fabre claimed that given the situation, it was no longer possible to preserve the Archdiocese of St. Boniface for an Oblate and that it was obvious that a secular priest must succeed him as archbishop. This opinion was shared by the members of the council of the Oblate Province of Canada. Consequently, the General Administration believed that it was pointless to appoint an Oblate to be Taché’s grand vicar and that he should look elsewhere for this individual.⁵⁶ A few weeks later the Superior General again wrote Taché to reiterate that, as a result of the “most serious reasons” and because of the lack of suitable personnel, his request for the appointment of an Oblate grand vicar and coadjutor could not be granted. Taché was asked not to insist, because the General Administration could not do otherwise. Turning to the matter of the personnel requested by Taché, the Superior General admitted that the request was “just and justifiable,” but that it was impossible for the Congregation to provide those human resources.⁵⁷

For his part, Grandin advised Taché that his unilateral action and insistence on being succeeded by an Oblate had not only annoyed the General Administration but the Congregation as a whole. Grandin claimed that Oblates had manifested apprehension when some of their members had been elevated to the episcopacy and that Taché’s actions had justified their worst fears. An insightful Grandin suggested that often the Congregation did not understand the duties of a bishop and did not help Oblate bishops to fulfil their episcopal obligations. Be that as it may, the missionary dioceses could not exist without the support of the Congregation and Grandin suggested that, in the interests of the greatest good, the Oblate bishops and the Congregation had to work together.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid., Ta 1645-49, Taché to T. R. P. J. Fabre, 29 September 1885.

⁵⁵ Benôit, *Vie de Mgr Taché*, vol. II, 538, A. Taché to J. Fabre, 18 March 1886.

⁵⁶ SHSB, AASB, FT, T 31385, J. Fabre to Mgr et bien cher père [A. Taché], 9 March 1886.

⁵⁷ Ibid., T 33397, 13 April 1886.

⁵⁸ Ibid., T 33572, V. Grandin to S.G. Mgr Taché, 14 May 1886.

Grandin had also written to Fabre to plead for the appointment of an Oblate successor in St. Boniface to safeguard the future of the Oblates in the Canadian North West. Claiming that Taché's influence was valuable for the northern missions and that the archbishop had never failed to assist those missions, Grandin asked the General Administration to reverse its decision.⁵⁹ The Superior General read Grandin's letter to his council and afterwards it reversed its decision not to nominate an Oblate grand vicar and coadjutor for St. Boniface because of the difficulty of finding a suitable candidate.⁶⁰ After rescinding its initial decision, the General Administration was still hard pressed to find a suitable candidate to appoint as coadjutor. Consequently, it decided to appoint a vicar of missions separate from the Archbishop of St. Boniface because the secular clergy in the diocese were as numerous as the Oblates.⁶¹ In an effort to please Taché, the Superior General's council named an Oblate, Joachim Allard, as grand vicar.⁶²

Events associated with the sessions of the first Council of the Ecclesiastical Province of St. Boniface held 16-24 July 1889 introduced a new element of tension between Fabre and Taché and impacted on the appointment of an Oblate coadjutor. Since all of the bishops present were Oblates, the Superior General felt slighted that the Congregation was not represented officially at these sessions. Fabre reiterated his fear that ecclesiastical interests readily could be mingled with religious ones and that an *ad hoc* representative of the General Administration could have informed the delegates if the Congregation was prepared to support the proposals that were being discussed.⁶³ In July 1889, the Superior General wrote Taché to express his displeasure at not being informed of the convocation of the Council. Fabre included a clipping from *l'Univers*, a Parisian newspaper, which provided details of the Council and those who were in attendance. By way of apology Taché replied that the information reported in the press had no official status and that it had been furnished by Manitoba newspapers. On the subject of his silence, Taché claimed that he had written the Superior General from Montreal the previous January but that he had been so ill that he did not remember the contents of that letter.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ PAA, OMI Grandin Écrits, vol. 13, p. 383, V. Grandin to Mon très révérend père [J. Fabre], 9 April 1886.

⁶⁰ SHSB, AASB, FT, T 33571-574, V. Grandin to S. G. Mgr Taché, 14 May 1886.

⁶¹ Ibid., T 36042, J. Fabre to Mgr et bien bon père [A. Taché], 21 June 1887.

⁶² Ibid., T 36668, C. Augier to Mgr et bien aimé père [A. Taché], 6 November 1887.

⁶³ PAA, OMI, Grandin Écrits, vol. 10, V. Grandin to Mgr et bien cher père [A. Taché], 3 November [1890].

⁶⁴ SHSB, AASB, FT, Ta 2036-039, A. Taché to T.R.P. J. Fabre, 31 July 1889.

Some of the subjects dealt with by the Council of St. Boniface exasperated the General Administration even more than Taché's silence. One of these had to do with the proposed division of the Diocese of St. Albert. In view of the fact that the bishops had agreed, during the sessions of the Council St. Boniface, that they would inform the General Administration immediately of any decision that concerned the Congregation, the proposal to divide the Diocese of St. Albert was not accorded a warm reception by the Superior General's council, especially when it became apparent that an Oblate candidate was being proposed for the new Vicariate of Saskatchewan.⁶⁵ In addition to being vexed as a result of not being consulted on the creation of a new vicariate, the General Administration was annoyed because Taché had not forwarded the names of the three Oblate candidates to the Superior General.⁶⁶

Louis Soullier, one of Fabre's assistants, expressed the General Administration's distress over not being consulted in the decision to divide the Diocese of St. Albert. Affirming that the Congregation was not a stranger in this matter, Soullier declared that the General Administration should have been consulted prior to the Council of St. Boniface because the bishops were well aware of its reluctance to create and support new religious vicariates.⁶⁷ Fabre was particularly displeased that Oblate bishops seemed to recognize the existence of the General Administration only when they wanted additional personnel and resources. Since the bishops were not consulting Paris prior to making requests for the creation of new vicariates, the Superior General feared that they would submit the names of potential Oblates prelates to Rome without advising the General Administration. This concern determined the Superior General to again adopt the position that the Congregation would not approve of the appointment of new Oblate bishops.⁶⁸

Taché was aware of the deteriorating relations between himself and the General Administration and the fact that illness prevented him from travelling to Europe to redress the situation. When Adélarde Langevin, his confidant and choice as coadjutor, was called to Rome in 1890, Taché asked him to act as his intermediary.⁶⁹ Langevin met with Fabre, who voiced his

⁶⁵ PAA, OMI, Grandin Écrits, vol. 13, 492, V. Grandin to Mon T.R.P.G. [J. Fabre], December 1890.

⁶⁶ Ibid. vol. 14, 275, V. Grandin to Mon révérend et bien cher père Augier, 27 January 1890.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Administration, L. Soullier, Correspondance 1886-97, L. Soullier to Mon cher père Lestanc, 31 October 1890.

⁶⁸ SHSB, AASB, FT, T 43489, V. Grandin to S.G. Mgr Taché, 22 December 1890.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Fonds Langevin [FL], L 010, A. Taché to R.P. A. Langevin, 2 July 1890.

high opinion of Taché and praised his work as a missionary. Nevertheless, Langevin was forced to admit that the Superior General became visibly troubled when certain matters relating to the Diocese of St. Boniface were mentioned. According to Langevin, serenity could be restored only by a personal meeting between Taché and Fabre and Taché was assured that he would receive a cordial reception in Paris.⁷⁰

At about the time that Langevin met with the Superior General, Taché received a letter from the latter that devastated him. Once again the Superior General had read details about the division of the Diocese of St. Albert in the press and he blamed Taché for not having informed the General Administration and for proceeding in this matter without its knowledge. Taché claimed to have informed Fabre, and he believed that Grandin and others also had advised the General Administration. Taché was hard pressed to explain how all these sources had failed to achieve their objective.⁷¹

Taché was steadfast in his conviction that he had kept the General Administration advised and, consequently, he admitted that the surprise in reading Fabre's letter was equalled only by the pain it provoked. Taché naively went on to state that he never suspected that because of him Fabre could declare with "obvious displeasure" that there were enough bishops in the Congregation. Even more menacing to Taché was the Superior General's comment that, for the present, Oblates serving in the St. Boniface missions would remain where they were but their status would be reviewed in the future. Since the founder of the Oblates once had told Taché that his elevation to the episcopacy had saved the Red River missions, Taché was doubly grieved that it was Mazenod's successor who claimed that he was threatening the existence of those very missions. Taché's exasperation is evident in the somewhat impulsive solution he proposed to the impasse. If the number of Oblate bishops created a problem for Fabre, Taché offered to reduce their ranks by one by tendering his resignation.⁷²

While the precise impact of Taché's letter is not known, it obviously caused the General Administration to review its position. In December 1890, Fabre accepted the new vicariate and he proposed a candidate that merited his confidence as the new vicar apostolic.⁷³ As the curtain closed on the contentious issues associated with the Council of St. Boniface, another divisive subject resurfaced. After having been informed by the Superior

⁷⁰ Ibid., AASB, FT, T 43224-226, A. Langevin to Sa Grâce Mgr A. Taché, 5 November 1890.

⁷¹ Ibid., Ta 2238-241, A. Taché to T.R.P. J. Fabre, 30 October 1890.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ PAA, OMI, Grandin Écrits, vol. 13, 496-97, V. Grandin to Mon très révérend père [J. Fabre], 16 January 1891.

General that he would not be succeeded as bishop by another Oblate, Taché had not pressed the appointment of his coadjutor out of fear of further irritating the General Administration. Taché's deteriorating state of health and the concern expressed by his suffragans made him make a formal request for a coadjutor with right of future succession in the summer of 1892 to Cardinal Ledochowski, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda.⁷⁴

Taché himself realized that the less than amicable relationship between himself and the General Administration could not continue without prejudicing the appointment of his successor. Consequently, he contacted Aimé Martinet, a sympathetic member of the General Administration, who was acting as canonical visitor to Oblate residences in eastern Canada and the United States. Martinet made an "official" visit to St. Boniface and this short visit allowed Taché to explain his actions and proclaim his love for the Congregation.⁷⁵ Martinet was obviously convinced of Taché's motives and sincerity, and upon his return to France, he was able to convince the General Administration of the necessity of appointing an Oblate successor for the Diocese of St. Boniface. He informed Taché that the council not only rescinded its earlier decision but that it unanimously approved of the candidate put forward by Taché.⁷⁶ Since there was agreement on the candidate and the appointment of a coadjutor who could be initiated gradually and provide immediate assistance, Taché was advised to initiate negotiations with the Vatican.⁷⁷

In the meantime, Superior General Fabre died on 26 October 1892, and illness again prevented Taché from attending the sessions of the General Chapter that would choose his successor.⁷⁸ Louis Soullier's election was a fortuitous event for Taché, because he was on much better terms with the new Superior General. However, as Taché's relations with the General Administration improved other issues emerged to delay the appointment of a coadjutor. Reports in the press to the effect that Adélarde Langevin had been appointed Taché's coadjutor amazed Albert Pascal, Vicar Apostolic of Saskatchewan, who claimed that Taché had never informed him of his choice.⁷⁹ Upon learning of these rumours, the General Administration

⁷⁴ SHSB, AASB, FT, T 47279, Pétition au Cardinal Ledochowski, [May-June (?) 1892]; PAA, OMI, Grandin Écrits, vol. 13, 509, V. Grandin to Mon T.R.P.G. [J. Fabre], 22 August 1891.

⁷⁵ SHSB, AASB, FT, T 45092-093, A. Martinet to Mgr [A. Taché], 2 July 1891.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, T 47893-899, 26 August 1892.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, T 4135-138, 30 September 1892.

⁷⁸ PAA, OMI, Grandin Écrits, vol. 5, "Quelques notes," 251.

⁷⁹ SHSB, AASB, FT, T 49213, A. Pascal to Mgr et vénéré père [A. Taché], 18 March 1893.

became concerned and Langevin himself began to have second thoughts concerning his nomination.⁸⁰

When Taché succeeded in rectifying the press reports, the General Administration felt that it could proceed and name Langevin as Vicar of Missions. Informing Taché of this nomination, Soullier expressed the hope that there would be no serious difficulties in proceeding to the next step and have Langevin appointed coadjutor.⁸¹ In the meantime, rumours concerning Langevin's appointment continued to circulate and, as Taché's health declined, Langevin expressed his concerns to the Superior General who was undertaking a canonical visit of the Canadian missions in 1894.⁸² When Soullier arrived in St. Boniface in April 1894, Taché had prepared the request for a coadjutor to be sent to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda but he had indicated only two of the three names of the candidates submitted for Rome's consideration and the Superior General told Taché to decide on the third name.⁸³ Much to Grandin's dismay, the third and final name had not been added when he arrived in St. Boniface some six weeks later. Taché had so often been reproached for acting without the knowledge or advice of the General Administration that he preferred to wait for Soullier's return before adding the final name.⁸⁴

Taché died on 22 June 1894, and the incomplete document delayed Langevin's nomination and additional complications emerged. Some members of the secular clergy desired one of their own as archbishop and sought support for their proposal.⁸⁵ The secular clergy also contended that the Congregation had "forced" Taché to accept an Oblate as his successor.⁸⁶ Bishop Grandin was hard pressed to counter the claims and machinations of the secular clergy. In the midst of these trying circumstances and frustrating delays, Langevin also had to be reassured. Finally, on 8 January 1895, after many frustrating delays, Langevin was nominated Archbishop of St. Boniface.

⁸⁰ Ibid., T 49288-290, A. Martinet to Mgr [A. Taché], 8 April 1893.

⁸¹ Ibid., T 49627-628, L. Soullier to Mgr et bien bon père [A. Taché], 30 June 1893.

⁸² Ibid., Fonds Langevin [FL], L 0215-216, L. Soullier to Mon cher père Langevin, 15 June 1894.

⁸³ Benoît, *Vie de Mgr Taché*, vol. II, 777.

⁸⁴ PAA, OMI, Grandin Écrits, vol. 13, 584, V. Grandin to Mon révérend et bien cher père [C. Tatin], [23] July 1894.

⁸⁵ SHSB, AASB, FL, L 0230-2231, [J.T. Duhamel] to Mon révérend père et cher ami [A. Langevin], 26 June 1894.

⁸⁶ PAA, OMI, Grandin Écrits, vol. 11, 3-4, V. Grandin to Bien cher père Langevin, 8 September 1894.

In a retrospective assessment of his own career near the end of his life, Taché stated that schools had been his greatest anguish. The school question embellished his reputation, and his zealous defence of Catholic rights in education in Manitoba and the North West Territories accorded him the status of a martyr. Taché's strained relationship with the Oblate General Administration, on the other hand, created greater grief than the school question and it was not a question that he could address publicly without tarnishing his reputation and stature.

As a "local manager," Taché often was confronted by two opposing forces: the needs of his diocese on the one hand, and the demands and interests of the Oblates as a religious congregation on the other. Establishing an equilibrium necessitated great skill and there is no doubt that Taché possessed a rare talent for administration. However, he was a micro-manager who did not like to delegate authority and this resulted in disconcerting situations for those who served under him and complaints to Paris. In Taché, social class, episcopal authority, and religious authority combined to produce an authoritative figure who imposed his will on subordinates rather than a leader who inspired loyalty, enthusiasm, confidence, and a shared vision. Furthermore, he tended to oscillate between unilateral action and procrastination. Taché was not aware of hurting the sensibilities of others, but he was extremely sensitive to the alleged slights of others against him. From a management perspective, Taché himself was the author of many of his difficulties with the Oblate General Administration.