

Bishop J. T. McNally and the Anglicization of the Diocese of Calgary: 1913-1915

Sheila ROSS

During the latter part of the nineteenth and early in the twentieth century, anxiety about the status of Catholicism in Canada caused internal rivalry between English-speaking and French-speaking Catholics, notably in the field of education. English-speaking Catholics believed that the Church could progress only if the English language was used to prepare children for duties as citizens and patriots. French-speaking Catholics fell back on the historical intertwining of language and religion that had ensured the cultural survival of the French in Quebec.¹ The French-Canadian bishops defended denominational and linguistic rights from the pulpit, insisting that children should be given religious instruction in their native language. In English-speaking circles, the French bishops were widely depicted as nationalist zealots whose behavior alienated the Protestant majority and impeded the position of the Church in Canada. Fearful about the effects such actions would have on its relations with the Canadian and British governments, the Holy See tended to support the stance taken by the English-speaking hierarchy.²

Undaunted, the French clergy continued to press for the same rights, using an extended network of parishes, missions, and schools. In the western dioceses, Adelard Langevin, OMI, Archbishop of St. Boniface, and his French-speaking bishops tried to settle “blocks” of French-speaking Catholics in the prairies.³ Even when the population shifted, and the French

¹ T. J. Fay, *A History of Canadian Catholics* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 155-71.

² See R. Perin, *Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

³ Fay, 163-6.

became a distinct minority,⁴ the French-speaking clergy, for the most part the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, continued to preach that assimilation of the French led to a loss of language and faith.⁵

In Alberta, the interests of religious education and language took a notable turn 30 November 1912 with the division the Diocese of St. Albert, established in 1871, into the Dioceses of Edmonton and Calgary. The appointment of English-speaking John Thomas McNally as Bishop of Calgary marked the introduction into the province of ethnic and cultural tensions that were prevalent in eastern Canadian Catholicism. Indeed, the subsequent conflict between French-speaking and English-speaking Catholics in Calgary can be seen as a microcosm of the polarization of viewpoints concerning the nature of the Canadian identity that was occurring at the national level.⁶

As Calgary's bishop, John McNally was entrusted with securing the loyalty of thousands of Catholics from Ontario, the Maritimes, Great Britain and Ireland, central and southern Europe, and the United States who had homesteads in southern Alberta. Specifically, he was placed in Calgary to implement an English-language policy for the West that had been endorsed by the Vatican.⁷ This paper examines a debate within the Calgary separate school system that brought out less than desirable characteristics in its participants and demonstrated how Bishop McNally used the education question to rid himself of the major French influence in Calgary.

⁴ M. P. Lupal, "The Schools and French – and – Ukrainian Language Claims in Alberta to 1918," in N. Kach & K. Mazurek (eds.), *Exploring our Educational Past: Schooling in the North-West Territories and Alberta* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1992), 73; R. J. A. Huel, "Gestae Dei Per Francos: The French Catholic experience in western Canada," in B. G. Smillie (ed.), *Visions of The New Jerusalem: Religious settlement on the prairies* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983), 39-53.

⁵ Huel, "The Irish French Conflict in Catholic Episcopal Nominations: The Western Sees and the Struggle for Domination Within the Church," Canadian Catholic Historical Association (CCHA), *Study Sessions*, 42 (1975), 51-69. Also see M. G. McGowan, "Toronto's English-Speaking Catholics, Immigration, and the Making of a Canadian Catholic Identity," in T. Murphy and G. Stortz (eds.), *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society, 1750-1930* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 900-30; R. Choquette, "John Thomas McNally et l'erection du diocese de Calgary," *Revue de l'universite d'Ottawa* 45, 4 (1975): 401-16; M. Cottrell, "John Joseph Leddy and the Battle for the Soul of the Catholic Church in the West," *CCHA Historical Studies*, 61(1995), 41-51.

⁶ Huel, "The Irish French Conflict in Catholic Episcopal Nominations," 51.

⁷ Diocese of Calgary Archives, Calgary (DCA), F. A. Gasquet, OSB, to O. Smith, OSB, Abbot of Ampleforth, 25 October 1913, Copies of Documents in *Ampleforth Abbey Archives on the Monastic Foundation at Calgary, Alberta, Canada 1912-1914* (Benedictine Papers), file no. 993070745 D.1 74.

What began as a Catholic-Protestant issue to ensure acceptance of the Catholic population turned inward as English-speaking Catholics, concerned about the quality of education in the Catholic schools, ignored hitherto amicable relations between English-speaking and French-speaking Catholics and began to fear that they would lose respectability in the eyes of the local Protestant majority.

Born in Hope River, Prince Edward Island, 24 June 1871, of Irish background, McNally was ordained in Rome 4 April 1896, a candidate from the Diocese of Ottawa. He was consecrated a bishop, also in Rome, 1 June 1913, and sent to a diocese that was without organization, without seminarians and, due to an economic downtrend, without funds. At the time of his arrival in Calgary, 27 July 1913, there were thirty-three priests; thirty-two belonged to Orders, twenty-four were French-speaking Oblates. Nine towns had a resident priest who aided neighboring missions and quasi-missions. Catholics in outlying areas rarely received a visit from the clergy.⁸

The city of Calgary was seat of the new diocese. Located at the confluence of the Bow and Elbow rivers, it was originally a French-speaking Oblate mission, Notre Dame de la Paix, established in Calgary in 1875, and subsequently known as St. Mary's. Basil Clarkson, OSB, resided at St. Mary's rectory in 1913. He described early Calgary in a letter to a fellow Benedictine: "You see a city in the making and the town planning is most up to date with every modern improvement; the streets and avenues are wide and beautifully smooth with asphalt. The houses are all built of wood but very artistic in most cases and all separate from each other; only the big stores and public buildings are built of brick or stone."⁹ A system of streetcars was in operation, a supply of electricity laid on in every street and avenue; telephones were in most homes. Everything was expensive, Clarkson noted, except the use of natural gas. New immigrants to Calgary – Chinese, Japanese, Polish, Lithuanians, Turkish, Ruthenians, Austrians, Germans, Italians, Portuguese, and Dutch – lived in small houses and shacks on the northern outskirts of the town, in "an area that was practically all prairie."¹⁰

Catholics made up approximately one-tenth of the population, which increased from 4,392 in 1901 to 43,704 in 1911 and to well over 50,000 by 1913.¹¹ The organizations in operation at St. Mary's when the Calgary

⁸ Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), *Calgarien*, Sacra Congregazione Consistoriale Relationes, 169, 1-5, trans. from the Italian by the author.

⁹ Benedictine Papers, T. B. Clarkson, OSB, to A. Turner, OSB, 20 December 1912.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ DCA, N. R. Anderson, *Calgary Diocese in 1912-1913*, in *History of Diocese of Calgary* file.

diocese was erected reflected the diversity of the Catholic immigrants. The Société St. Jean Baptiste, founded in 1888, as well as the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the Women's Auxiliary of the Catholic Church Extension Society, both founded in 1910, met regularly. Also, the Polish and Ruthenian Societies, the League of the Sacred Heart, and the Catholic Mutual Benefit Association of Canada welcomed new members, as did the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Temperance Union.¹² The Oblates relinquished St. Mary's Parish when the church was raised to cathedral status, but remained in charge of Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, to the west of St. Mary's. St. Ann's Parish, to the east, was entrusted to the French-speaking priests of St. Mary of Tinchebray. The English-speaking Benedictines operated St. Benedict Parish in north Calgary; services were held in the Ukrainian Catholic church.

A steadily increasing population, together with the security afforded by the passing of the 1905 Alberta Act, had been beneficial to Calgary separate schools.¹³ In 1910, St. Mary's opened a newly constructed eight-room school. In 1912, two four-room schools were opened to children in Sacred Heart and St. Ann Parishes. Women religious were on staff in two of the schools. The Ursulines of Jesus, a congregation established by Louise Marie Baudouin in Chavagnes en Paillere, Vendee, France in 1802 for education, nursing, and missionary work, were at Sacred Heart school. The Faithful Companions of Jesus, a congregation established for education and missionary endeavors in Paris in 1823 by a young widow, Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bengy, Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houet, taught at St. Mary's School. The Faithful Companions of Jesus had been attracted to western Canada from France, in 1883, by Vital Grandin, OMI, the first Bishop of St. Albert, when he realized that there was a need to begin English-language schools in the western dioceses.¹⁴ Grandin wrote to Mother Josephine Petit, Superior General, about sending nuns from the English-speaking convents, lamenting: "Our poor French-Canadians are so convinced of the need for English that they would send their children to Protestant schools. In fact they are already sending them, not hesitating to endanger their faith and to jeopardize their religious education in order to procure for them a knowledge of English."¹⁵ Several of the nuns had been

¹² *Cattolica*, (Calgary: The Herald Western, 1912) 37.

¹³ P. E. Crunican, *Priests and Politicians: Manitoba schools and the election of 1896* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) and M.P. Lupal, *The Roman Catholic Church and the North-West School Question: a study in church-state relations in western Canada, 1875-1905* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974).

¹⁴ DCA, *St. Mary's Cathedral*, file no. 41.1167.

¹⁵ Calgary Catholic School District Archives, Calgary (CCA), V. Grandin, OMI, to J. Petit, FCJ, 22 January 1884. Copy from Grandin's "Letters," Vol. 1, 307.

teaching at St. Laurent, in Saskatchewan, during the Northwest Rebellion, and readily accepted Grandin's assignment to Calgary, arriving 26 July 1885. Albert Lacombe, OMI, Superior of the southern missions, offered Mother Mary Greene, Superior, the Oblates' new church for a school and residence which the sisters opened 1 September with twenty-two pupils. The day students were both French-speaking and English-speaking. The boarders were mainly Metis, most of whom spoke neither French nor English, the children of interpreters and Quebec laborers employed for construction of the western rail line.¹⁶ St. Mary's became the first school in Lacombe Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 1, established 18 December 1885.¹⁷

As Huel points out, mission and school were integral parts of the frontier "parish."¹⁸ In a carefully controlled environment, the school was to enhance and strengthen the precepts of Christianity initially instilled by the Oblates.¹⁹ Envisioning a haven of French-Canadian culture, Father Lacombe had travelled to Ottawa, in 1883, to obtain residence status for himself and Leon Doucet, OMI, on two quarter-sections of land south of and separate from the town of Calgary for settlement.²⁰ In an area called Rouleauville, new parishioners built their homes around the church, rectory, and convent school.²¹

School trustees met at St. Mary's, known locally as the Catholic Mission. Both Lacombe and Hippolyte Leduc, OMI, who became Superior of the southern missions in 1886, served as trustees when appointed to St. Mary's, a liaison between church and school.²² Mother Stanislaus Poiret,

¹⁶ Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus Archives, Calgary (FCJA), File no. 86.6.

¹⁷ Lacombe Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 1 became Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 1 in 1911.

¹⁸ Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Metis*, 99. Also see Choquette, *The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *History of Diocese of Calgary* file.

²¹ Quebec-born brothers, Charles and Edward Rouleau, championed denominational schools and French language rights in the Northwest Territories. See Lupal, *The Roman Catholic Church and the North-West School Question*, 25-26, 54-55, 64-65. Also see R. Parel, "The French Roots," in M. Foran & S. Jameson (eds.), *Citymakers: Calgaryans After the Frontier* (Calgary: The Historical Society of Alberta, Chinook Country Chapter, 1987), 333-341; P. J. Le Chevalier, OMI, *Esquisse sur L'Origine et les Premiers Developpements de Calgary (1873-1913)* (Calgary: Paroisse Sainte Famille, 1936).

²² The Calgary Catholic School District has minutes of School Board meetings beginning in 1897. Also see P. E. Breton, OMI, *The Big Chief of the Prairies: The Life of Father Lacombe* (Edmonton: Palm Publishers, 1955); K. Hughes, *Father Lacombe: The Black Voyageur* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1914); D. Lavoisier, *Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée dans l'Ouest et le Nord du Canada, 1845-1967*

the only French-born nun, ensured that the children learn and speak French fluently, although English became the language of instruction by law and choice as the Costellos, Sparrows, O'Keefes, and Costigans began intermingling with and outnumbering the Rouleaus, Miquelons, and Laurendeaus.²³ Both English-speaking and French-speaking families were represented on the School Board.²⁴ According to Mother Greene, the Protestants as well as the Catholics were happy to have a good school and both sent many children to St. Mary's.²⁵ In 1910, the Sisters recorded in the *Annals*: "The system of education in Alberta is liberal, reasonable and adaptive. So far, we have had no serious school trouble; our relations with inspectors and government officials have been extremely pleasant and satisfactory."²⁶

The *Annals* also recorded that Francis Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, visited Calgary in August 1910. Bourne was on a cross-country tour prior to addressing the World Eucharistic Congress in Montreal (where he was sharply criticized for recommending English as the language for the West.)²⁷ He visited each classroom at St. Mary's, listened as the children responded to instruction in English, and remarked to Mother Green, upon leaving: "Canada has a great future before it but the progress of the Church here and elsewhere depends on England's attitude towards Catholicity."²⁸ Later, having been elevated to the College of Cardinals, Bourne visited with Bishop McNally when the latter was on his way to Calgary in June 1913, after his consecration in Rome. Among other topics, Bourne spoke to McNally about plans for English language education in the western provinces.²⁹

Bishop McNally's experience with French-English relations had been honed while serving as a notary at the Plenary Council of Canadian Catholic Bishops in 1909, and from pastoral service for the Diocese of Ottawa, at Old Chelsea, Quebec, and Almonte, Ontario, before coming to

(Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1994).

²³ See Lupal, *The Roman Catholic Church and the North-West School Question*.

²⁴ CCA, Minutes of Calgary Separate School Board meetings (Minutes) 1897-1912.

²⁵ FCJA., M. Greene, *Reminiscences: An Account of the Coming of Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus to Canada*, related October and November 1922.

²⁶ FCJA, Sisters, *Faithful Companions of Jesus: Annals* (1910).

²⁷ *The Tablet* commented 17 September 1910 about Bourne's controversial statements, noting that "happily the situation is well understood in Rome."

²⁸ Sisters, *Faithful Companions of Jesus: Annals* (1910).

²⁹ Benedictine papers, Smith to W. J. Darby, OSB, 2 July 1913; Smith to Clarkson, 17 July 1913; Smith to McNally, 17 July 1913.

Calgary.³⁰ He credited the existence of separate schools in Alberta to Donato Sbarretti, the Apostolic Delegate to Canada, whose energy and resolve, he thought, tipped the scales in favour of Catholic education.³¹ He blamed the loss of Catholic schools in Manitoba on the inferiority of the schools themselves, not on the fact that they were Catholic. Furthermore, he thought that the schools in Manitoba had been used to promote the interests of French-speaking Catholics, a mistake that would not be repeated in Calgary.³²

According to the Separate School Board chairman, John Burns, the trustees met with McNally soon after his arrival in Calgary “to learn his views and receive his suggestions.”³³ Burns said that after listening to the bishop, the trustees could “see a policy outlined for future prosecution and we might hope to see our school work fit in with diocesan work.”³⁴ McNally said that “the two must dovetail and made to help one another as must be done in every business that aims at success – the different parts must work towards one definite purpose.”³⁵

McNally quickly gained a reputation among both French-speaking and English-speaking Catholics in Calgary as being “young and raw,” and “excitable,” to use the adjectives of Father Clarkson, who was living with McNally at St. Mary’s at this time, and who complained about trying to work with a man “overwhelmed by his difficulties” and constantly “in a state of nerves.”³⁶ And yet, even though Protestants far outnumbered Catholics in Calgary, the bishop was at ease with the Protestant community, many of whom he sought out as friends, including J. A. Lougheed, a Senator, and R. B. Bennett, then a prominent lawyer and Member of Parliament.³⁷ McNally assured Bennett, who had reservations about separate schools, that he would make them efficient or consider his work a failure, adding: “If my schools are not the equal of yours, then our children are handicapped, and I do not propose that they shall be.”³⁸

³⁰ See R. Choquette, *Language and religion: a history of English-French conflict in Ontario* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1975).

³¹ *Calgarien*, 5.

³² *Ibid.*, 5-7.

³³ CCA, J. Burns, Minutes, 15 December 1915.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Benedictine papers, Clarkson to Smith, 8 September 1913.

³⁷ *Calgarien*, 5; Also see R. Berard, “A Cardinal for English Canada: The Intrigues of Bishop John T. McNally, 1930-1937,” CCHA, *Historical Studies* 66 (2000), 81-100.

³⁸ *The Calgary Daily Herald*, 20 November 1924.

McNally spoke regularly from the pulpit about the importance of Catholic education.³⁹ He attended School Board meetings when he was in Calgary and spent long hours in discussion with the trustees.⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that 10 January 1914, upon being advised that the French-speaking Sisters of Charity of Notre Dame d'Evron intended to settle in St. Ann's Parish and teach at the school, the trustees decided against engaging as teachers, "the Sisters of different Orders."⁴¹ Trustees McDonald, Burns, Morrow, Calhoun, and Tobin "deemed the policy to be for the best interests of the Separate schools" even though another congregation, the Faithful Companions of Jesus, was considered beyond reproach at St. Mary's School.⁴²

Also of note, on the bishop's recommendation, the trustees appointed Father A. Bernard Macdonald as the Superintendent and Secretary-Treasurer of the Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School Board 12 January 1915.⁴³ Dr. Macdonald, as he was referred to, was a former teacher at St. Dunstan's College in Prince Edward Island, a friend and colleague of McNally since their student days in Rome, and the second diocesan priest recruited for the Diocese of Calgary.⁴⁴ McNally enlisted Dr. Macdonald's support when he became openly involved in a disagreement about the dismissal of a nun from the teaching staff of Sacred Heart School, in a parish that had been entrusted to the French-speaking Oblates by Bishop Legal when it was canonically erected 1 June 1911.

Sister Mary Augustine Murray had been engaged by the Separate School Board 26 November 1913.⁴⁵ Although she possessed certification in Alberta, along with twelve years of teaching experience without incident, according to the trustees, her work had not been satisfactory. At a meeting held 11 June 1915, trustees Burns, McDonald, Tobin, Venini, and Creagan decided not to renew Sister Murray's contract, nor that of Sister Gabriel Collins, a substitute teacher at Sacred Heart, who also had teaching certification in Alberta.⁴⁶ Both had been invited from France to Edmonton in 1911 by Bishop Legal and sent to Calgary the same year to establish a convent in Sacred Heart Parish.

³⁹ "Lettera Pastorale del Revmo John T. McNally, Vescovo di Calgary al Clero ed ai Laici della Sua Diocesi," 1 March 1915, *Calgarien*, 22-4.

⁴⁰ Burns, Minutes, 15 December 1915.

⁴¹ Minutes, 10 January 1914.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Minutes, 12 January 1915.

⁴⁴ M. B. Venini Byrne, *From the Buffalo to the Cross: A History of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary* (Calgary: Calgary Archives & Historical Publishers, 1973), 441-2; Also see Allegati, 6, *Calgarien*.

⁴⁵ Minutes, 26 November 1913.

⁴⁶ Minutes, 11 June 1915.

The dismissal of Sister Murray caught the ratepayers of Sacred Heart Parish by surprise and provoked a meeting, held 22 July 1915, at which it was resolved to ask the trustees to reinstate her. In a letter to the School Board, three ratepayers – V. Raby, J. Sullivan, and P. Harcourt-O'Reilly – claimed to have been informed by J. A. Smith, the Provincial Inspector, that Murray was a competent teacher. They noted that Smith's report to the Department of Education was to that effect; in his opinion, she should be re-hired. They pointed out that she was the only teacher in the school who held a first-class certificate, adding that, in their opinion, the influence of a religious in a school was beneficial to the children. As well, they asked the Board to employ other nuns of the same congregation who were qualified to teach in Alberta.⁴⁷

The decision of the Board was not reversed. The teachers hired for Sacred Heart School were Josephine Walsh, as principal, and Mary O'Brien, Gertrude Hennebey, Elodie Bourque, and Euphrasie Cox for the classrooms.⁴⁸ Dr. Macdonald assured the ratepayers that mere possession of a certain class of certificate gave no guarantee of competence in teaching, adding that he had inspected Sister Murray's classroom himself and "the order was quite imperfect, there being too much going and coming on the part of the pupils."⁴⁹ Furthermore, he said that he had proof that Inspector Smith reported that, with the exception of arithmetic, Sister Murray's class results were unsatisfactory.

Continuing, Macdonald explained that the Board did not engage Sister Collins, who was certified in music as well as teaching. He alleged that Alphonse Jan, OMI, the pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, had met with one of the trustees and had given an ultimatum, insisting that two nuns be hired in order to justify maintaining an Ursuline convent in the parish.⁵⁰ He added:

The actions of the Board are open to scrutiny, but the scrutineers, in justice to themselves and the Board, should act on authentic information. The Board would, therefore respectfully request that the 'ratepayers' of any section of the City, when seeking information would ask such at the office of the Separate School Board, where they can secure data in better shape, and with greater guarantee of its veracity than if said information is sought on the streets of the city.⁵¹

Bishop McNally entered the controversy when Sister Marie Leonie, Sister Murray's Superior in Calgary, visited the Cathedral, asking to meet with the bishop about whether the sisters had "suffered an injustice at the

⁴⁷ Minutes, 26 July 1915.

⁴⁸ Minutes, 11 June 1915.

⁴⁹ Minutes 17 March 1915.

⁵⁰ A. B. Macdonald to V. Raby, copy in Minutes, 28 July 1915.

⁵¹ Ibid.

hands of the Board.”⁵² On 27 July, in response to McNally’s request, Dr. Macdonald sent the bishop copies of Sister Murray’s evaluation by the trustees, along with the letter about the presence of Father Jan at the ratepayers’ meeting at Sacred Heart Church.⁵³ McNally had already received a letter from Father Jan indicating that he was present at the meeting but had not voiced an opinion about the school issue.⁵⁴ Also, he had in his possession an anonymous letter sent the previous summer that contained allegations of impropriety on the part of McNally.⁵⁵ Finally, he had a third statement, from a parishioner at Sacred Heart, stating that Father Jan had, indeed, taken part in the spirited discussions about the problems at Sacred Heart School.⁵⁶

During the early evening of 31 July, Father Jan received a letter from Bishop McNally, via the bishop’s secretary, Father Arthur J. Hetherington. The letter stated that McNally was going to explain the situation to the parishioners of Sacred Heart the next morning. The bishop angrily denounced the Oblates from the pulpit, accusing them of insubordination and disobedience, and alluded to scandalous remarks about McNally emerging from Sacred Heart Parish.⁵⁷ Father Jan contacted Henri Grandin, OMI, the Provincial, who wrote to McNally, asking for an explanation of the public spectacle. Grandin was particularly annoyed that McNally took the word of a lay person rather than a cleric, referring to a statement implicating Father Jan in the discussions at the meeting of ratepayers.⁵⁸

McNally replied that he was ready to render a full account of acts “in fulfilment of his serious responsibility,” but not to Grandin. He added:

Permit me, Reverend Father, to avail myself of this occasion to say something I have for some time wished to communicate to you, that is, that henceforward no priest will be permitted to exercise the sacred ministry in the diocese of Calgary, whether for a brief or a lengthy period, without the approbation of the Ordinary of the Diocese, to be applied for in each individual case.⁵⁹

The following week, Father Grandin was summoned to Calgary from Edmonton for a meeting presided over by Bishop McNally. A lawyer, M. E. F. Ryan, along with three diocesan priests – Dr. Macdonald, Father Hetherington, and Father Albert Newman – were present. Complaints about Father Jan were read, after which McNally announced that the Oblates were to vacate their premises before 21 August, to make way for diocesan

⁵² DCA, J. T. McNally to Sister Celine-Marie, UJ, 2 August 1915.

⁵³ Minutes, 26 July 1915.

⁵⁴ DCA, H. Grandin, OMI, to McNally, 5 August 1915, copy.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ DCA, H. Grandin to McNally, 5 August, 1915, copy.

⁵⁹ DCA, McNally to H. Grandin, 7 August, 1915, copy.

clergy.⁶⁰ Father Hetherington, the first diocesan priest in the Diocese, loaned to McNally by Cardinal Bourne, became pastor of Sacred Heart Church, beginning 20 August 1915.⁶¹ His assistant was Father Edward J. Carew, an Irishman ordained by McNally 29 August 1915, the first priest ordained in Calgary for the Diocese.

To avoid a scandal, Father Grandin advised his priests to leave quietly, but refused to accept that the Oblates were a spent force in Calgary. Nor did he believe that the Oblate foothold in the city should be lost to a whim of Bishop McNally. He enlisted Father Leduc, Vicar General of the Diocese of Edmonton and formerly a pastor at St. Mary's, to criticize the "tribunal" at which Grandin had been allowed neither discussion nor argument.⁶² Writing to Pellegrino Stagni, the Apostolic Delegate, Father Grandin pointed to the plight of the other French-speaking congregations that were leaving Calgary – the Sisters of Charity of Notre Dame d'Evon, the St. Mary Tinchebray priests, as well as the Ursulines. He added: "*nous montraient bien ce qui nous attendait, on attendait une occasion, elle s'est presentee et on l'a saisie avec empressement.*"⁶³ Later, Grandin travelled to Ottawa, arriving 25 August, to meet with Stagni to have his views of the dismissal addressed.⁶⁴

After visiting the Delegate several times, and receiving a sympathetic ear, Father Grandin wrote to A. Dontenwill, OMI, Superior General, in Rome, explaining the matter at hand. Grandin allowed that Father Jan was quite likely the author of the anonymous letter,⁶⁵ but pointed out that McNally had never issued a complaint about the Oblates at Sacred Heart Parish, including Father Jan, and had never manifested a desire to have any priests at Sacred Heart replaced. Yet the bishop had humiliated and punished an entire congregation because of an incident involving one man. For these reasons, Grandin asked that the Oblates petition the Holy See for reinstatement in Sacred Heart Parish, Father Jan excluded.⁶⁶

An examination of Bishop McNally's response to the allegations, presented to the Sacred Consistory in 1916, reveals that the bishop "began

⁶⁰ DCA, H. Leduc, OMI, to McNally, 24 August 1915, and H. Grandin to McNally, 5 August 1915.

⁶¹ Sacred Heart Parish Archives, Calgary, F. Cardinal Bourne to A. J. Hetherington, 28 June 1913.

⁶² DCA, Leduc to McNally, 24 August 1915.

⁶³ DCA, H. Grandin to P. Stagni, Apostolic Delegate, 18 August 1915, copy.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ DCA, H. Grandin to A. Dontenwill, OMI, 28 August 1915, copy. Also see E. P. Ryan to McNally, 8 January 1916, copy, Allegati, 35, *Calgarien*; Statement from Hetherington, Macdonald and Newman, 12 August 1915, Allegati 38a, *Calgarien*.

⁶⁶ H. Grandin to Dontenwill, 28 August 1915.

to question” the Oblates from the moment of his arrival in Calgary.⁶⁷ He set the stage with a list of grievances, beginning with a claim that although the Oblates were in charge of events leading to his arrival in Calgary, they failed to provide a public reception worthy of a bishop. Standing their ground, the Oblates were able to point to *The Calgary Daily Herald*’s report that “an informal reception was held on the lawns of the rectory, where a large number of parishioners were presented to His Grace.”⁶⁸

Next, McNally complained about St. Mary’s, the Cathedral parish. He said that the Oblates left the church itself in disarray and retained most of the land surrounding the church.⁶⁹ They charged him one hundred dollars monthly for an old, leaking house on their property to serve as the bishop’s palace (until another was built west of the cathedral the same year for 25,000 dollars).⁷⁰ He said that he had planned to build a diocesan seminary west of the cathedral, but they did not leave a “square meter” for purposes of education of seminarians.⁷¹ The difficulty with regard to the site lay in the high price that the Oblates required for it, and no steps were taken.⁷²

McNally said that the Oblates were lacking in any spirit of generosity toward him, even though the laity in Calgary had supported them faithfully, adding to their wealth. For example, they had been recipients of land donated by Patrick Burns, a prominent Catholic businessman, which was given for parish purposes and should have been left to the Diocese.⁷³ He claimed that they had “cleared out some millions of dollars from his diocese,” and that he had no resources other than contributions from St. Mary’s parishioners.⁷⁴

Closer to the point at hand, McNally said that he wanted St. Mary’s Hall, the building next to the church, “for purposes of education,” but upon investigation learned that the Oblates had sold it to the Canadian Northern Railway for 60,000 dollars in 1909 for a terminal in Calgary.⁷⁵ Further, he discovered that when it became evident that a larger amount of property would be needed for the planned terminal, the Oblates had made a payment of 50,000 dollars in 1912 for the nearby estate of Patrick Burns, intending to move and build a new church and rectory.⁷⁶ He said that he was

⁶⁷ *Calgarien*, 38.

⁶⁸ *The Calgary Daily Herald*, 28 July 1913.

⁶⁹ *Calgarien*, 2.

⁷⁰ Darby to Smith, 23 August 1913; *Calgarien*, 2; Venini Byrne, 75.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² ASV, A. J. Hetherington, “Memorandum,” Calgary Collegio Benedettino (1913-14), *Rappresentanza pont.*, Canada.

⁷³ *Calgarien*, 27.

⁷⁴ Benedictine papers, Darby to Smith, 23 August 1913.

⁷⁵ *Calgarien*, 29.

⁷⁶ Venini Byrne, 79-80.

successful in his attempts to nullify the contract for the estate of Patrick Burns. Since Burns was still in possession of the house and McNally desired neither the property obtained by the Oblates nor the debt involved, Burns graciously returned the payment to the bishop.⁷⁷ Recalling the incident, J. W. Darby, OSB, said that McNally was “in a state of fury.” He travelled to Winnipeg 4 August to meet with railway officials in order negotiate a reversal of the sale of St. Mary’s Hall, or at least a rental agreement. Unsuccessful, he returned to Calgary 13 August and was hospitalized “with his nerves all upset.”⁷⁸

According to Darby, the relations between Bishop McNally and Father Grandin had been strained from the beginning, that is from the day that Grandin arrived from Edmonton and proposed, in the name of Archbishop Legal, that they should start a common seminary for the dioceses. Writing to Abbot Smith at Ampleforth, in England, Darby said: “It upset him terribly because he says it is only a clever move to keep the West still in the hands or under the heels of the French.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, McNally was provoked by Grandin’s request that Sacred Heart Parish be granted “*in titulo perpetuo*,” a ratification of Bishop Legal’s gift to the Oblates.⁸⁰ At issue was a permanent meeting place in Calgary for the Oblates, large enough for annual retreats and for those priests in need of respite from isolated postings throughout the southern part of the Diocese.⁸¹

Sacred Heart Parish was next on McNally’s agenda. He pointed out that soon after the mission was made a parish, Legal had also consented to a legal transaction whereby the French-speaking Ursulines bought four lots, one of which was occupied by Sacred Heart Church, from the Oblates in exchange for four lots west of the same church. The contract was formalized after Legal had recommended that the Diocese of St. Albert should be divided. The Oblates had intended to build a new church, leaving Sacred Heart as a convent, near the school, for the Ursulines.⁸²

McNally was aware of the transaction. Coincidentally, he had contacted Charles Rooney, a trustee from Sacred Heart Parish at the time of the land negotiation, and several months before the problems at Sacred Heart

⁷⁷ *Calgarien*, 27-8.

⁷⁸ Benedictine papers, Darby to Smith, 6 September 1913; T. B. Clarkson, *Diaries*, 3 November 1912 – 14 October 1913.

⁷⁹ Benedictine papers, Darby to Smith, 23 Aug 1913.

⁸⁰ DCA, Allegati, 39, *Calgarien*; H. Grandin to McNally 23 March 1914, copy.

⁸¹ DCA, H. Grandin to McNally, 5 August 1915 copy. The Oblates declined McNally’s offer of St. Joseph’s, a parish burdened with debt because of a new church. See Venini Byrne, 18.

⁸² DCA, Leduc to A. Naessens, OMI, 2 June 1913; Naessens to Leduc, 16 June 1913; Legal to Naessens, 22 March 1913; Venini Byrne 145.

School surfaced. Rooney confirmed that 2 June 1913 the church and property were transferred to the Ursulines.⁸³ Understandably, Bishop McNally wanted the contract annulled and was waiting in the wings, so to speak, for an opportunity to lash out at the Oblates.

A suitable occasion presented itself to the bishop when he received the minutes of the Separate School Board meeting of 27 July 1915 from Dr. Macdonald. Included was a statement submitted by Inspector Smith, an evaluation of performance by Dr. Macdonald, and a letter signed by the chairman, J. E. MacDonald, and trustees G. Venini and J. L. Tobin indicating that the work of Sister Murray was not satisfactory. Also available for the bishop's perusal was the letter sent by Dr. Macdonald to the ratepayers of Sacred Heart parish. It verified that Father Jan had interviewed one of the trustees shortly before the meeting at which teachers were engaged. It also informed McNally that, unless the two Sisters were re-engaged, the Ursulines would not remain in Calgary. Jan had said that he wished to know the decision of the trustees beforehand in case he had to arrange for their departure.⁸⁴

Bishop McNally concluded his response to the allegations by claiming that the Ursulines were under the influence of the Oblates, resulting in their disrespectful attitude towards him. He implied that the Sisters had accused him of discouraging the hiring of religious in the schools.⁸⁵ He said that Father Jan had meddled with School Board's salary schedule, sending the trustees a letter that supported a request to pay seventy rather than fifty dollars per month to Sister Murray.⁸⁶ Finally, McNally accused the Oblates of "stirring up in the population a revolt against school authority, so much so, that he had to intervene, to calm the population."⁸⁷

McNally closed his door on the issue with a terse statement to the Oblates: "I am indeed sorry if it has been lost to me the friendship of Oblate Fathers whom I esteem and sorrier still if through it I have done a wrong to anybody. The arrogance I had suffered had reached a point where I was obliged to protect myself and my work for religion."⁸⁸ To the ratepayers, McNally remarked:

The prospects for the future are bright and in this country we must build for the future. Our duty is to make Catholics respected and looked up to; we

⁸³ DCA, C. Rooney to McNally, 4 January 1915.

⁸⁴ DCA, Macdonald to Raby, copy in Minutes, 28 July 1915; McNally to Sister Celine-Marie, 2 August 1915; Sister Joseph, Superior General, UJ, to McNally, 19 July 1916.

⁸⁵ *Calgarien*, 19.

⁸⁶ Murray's salary was increased from fifty to seventy dollars per month, according to the Minutes 26 November 1913 and 17 December 1913.

⁸⁷ *Calgarien*, 19.

⁸⁸ DCA, McNally to Leduc, 21 September 1915.

must aim at genuine respect from the great non-Catholic body. Criticism then might be lost. If we in our day do the best for the most sacred interests of our people, we are doing all that can be demanded or expected. There has been criticism and fault-finding but it was the work of a minority and we all should wipe out all small, petty talk and be Catholic not in name alone but in reality.⁸⁹

Lawyer Patrick Harcourt-O'Reilly, one of the ratepayers who had requested Sister Murray's reinstatement, was familiar with McNally's tactics, having been involved in an abortive attempt to establish the English Benedictines in Calgary two years earlier. He knew that McNally was "a particular friend of the Secretary to the Delegate Order, and to the other two channels which the matter should go through at Rome."⁹⁰ Writing to Father Darby, in Ampleforth, he noted that Sister Murray had been immediately hired by the Separate School Board in Edmonton. He added:

It has been simply one muddle after another here. Himself has been to Rome, twice, and possibly three times. He is known all over the dominion as 'the Bishop from Calgary.' You will be sorry to hear that the latest move was to fire the Oblates. Certainly something should be done to remove this man to a sphere where his activities would be more appreciated or at least less harmful ... something should be done to stop McNally. All he seems to do is to show the most utter want of tact and then get out of the city.⁹¹

In fact, for Bishop McNally, "out of the city" meant a trip to Rome. He sailed from New York 18 January 1916 to plead his case in person as several other congregations in the Diocese had joined the Oblates with similar petitions.⁹² Buoyed up by letters of support from Dr. Macdonald and J. B. Creagan, chief deputy of the Knights of Columbus as well as references from P. J. Costello, a Calgary lawyer, Senator J. A. Lougheed, and Honorable R. B. Bennett, he alleged that in Alberta the separate schools had been used as mediums of propaganda in the interests of race or language.⁹³ He warned that if the Catholic schools were not "on a par" with the public schools there was a danger that they would be lost.⁹⁴ Using Sacred Heart school as an example, he noted that Sister Murray belonged to a congregation that had recently arrived from France, and was expecting to teach in an English school. He said that actions such as this, the hiring of someone to serve as propaganda for a certain nationality, one who could

⁸⁹ McNally's remarks are paraphrased in Minutes, 15 December, 1915.

⁹⁰ Benedictine papers, P. Harcourt-O'Reilly to Darby, 24 November 1915.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² *Calgarien*, 5-58; Also see S. Ross, "Bishop McNally and the Benedictines of Ampleforth," CCHA, *Historical Studies*, 64 (1998), 116.

⁹³ Allegati, 3, 4, *Calgarien*.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

possibly lower the level of education in Catholic schools, would provide an excuse for those who wanted to abolish the separate school system.⁹⁵

Successful in his endeavour, McNally managed to prevent a reinstatement of the Oblates in Sacred Heart parish, although he was chastised by the Holy See for his lack of sensitivity.⁹⁶ Later, he said that he was aware before he arrived that there existed in his diocese “a state of affairs contrary to the development of religion, an impression that prevailed in the English-speaking clergy and laity in all of Canada.”⁹⁷ Defending his views, he told Pietro di Maria, the Apostolic Delegate, that it had been his duty to raise his voice, not only in self-defense, but also in the name of religion. According to McNally, any claims by Catholics for the French language or culture were a source of division and strife, and therefore the cause of distrust, contempt, and opposition towards the Church they represented.⁹⁸

Under the guise of concern about English-language education in Catholic schools, McNally not only enhanced the prestige of Catholics but also eliminated the major French-speaking influence in Calgary, eventually reducing the Oblates to the aboriginal reserves and parishes in Lethbridge and Pincher Creek in the southern part of the Diocese.

At a civic gathering to honour Bishop McNally before he left Calgary to become Bishop of Hamilton in 1924, R. B. Bennett, in proposing a toast to his friend, said that McNally had raised the standard of education in Calgary. Bennett stated that unity of country had been McNally’s purpose, and that he brought about better understanding between Catholics and non-Catholics with “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.”⁹⁹ The controversy at Sacred Heart school was a step in his larger plan of anglicization in the Diocese, and part of an even larger vision of ensuring that Catholicism would be an effective force on the prairies. He said that it was “all a question of the welfare of souls, of the building up to the best advantage of the kingdom of Christ.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ *Calgarien*, 18, 32.

⁹⁶ Venini Byrne, 108-23.

⁹⁷ ASV, McNally to P. di Maria, Apostolic Delegate, 29 January 1919, “Calgary – Questione bilingue (1919),” *Rappresentanza pont.*, Canada.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *The Calgary Daily Herald*, 20 November 1924.

¹⁰⁰ McNally to di Maria.