Transcending Language and Ethnicity: Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Canonical Erection of the Diocese of Calgary, 1912–1916

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Historians have generally presented conflict between the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and Bishop John Thomas McNally of Calgary as a chapter in a national narrative of rivalry between “French” and “Irish” Catholics. However, references to ethno-linguistic rivalry are conspicuously absent from contemporary reports by the Oblate personnel of southern Alberta. These reports indicate that Oblates attributed their conflict with McNally to administrative tensions between episcopal authority and the autonomy of religious orders. Having assembled a multi-ethnic and multilingual missionary corps in response to the rapid influx of Catholic immigrants over the previous three decades, Oblates believed that a secular bishop possessed neither the international connections nor the administrative experience required to assume jurisdiction over such a diverse faith community. They consequently resolved to retain their traditional autonomy and to oppose efforts to concentrate ecclesiastical authority in the office of bishop.

Les historiens ont généralement présenté le conflit entre les Oblats de Marie Immaculée et Mgr John Thomas McNally, Évêque de Calgary, comme un chapitre de la narration nationale traitant de la rivalité entre catholiques « français » et « irlandais ». Des allusions à une rivalité ethnolinguistique sont cependant absentes des rapports rédigés à l’époque par le personnel oblat du sud de l’Alberta. Ces rapports indiquent que les Oblats attribuaient leur conflit avec McNally aux tensions administratives entre l’autorité épiscopale et l’autonomie des ordres religieux. Ayant assemblé un personnel multiethnique et multilingue en réponse à l’afflux d’immigrés catholiques durant les trois décennies précédentes, les Oblats se sont

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convaincus qu’un évêque séculier ne possédait ni les liens internationaux ni l’expérience administrative requis pour assumer la direction d’une communauté si largement diversifiée. Ils décidèrent ainsi de conserver leur autonomie traditionnelle et de résister à toute tentative de concentrer l’autorité ecclésiastique sur la fonction de l’évêque.

SINCE THE 1970S, the theme of ethno-linguistic conflict has pervaded historical literature on the canonical erection of the Catholic Diocese of Calgary (1912) and the tenure of its first local ordinary, Bishop John Thomas McNally (1913–1924). This literature situates McNally’s episcopate within a national context of deepening tensions between French-speaking and English-speaking Catholics and identifies Calgary as a focal point for these tensions. In their extensive research on ecclesiastical administration, Raymond Huel and Robert Choquette have laid particular emphasis on the fact that McNally was the first anglophone prelate in western Canada. They conceptualize his appointment as a definitive rupture with the previous order, under which francophone clerics had established and sustained a vast network of missions, parishes, and schools in the Northwest and had enjoyed an exclusive monopoly on positions in the western hierarchy. According to Huel and Choquette, McNally’s appointment occasioned a crisis within the francophone clergy as it signalled the ascendancy of an “Irish” Catholic element that demanded English-speaking priests, English-speaking parishes, and English-speaking institutions in the West.1 Pursuing this line of argument, several historians have insisted on McNally’s determination to overhaul the “French” character of his diocese and to embark on a systematic campaign of anglicization. Sheila Ross, Robert Nicholas Bérard, M. B. Venini Byrne, and others have cited evidence of this objective in the bishop’s

heavy-handed treatment of the congregation of Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), his expulsion of four French-speaking religious orders from southern Alberta, and his installation of English-speaking clergy in Calgary’s urban parishes. These measures — and the controversy they generated — are customarily perceived as part of a larger polemic over the status of Catholicism in Canada and the nature of Canadian Catholic identity in the early twentieth century. In common cause with “Irish” prelates in the dioceses of London, Winnipeg, Regina, and Edmonton, McNally allegedly sought to integrate Catholicism more thoroughly into British-Canadian society by making English the sole language of instruction in Catholic schools and the sole language of evangelization from Catholic pulpits. This endeavour purportedly sparked opposition from francophone Catholics who — positing a fundamental unity of language and religion — maintained that anglicization would lead to mass defection from the ancestral faith.

While employing a distinctly national perspective on McNally’s episcopate and attempting to weave evidence of intra-denominational conflict into a coherently “Canadian” narrative of French-Irish rivalry, historians have devoted surprisingly little attention to the local context in which the Diocese of Calgary was erected. In particular, they have overlooked the perspectives of local religious who staffed the missions, parishes, and churches.


separate schools of southern Alberta at the time of McNally’s appointment. These individuals bore the brunt of the bishop’s policies and consequently challenged him most openly, yet their voices remain curiously muted in the historical record. The present article seeks to restore some of these voices by examining reports from the Oblate missionary personnel of southern Alberta. These documents call the existing historiography into question as they provide little evidence of French-Irish rivalry in the Diocese of Calgary and equally little evidence of McNally’s attempt to implement an extensive policy of anglicization. Oblates did not consider themselves embroiled in a clash between ethno-linguistic factions, but rather attributed conflict within the local Catholic community to political and administrative issues that transcended the boundaries of ethnicity and language.

In describing their turbulent relationship with the Bishop of Calgary, Oblates drew from a specialized vocabulary that had developed primarily in Europe over centuries of tension between episcopal authority and religious orders trying to protect their autonomy. They conceded that McNally was bound by Tridentine legislation to enforce religious and moral discipline among the clergy of his diocese. They insisted, however, that there were clear limits to this disciplinary power. As regular clergy (members of a community living under a rule), Oblates had their own administration distinct from that of secular clergy (who owe canonical obedience directly to a bishop). Oblates coordinated their missionary activity through a chain of command linking personnel in the mission field to a local superior, a regional vicar of missions, and an international Superior General in Europe. Since their arrival in southern Alberta in the early 1870s, Oblates had relied on this administrative structure to provide funding, to enforce internal discipline, and to devise organizational strategy to establish the first Catholic missions and parishes in the area. In particular, they

4 Sheila Ross has taken a major step toward filling this historiographical gap through her survey of English-language correspondence between Benedictine monks serving in Calgary (1912–1914) and their administrative headquarters at Ampleforth Abbey, Yorkshire. Much work remains to be done, however, on the French- and English-language correspondence of the Sisters of Charity of Notre Dame d’Evron, the Congregation of St. Mary Tintenbey, the Faithful Companions of Jesus, and the Ursulines de Chavagnes, among others. See Sheila Ross, “Bishop McNally and the Benedictines of Ampleforth,” Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Historical Studies, vol. 64 (1998), pp. 115–134.


6 For published primary material on Oblate missionary activity in southern Alberta (c.1865–c.1915), see Jules le Chevalier, OMI, Esquisse sur l'origine et les premiers développements de Calgary...
had used this structure to procure the services of missionaries who spoke the languages and understood the customs of the local Catholic population. Through a process of continuous communication between the mission field and the Oblate General Administration, Oblates had assembled a corps of polyglot priests capable of ministering to First Nations and Métis peoples as well as to newcomers from central and eastern Canada, the United States, the British Isles, and Continental Europe. By the time of McNally’s appointment as first Bishop of Calgary, Oblates had become convinced that their pastoral services were indispensable given the multi-ethnic and multilingual composition of southern Alberta’s Catholic population. Although initially willing to cooperate with the new appointee, Oblates believed that a secular bishop possessed neither the international connections nor the administrative experience required to assume jurisdiction over such a diverse community. They consequently resolved to retain their traditional autonomy and to oppose efforts to concentrate ecclesiastical authority in the office of bishop.

Oblates had long been committed to developing a multi-ethnic and multilingual faith community in the area that became the Diocese of Calgary — a territory bound by the 30th township to the north, the 110th degree of longitude to the east, the American border to the south, and the summit of the Rocky Mountains to the west. Within an expanse of 110,000 square kilometres, they launched simultaneous missionary campaigns to three ethno-linguistic groups in the early 1870s: the Plains Cree, the Tsuut’ina, and the Blackfoot Nation (composed of the Blackfoot proper [Siksika], the Blood [Kainai], and the Peigan [Pikuni]). Oblates coordinated these campaigns from their central mission, Notre-Dame de la Paix (established 1873), near the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers. After the signing of Treaty No. 7 (1877), they set up dependent...

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8 Le Chevalier, Esquisse, pp. 17–21; Levasseur, Histoire des Missionnaires Oblats, p. 242; Huel, Proclaiming the Gospel, p. 52; Knowles, Winds of Change, p. 179; Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, pp. 23–40.
missions on the newly established Blackfoot reserve at Blackfoot Crossing, the Peigan reserve near the entrance of the Crowsnest Pass, and the Blood reserve between the St. Mary’s and the Belly Rivers. Oblates conducted these operations according to protocol delineated in the second edition of the *Constitutions et Règles* (1853) issued by the founder and first Superior General of their congregation, Bishop Eugène de Mazenod of Marseilles. Mazenod had instructed his missionaries to follow apostolic tradition by mastering the vernacular of their audience in order to preach persuasively and to guide neophytes to a genuine acceptance of Catholicism. The Oblates of Notre-Dame de la Paix consequently strove to become fully conversant in the indigenous languages of the prairies and the foothills. Their efforts were expedited by the Cree dictionary and grammar published by Albert Lacombe OMI in 1874, as well as by the Blackfoot dictionary and the Blackfoot, Blood, and Peigan vocabulary published by Lacombe and Émile Legal OMI in 1883.

Mazenod’s directive took on new implications as southern Alberta underwent rapid demographic growth and ethno-linguistic diversification in the 1880s and 1890s. The arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Calgary (1883) initiated a steady stream of newcomers to the area. While economic depression curtailed immigration to urban Calgary in the early 1890s, the hinterland drew an almost continual influx to its ranching country, farmland, and mining districts. Among the earliest settlers were French-speaking Catholics from Quebec and the rangelands of the Northwest, together with English-speaking Catholics from Ontario, the Maritimes, the United States, and the British Isles. These were followed


in the second half of the 1890s by Ukrainian-, Polish-, German-, and Flemish-speaking Catholics, many of whom had been enticed by the Laurier government’s immigration propaganda touting “the last best West” with its “happy homes, larger opportunities . . . and assurance of a prosperous future.”14 As the Catholic community of southern Alberta became increasingly diverse, Oblates were compelled to broaden their pastoral efforts by mastering foreign languages, adopting unfamiliar customs, and recruiting specialized clergy.15 Appointed Vicar of Missions of Alberta in 1905, Henri Grandin OMI regarded polyglotism as fundamental to the Catholic ministry in the southern missions. The native of Sarthe (France) endeavoured to assemble a corps of missionaries capable of tending a multi-ethnic and multilingual flock.16 “Nous avons affaire ici à toutes les nations du monde,” reported Grandin to the Oblate General Administration in Rome. “[N]ous nous devons [sic] à tous et nos missionnaires ne seront jamais à la hauteur de leur tâche s’ils [...] ne mettent toute leur bonne volonté à apprendre les langues parlées par leurs futurs paroissiens.”17

Within this growing repertoire of languages, French occupied a position of relatively marginal and steadily declining importance. By 1913 the Oblates of southern Alberta recognized only two communities with significant numbers of French-speaking laypeople. The first community was centred geographically around the former site of Notre-Dame de la Paix mission, which had been converted into a permanent mission church and reconsecrated Sainte-Marie de l’Immaculée Conception (known alternatively as Saint Mary’s) in December 1889.18 This community had originated in the early 1880s as a hub for Métis freighters and railwaymen from Quebec. It continued to draw settlers from Quebec throughout the


17 Provincial Archives of Alberta [hereafter PAA], OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 888, Box 30, Henri Grandin OMI to Nazaire-Servule Dozois OMI (Assistant General), Edmonton, March 9, 1913. See also Carrière, Dictionnaire biographique, vol. 1, p. 298.

18 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 6767, Box 166, Hippolyte Leduc OMI to Père Sardou, Calgary, October 7, 1887; Item 6768, Box 166, Leduc to Frère Guillet, Calgary, October 16, 1889; Item 6768, Box 166, Leduc to Guillet, Calgary, February 1891; “Opening of the New Roman Catholic Church,” Calgary Daily Herald, December 3, 1889; “Opening of the R.C. Church Yesterday,” Calgary Daily Herald, December 9, 1889; Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, pp. 70–73.
eighties, the most prominent of whom were Charles Borromée Rouleau (stipendiary magistrate [1883–1887] and Justice of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories [1887–1901]) and his brother, Dr. Édouard Hector Rouleau (surgeon to the local detachment of the North West Mounted Police, 1886–1912).19 Sandwiched between the northwestern bank of the Elbow River and the southern edge of Calgary, “Rouleauville” was legally incorporated as a village in 1889. Its autonomy was short-lived, however, as it experienced demographic stagnation in the 1890s and was ultimately annexed to the City of Calgary in 1907.20 By 1913 Calgary had a French-speaking Catholic population of approximately 500 — accounting for about 12 per cent of the city’s Catholic population and 1 per cent of the total urban population.21 The second community — the town of Pincher Creek — lay at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. This prime ranching country had attracted five French-Canadian Catholic families in the mid-1880s. Additional francophone settlers arrived sporadically after the completion of the CPR line through the Crowsnest Pass, thus prompting the Oblates to establish a permanent parish in Pincher Creek in 1897.22

In contrast to the meagre francophone presence in southern Alberta, the parklands north of Edmonton had attracted a continual influx of Métis, French-Canadian, and Franco-American settlers. Writing in 1913, William Pearce, advisor to the CPR on immigration and resource development, estimated that over 60 per cent of Alberta’s “French” population and nearly 70 per cent of its “Half-breed” population lay north of the North Saskatchewan River.23 Oblates had actively promoted this

19 Glenbow Archives [hereafter GA], Rouleau family fonds, M7864, signed affidavit with last will and testament, “In the Supreme Court of the North West Territories, Northerna [sic] Alberta Judicial District. In the Estate of The Honorable Charles Borromée [sic] Rouleau, Deceased,” Calgary, September 24, 1901.
23 University of Alberta Archives [hereafter UAA], William Pearce Papers, 74–169–393, file 3, William Pearce to T. M. Tweedie, Calgary, April 8, 1913. Edmonton itself had a considerable francophone population in 1913 — possibly exceeding 3,000 people — and the city was generally considered
geographical concentration. In response to territorial legislation making English the sole language permitted in schools, courts, and government (1892), Oblates endeavoured to create a large francophone bloc in the parkland region and thereby establish a demographic base for the legal recognition of French in the Northwest. 24 This venture was coordinated by the first two Oblate vicars of missions in present-day Alberta, both of whom held episcopal title and office: Vital-Justin Grandin OMI (Bishop of Saint-Albert, 1871–1902) and his successor, Émile Legal OMI (Bishop of Saint-Albert [1902–1912] and Archbishop of Edmonton [1912–1920]). 25 Bishop Grandin implemented a plan to build upon existing nuclei by channelling francophone settlers to the environs of two Métis communities north of Edmonton — Saint-Albert (founded by Lacombe in 1861) and Saint-Paul-des-Métis (founded jointly by Lacombe and Adéodat Thérien OMI in 1896). 26 Bishop Grandin engaged missionnaires-colonisateurs, notably l’abbé Jean-Baptiste Morin (1890–1899), to advertise the agricultural potential of the area and to recruit suitable colonists from major French-speaking centres throughout North America. 27
Given the pervasive fear of depopulation among the social and political elite of Quebec, Morin and his colleagues launched their mission primarily as a “mouvement de rapatriement” targeting the hundreds of thousands of French-Canadian expatriates who had settled in the factory towns and mining communities of the northeastern United States. By 1913 missionnaires-colonisateurs had drawn thousands of French-Canadian and Franco-American settlers to nascent farming communities in north-central Alberta — including Morinville (1891), Rivière-Qui-Barre (1893), and Bonnyville (1907) — and were gradually extending their colonization efforts northward into the Peace River district.

While Oblates in the parklands strove to reinforce the French Catholic presence, their counterparts in the south responded to the comparative scarcity of francophone settlers by de-gallicizing their ministry and dissociating themselves from characteristically French-Canadian expressions of Catholicism. This involved divesting themselves of the trappings of ultramontanism. Characterized by a strong emphasis on submission to papal authority and a profound distrust of liberalism, modernism, and individualism, ultramontane ecclesiology had generated sweeping changes in French-Canadian Catholicism during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Yet one of its most eminently recognizable legacies was the soutane, the full-length clerical garb prescribed by Pius IX to accentuate the priest’s separateness from the world. Under the terms of the First Plenary Council of Canada (1909), the soutane became mandatory attire for clergymen serving under the French-speaking prelates of Quebec and the Prairie West. Elsewhere in the dominion, the soutane was becoming a rarity as priests tended to follow the fashion of their British and American counterparts by sporting the soutanella, a knee-length coat similar to that worn by Anglican ministers. Underlying this trend was an increasing willingness to adopt forms that were compatible with the dominant Anglo-Protestant culture so as to dispel perceptions of Catholicism as an alien, autocratic, and retrograde force. As a corollary, the soutane came to be regarded as the dubious preserve of an intransigent French-Canadian

clergy. Oblates in southern Alberta were therefore deeply reluctant to be seen in the value-laden garb. During the spring of 1912, Albert Naessens OMI, the Belgian-born pastor of Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart parish in Calgary (established 1911), staged a protest against the established dress code by refusing to set foot outside his rectory while wearing the soutane. Despite firm admonishment from Archbishop Émile Legal of Edmonton and Archbishop Adélard Langevin of Saint-Boniface, Naessens garnered widespread support from fellow Oblates in southern Alberta and several even joined in his protest by casting off their soutanes. Thus, when it was announced that Calgary was slated to become an episcopal see, Henri Grandin OMI, Vicar of Missions of Alberta, reported to the Oblate General Administration: “Tous nos Pères en sont un peu au même point par rapport à la soutane, et beaucoup désirent que le futur Évêque de Calgary soit un Irlandais, parce qu’ils espèrent qu’il abandonnerait vite cette pauvre soutane.”

Concurrent with the soutane controversy was a growing disinclination to deploy French-Canadian Oblates to southern Alberta. In reports to the Oblate General Administration, Grandin stipulated that zealous young “patriotes” be barred from the southern missions. The vicar was particularly wary of francophone graduates from the University of Ottawa, Canada’s Oblate scholasticate. He found their language skills wanting and complained that their overt French-Canadian partisanship would only alienate their multi-ethnic and multilingual congregations. Instead, Grandin favoured a European clergy recruited from the Oblate scholasticates of Hünenfeld (Germany) and Liège (Belgium). He maintained that these missionaries were better suited to southern Alberta because they were conversant in more languages and were acquainted with a broader range of cultures than were their French-Canadian

33 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 886 Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, March 15, 1912; Item 886 Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, March 24, 1912; Carrie, Dictionnaire biographique, vol. 3, p. 10; Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, pp. 143–145.
35 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 886, Box 30, Grandin to Augustin Dontenwill OMI, Edmonton, June 3, 1912 [accents added].
brethren.37 Through regular correspondence with Rome, Grandin procured the services of European Oblates for all of the largest parishes and missions of southern Alberta (with the exception of Saint-Michel in Pincher Creek, which remained in the care of two Quebec-born Oblates).38 Grandin entrusted the German-speaking congregations of the Bow Valley to the German recruit Hubert Hermes OMI in 1907 and appointed the Polish Silesian recruit Anton Sylla OMI to minister to “Polish, Slovak and all Slav [sic] people who lived in Canmore, Bankhead, Exshaw and all along the CPR line from Calgary to Laggan [Lake Louise]” in 1909.39 Three years later, Grandin appointed Richard McGrath D’Alton OMI pastor of Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s in Calgary. Given his upbringing in Ireland and schooling in France, D’Alton seemed duly qualified to minister to the two largest ethno-linguistic groups of the parish.40 By 1913 Grandin had con- signed the German-, Flemish-, and English-speaking congregations around Lethbridge and Beiseker to the pastoral care of the Belgian missionary Leonard Van Tighem OMI, the French missionaries Pierre-Marie Cozanet OMI and Jules Bidault OMI, and the German missionaries Bernhard Ibold OMI, Ernest Nelz OMI, and Aloysius Rosenthal OMI.41

European recruits assumed a particularly dominant role in ministering to the local Ukrainian-speaking population, based in Calgary and Lethbridge as well as along the CPR line between Canmore and Bankhead.42 Hailing primarily from the Austro-Hungarian crown land of Galicia, the majority of Ukrainian-speaking settlers were communicants of the Greek Catholic or “Uniate” Church. Although subject to the authority and doctrinal standards of Rome, these settlers observed a liturgy that differed markedly from that of the Latin Rite.43 They had virtually

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38 Carrière, *Dictionnaire biographique*, vol. 1, pp. 269–270; vol. 3, pp. 80–81; Venini Byrne, *From the Buffalo to the Cross*, p. 215.
40 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 886, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, March 15, 1912; Item 888, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, January 17, 1913; Carrière, *Dictionnaire biographique*, vol. 1, p. 245.
no access to Greek-Rite priests, however, as the Vatican had prohibited the emigration of married clergy from Austria-Hungary to North America in 1894. Cut off from their traditional spiritual leadership, Galician immigrants became prime targets for Anglo-Protestant, Russian Orthodox, and Independent Greek missionary campaigns. Oblates went to considerable lengths to offset these campaigns and to keep Galician immigrants securely within the Catholic fold. As their first line of defence, Oblates deployed Polish recruits who spoke Ukrainian and who understood the devotional exercise of the Greek Rite. Between 1898 and 1906, they coordinated intermittent visits by the brothers Jan, Wojciech, and Paweł Kulawy OMI to Galician communities throughout southern Alberta. This strategy proved largely ineffective, however, as many Galicians nurtured deep-seated hostility to Poles and dreaded the prospect of being Latinized. Therefore, in the spring of 1900, Lacombe journeyed from southern Alberta to Austria-Hungary to confer over “la question des Grecs-Ruthènes” with the Metropolitan of Galicia, Andrii Szeptycki. As a result of these deliberations, five celibate Greek-Rite Basilians were dispatched to western Canada in 1902. Two of these clerics, Antin Strocki OSBM and Matey Hura OSBM, paid occasional visits to Galician missions along the CPR line between Calgary and Canmore. Still, these missions remained chronically understaffed, and Galician laypeople went without regular access to the spiritual and liturgical services of the Greek Catholic Church.

Fearing mass apostasy among Galician immigrants, Grandin wrote to the Oblate General Administration in 1911 and requested the transfer of the German-born Franz Gelsdorf OMI and the French-born Philippe

(Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1988), pp. 42–43; Mark G. McGowan, “‘A Portion for the Vanquished’: Roman Catholics and the Ukrainian Catholic Church,” in Luciuk and Hryniuk, eds., Canada’s Ukrainians, pp. 219–222.

44 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 6523, Box 56, Albert Lacombe OMI to Diomede Falconio (Apostolic Delegate to Canada), Paris, June 14, 1900; Accession 84.400, Item 1135, Box 47, “Circulaire de Monseigneur Emile J. Legal, O.M.I., Archevêque Élu d’Edmonton et Administrateur, pro tempore, du Diocèse de Calgary,” Saint-Albert, March 30, 1913, p. 282; Perin, Rome in Canada, pp. 165–182.

45 Sylla, Memoirs, pp. 19, 27, 69; Carrière, Dictionnaire biographique, vol. 2, pp. 207–210; Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, pp. 391–392.


47 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 6525, Box 156, “Mémoire à S.G. Szeptycki, Evêque de Stanislawow,” Lacombe to Szeptycki, Summer, 1900; Hughes, Father Lacombe, pp. 397–405; Perin, Rome in Canada, pp. 171–172, 175, 177–179.

48 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 6770, Box 166, Leduc to Lacombe, Edmonton, February 3, 1903; Item 6770, Box 166, Leduc to Lacombe, Edmonton, February 24, 1903; Item 6775, Box 166, Sir George Bury (Vice-President of the CPR) to Leduc, Winnipeg, December 28, 1911; Sylla, Memoirs, pp. 45, 67, 75.
Roux OMI from Hünfeld to the Basilian monastery of Buchach in Galicia. Initially, Grandin had simply wanted the pair to become fluent in Ukrainian and to familiarize themselves with the Greek-Rite liturgy before undertaking mission work in southern Alberta. However, after careful consultation with his personnel in Calgary, Grandin became convinced that Gelsdorf and Roux should undergo full ritual translation and thus effectively become Greek-Rite priests: “[L]e Père Sylla […] et les autres Oblats de Calgary prétendent que si nos deux nouveaux ne passent pas au rite grec ils ne pourront rien faire avec les ruthenes [sic] […] qui n’auront aucune confiance en eux et ne voudront pas se servir de leur ministère.”

Grandin received a solemn assurance from Bishop Nykyta Budka, first Greek Catholic Bishop of Canada (1912–1927), that Gelsdorf and Roux would remain under the supervision of their Oblate superior even after becoming Greek-Rite priests.

With the arrival of Gelsdorf and Roux in June 1913, the Oblate personnel of southern Alberta became bi-ritual in addition to being multi-ethnic and multilingual. This missionary corps had evolved and diversified in tandem with the local Catholic population. Through continuous communication between the mission field and the Oblate General Administration, Oblates had managed to adapt to the changing exigencies of a laity drawn from across Europe and North America. This achievement inspired confidence among Oblates when it was announced that the missions and parishes of southern Alberta were to come under the direction of a local bishop. Oblates were convinced that these missions and parishes could only function through the ministrations of a polyglot and highly flexible clergy.
specialized clergy. “[I]l faut […] tenir compte,” wrote Grandin to the Oblate General Administration in July 1912, “de la difficulté pour les Evêque [sic] de trouver des prêtres parlant Polonais, Allemand, Anglais, Français, Ruthène, etc. Bien souvent dans la même mission, le prêtre est obligé de se servir de 3 langues différentes, et hors de nos rangs il serait presque impossible de trouver des prêtres parlant toutes ces langues.”

News of McNally’s appointment in April 1913 occasioned no wavering in the Oblates’ confidence. On the eve of the bishop’s arrival in Calgary, Grandin and his missionaries remained steadfast in their conviction that they were irreplaceable. “Que fera Mgr. McNally à Calgary?” asked the vicar with rhetorical flair. “Attendons avec patience, et sans trop d’inquiétude, il verra je crois avant longtemps qu’il a besoin des Oblats, et qu’il ne serait pas de bonne politique de les éloigner de lui.”

Further bolstering the Oblates’ confidence were the personal and professional credentials of the new bishop. Although appointed directly by Rome and without input from Oblates, McNally appeared to have the makings of an administrator with whom Oblates could collaborate peacefully and profitably. After reviewing McNally’s curriculum vitae, Grandin remarked with muted approval that “l’Evêque de Calgary […] a reçu son éducation classique chez les Oblats […].” Indeed, the native Prince Edward Islander had obtained a Bachelor of Arts and a Licentiate in Philosophy from the Oblate-operated University of Ottawa in 1892. Yet, in contrast to the alleged parochialism of University of Ottawa alumni, McNally was noted for his cosmopolitanism and his fluency in Italian, German, and French. He had honed his language skills while studying at the Urban College of Propaganda Fide in Rome, where he had obtained doctorates in philosophy (1893) and theology (1897), and while serving in the Archdiocese of Ottawa as pastor of St. Stephen’s parish in Old Chelsea, Quebec (1905–1911) and as pastor of St. Mary’s parish in Almonte, Ontario (1911–1913). Oblates were given a
demonstration of these language skills during McNally’s public enthronement ceremony on July 27, 1913, at Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s. In keeping with established procedure in that parish, the new bishop alternated between French and English during his address to the congregation.58 Thus, from the beginning of his episcopate, McNally appeared to fit the local mould of the polyglot priest.

Despite their favourable first impression of the bishop, Oblates were quickly taken aback by his brash administrative style. They were particularly incensed at being turned out of Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s within days of his enthronement.59 Under the terms of Pius X’s *Æternam Humani generis* (issued November 30, 1912), Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s had been elevated to the status of *ecclesia cathedralis* and had thus become the seat of episcopal authority in the Diocese of Calgary.60 Nonetheless, Oblates intended to continue using the rectory as their mission headquarters in southern Alberta as they possessed no other residence large enough to accommodate their 25 members during meetings and annual retreats.61 To their great surprise, McNally wasted no time in relieving Richard McGrath D’Alton OMI of his pastoral duties and installing two secular priests in his stead. On July 28 the bishop appointed his personal secretary, Arthur Joseph Hetherington, to the cathedral staff. Three days later, A. Bernard Macdonald was named rector of Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s.62 Oblates were consequently left with only

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58 “Bishop M’Nally is Enthroned at St. Mary’s Church,” *Calgary Daily Herald*, July 28, 1913, p. 1; Le Chevalier, *Esquisse*, pp. 149, 152.

59 The archived correspondence of the Benedictines of Ampleforth provides a valuable, non-Oblate perspective on controversy surrounding the tenure of Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s. See, for instance, Dom Wilfred Darby’s commentary to Abbot Oswald Smith: “[Bishop McNally] sent the Oblates off in his first week here and has offended them much. It is a nice kettle of fish ...” (DCA, Benedictines of Ampleforth, 993070745 101.1967, Darby to Smith, Calgary, September 10, 1913).

60 Anderson, *Oblate Fathers in Calgary*, p. 79; Venini Byrne, *From the Buffalo to the Cross*, p. 73.

61 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 888, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, March 13, 1913. When McNally later reproached Oblates for the incompleteness of parish records and account books from Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s, the Oblate Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Edmonton replied: “Voyez-vous, Monseigneur, les Oblats alors en charge de la paroisse Ste Marie, s’étaient imaginé, et étaient convaincus, qu’ils resteraient pendant plusieurs semaines, plusieurs mois peut-être, à Ste Marie, après votre arrivée et qu’ils auraient tout le temps de bien régler toutes choses, de concert avec Votre Grandeur, pour vous mettre bien au courant de la situation et obvier d’avance à tout désagrément ou malentendu subséquent” (PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, Leduc to McNally, Saint-Albert, April 5, 1915).

62 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 889, Box 30, Grandin to Dontenwill, Edmonton, November 19, 1913; Le Chevalier, *Esquisse*, p. 149; Venini Byrne, *From the Buffalo to the Cross*, pp. 438–442.
one toehold in Calgary — Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart. This parish was comparatively small, and its rectory could accommodate only three resident priests and one visitor.63 Upset by this turn of events, Grandin complained in person to Pellegrino Stagni, Apostolic Delegate to Canada (1910–1918), during the latter’s ceremonial visit to Calgary on July 31.64 Grandin sent a précis of this complaint to Augustin Dontenwill OMI, Oblate Superior General (1908–1931):

Nous voilà sortis de St. Mary’s [...] Après avoir tout créé et tout fait dans cette ville, on nous met dehors sans même nous dire un vrai merci de ce que nous avons fait. Nous sentons tous la perte [...] Le jour de l’arrivée du Délégué Ap. à Calgary, je lui ai dit bien carrément [sic] ce que je pensais de cette manière de traiter des religieux qui ont dépensé leurs ressources en hommes et en argent à faire des établissements prospères, pour les voir passer aux mains d’étrangers qui n’ont jamais mis la main au travail et qui dans quelques mois, quelques années au plus, prétendront avoir tout fait eux-mêmes et ne connaîtront pas ceux qui ont été les vrais fondateurs.65

Grandin lodged no accusation of ethno-linguistic discrimination in his complaint to the Apostolic Delegate. Instead, he described the loss of Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s as an injustice to “les religieux” — Polish, German, Belgian, French, Irish, and Canadian members of the founding religious congregation. In this context, his use of the term “étrangers” did not denote “foreigners,” but rather “strangers” or “newcomers.” This was undoubtedly a reference to the newly installed secular clergy of Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s. From Grandin’s perspective, tensions were developing along regular-secular lines rather than along French-English lines.

Reinforcing this perspective was McNally’s palpable rancour toward the Irish-born D’Alton. In his function as pastor of Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s, D’Alton had been responsible for organizing a formal reception at Calgary’s CPR station on the morning of McNally’s arrival (July 27, 1913). Eschewing all pomp and ceremony, D’Alton had arranged to have two ordinary taxicabs collect the bishop and his secular entourage and convey them to the cathedral. McNally’s pride was deeply wounded by the meagreness of this reception.66 He subsequently reprimanded

63 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 888, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, March 6, 1913; Item 889, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, August 27, 1913; DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1116, Grandin to McNally, Edmonton, March 23, 1914.
64 “Bishop M’Nally Will Reach Here Tomorrow,” Calgary Daily Herald, July 25, 1913, p. 1; Sylla, Memoirs, p. 82; Le Chevalier, Esquisse, p. 149.
65 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 889, Box 30, Grandin to Dentenwill, Edmonton, August 7, 1913; Carrière, Dictionnaire biographique, vol. 1, pp. 291–292.
66 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 889, Box 30, Grandin to Legal, Calgary, August 27, 1913; Item 889, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, October 28, 1913.
D’Alton so sternly and to such devastating effect that Grandin felt compelled to grant the ex-pastor leave to return to Ireland. D’Alton’s departure did not allay McNally’s anger, however, and Grandin remarked that the bishop was still fuming three weeks later. “Ce brave Evêque ne décolère pas contre le pauvre D’Alton,” reported Grandin on August 19. “[Il] dit qu’il n’oubliera jamais comment il a été reçu par les Oblats (lisez D’Alton) lors de son arrivée dans la ville épiscopale.” D’Alton’s legacy of unsettled accounts and incomplete financial records only exacerbated the situation. McNally and his cathedral staff were particularly irritated to discover that they had inherited a construction debt of $9,719.35, which D’Alton had deferred paying for over a year. By October 1913 the bishop’s resentment had proven so unshakable that Grandin instructed the Oblate General Administration not to redeploy the Irish Oblate to southern Alberta: “Mgr. McNally ne peut ni le voir, ni le sentir même de loin, et il ne faudrait pas penser à le faire rentrer dans ce diocèse.”

Over the following year, Oblates came to regard D’Alton’s dismissal as the opening salvo of an episcopal campaign against regular clergy. They ascertained from the experiences of other religious communities that McNally was loath to collaborate with clerics who were not subject to his immediate jurisdiction. Especially revealing in this regard was the case of the English Benedictines. In 1912 Bishop Legal of Saint-Albert and Abbot Oswald Smith OSB of Ampleforth Abbey (Yorkshire) had developed a plan to establish an English-language Catholic college in southern Alberta. To this end, three Benedictines — Basil Clarkson OSB, Benedict McLaughlin OSB, and Wilfred Darby OSB — were despatched from Ampleforth to Calgary and granted charge of St. Benedict’s parish (established 1912) on the north bank of the Bow River. Their principal assignment was to acquire property, solicit financial support and finalize construction plans for the proposed college. However, this project ran into serious difficulties within the first month of McNally’s

67 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 889, Box 30, Grandin to Dontenwill, Edmonton, August 7, 1913.
68 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 889, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, August 19, 1913.
69 This sum was owing to the Oblate Province of Germany, which had tendered a loan for the reconstruction of Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s nave and parish hall. D’Alton had ignored directives from Grandin, Legal, and Oblate bursar Olivier Cornellier OMI to settle the debt before McNally’s arrival. PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 886, Box 30, Grandin to Dubois, Saint-Albert, January 16, 1912; Item 888, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, January 17, 1913; Item 888, Box 30, Grandin to Legal, Edmonton, March 15, 1913; Item 888, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, March 28, 1913; Item 889, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, August 19, 1913; Accession 71.220, Item 6778, Box 166, Lépine to Leduc, Calgary, September 9, 1913.
70 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 889, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Calgary, October 19, 1913.
episcopate. The bishop withheld his approval of the site on which the Benedictines had intended to build their institution. He likewise refused to grant them permission to solicit building funds from the local laity. 71 On September 8, 1913, an exasperated Clarkson reported to Abbot Smith: “The hostility of the Bishop to a College on the same lines as Ampleforth is very marked and it is very evident that it would be foolish and probably useless for us to try and found one in the face of his opposition.” 72 According to Darby, McNally was determined to control every aspect of the Benedictines’ project: “I fear [McNally] will be a difficult man to work with. . . . We shall be under his thumb, and interference morning, noon and night, and the situation will not be very tolerable. We shall never be an autonomous College.” 73 The bishop urged the Benedictines to devote their money and resources to a diocesan day school under his direct supervision. This proposal conflicted with the Benedictines’ time-honoured policy of building their own schools and teaching according to their own regulations. 74 By spring 1914 the Benedictines of Ampleforth had abandoned all hope of collaborating with McNally and were preparing their return to England. 75

News of the Benedictines’ imminent departure prompted Oblates to consider taking collective action against the Bishop of Calgary. Alphonse Jan OMI distinguished himself as the earliest and most vociferous advocate of a strategic alliance of regular clergy. Assigned to Calgary in 1913 and appointed pastor of Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart the following year, the Breton missionary urged Oblates and Benedictines to join forces and submit a list of shared grievances to prominent officials in Rome. 76 In a report to the Oblate General Administration dated June 4, 1915, Grandin openly supported Jan’s proposal:

Le P. Jan exprime le désir que les congrégations religieuses en butte aux attaques de Mc. s’unissent pour défendre leurs intérêts communs auprès du saint Siège, et puisque nous [i.e. Oblates] sommes les plus anciens et les plus nombreux, nous devrions prendre la direction de ce mouvement.
et exposer devant qui de droit les faits qu'on peut reprocher à l'autocrate et à l'ennemi de tout ce qui est religieux que Rome nous a imposé. Quand je rencontrai l'automne dernier un Bénédictin anglais qui venait du monastère ayant fourni les sujets pour la fondation de Calgary, je lui dis un mot de cela [...] [Il pourrait arriver que nous fussions obligés d'en venir là pour nous protéger contre cet homme qui a la haine de tout ce qui est religieux, et qui si il le pouvait nous chasserait tous demain de son diocèse [sic].]

Underlying Jan’s plan was the perception that the Bishop of Calgary was indiscriminately hostile to all regular clergy in his diocese. Clerical status — rather than ethnicity or language — was understood to be the determining factor in shaping the bishop’s most heavy-handed policies. Concomitantly, clerical status was understood to provide a sound basis for challenging these policies as it had the potential to draw English Benedictines into common cause with Polish, German, Belgian, French, Irish, and Canadian Oblates. To Jan’s disappointment, however, the Benedictines offered only a tepid response to his proposal. Preferring to cut their losses and to avoid a scandal in the nascent diocese, they returned quietly to England in March 1914.

Nonetheless, Jan remained firmly committed to the collective defence of religious communities in southern Alberta. Indeed, by championing a congregation of English-speaking nuns, he set in motion a sequence of events that culminated in the Oblates’ expulsion from Calgary. In 1911 Albert Naessens OMI and Ernest Nelz OMI had engaged an English-speaking staff for the new separate school in Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart parish. Under the terms of an agreement between Dontenwill and Legal, the Oblates of Calgary held this parish in perpetuum (in perpetuity) and administered it with limited episcopal involvement. Thus Naessens and Nelz needed only to consult with their parish council before inviting the Ursulines de Chavagnes to take charge of Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart school. The Ursulines accepted this invitation and sent two of their

77 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 892, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Le Mans, June 4, 1915. In alleging that McNally “avait la haine de tout ce qui est religieux,” Grandin was referring specifically to the Bishop of Calgary’s attitude toward regular clergy (known alternately as “religious” in English and “religieux” in French).
79 DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1116, Grandin to McNally, Edmonton, March 23, 1914, and Dontenwill to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, Rome, November 22, 1915; Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, pp. 113, 117.
80 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, “Explanatory notes concerning dismissal of Sister St. Augustine: Copy of notes given to Judge Beck,” September 1912; Carrière, Dictionnaire biographique, vol. 3, pp. 10, 14; Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, pp. 144–146.
members to Calgary in 1911. Although their congregation was based in the Vendée (France), Sister Mary Augustine (née Josephine Murray) and Sister Gabriel Collins were both born and raised in England. Sister Mary Augustine held an Alberta teaching certificate and had taught for twelve years in England and the United States. Sister Gabriel, a qualified music teacher, had received her training in England and Canada. Yet, despite their professional qualifications, Sister Mary Augustine and Sister Gabriel were both summarily fired by A. B. Macdonald in July 1915. Appointed superintendent of the local separate school board on McNally’s recommendation, Macdonald notified the Ursulines that their teaching contracts had been terminated and that new personnel would take charge of Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart school at the beginning of the next academic year. Macdonald claimed that Provincial School Inspector J. A. Smith had deemed Sister Mary Augustine “incompetent” and found conditions in her classroom “unsatisfactory.” Rumours began to spread that McNally and Macdonald had dismissed the Ursulines under false pretences and that Inspector Smith had never filed an unfavourable report. Thus, in his capacity as pastor of Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart, Jan organized a meeting of local ratepayers on July 22, 1915. During this meeting, the ratepayers drafted a petition demanding the Ursulines’ reinstatement. They also rejected a proposal by McNally to borrow $50,000 to carry out school renovations and engage a new teaching staff. When McNally learned of these developments, he wrote to the pastor of Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart demanding to know whether or not he had influenced the ratepayers’ decisions. Jan responded that he been present at the meeting, but had not spoken a word. However, one of the ratepayers sent an anonymous letter to the bishop stating that Jan

82 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, Grandin to Stagni, Edmonton, August 18, 1915; DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1116, Dontenwill to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, Rome, November 22, 1915; Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, pp. 441–442.
83 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, John Cormack (barrister and solicitor) to Grandin, Edmonton, September 16, 1915, pp. 1–2.
84 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, “Explanatory notes concerning dismissal of Sister St. Augustine”; DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1116, Dontenwill to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, Rome, November 22, 1915.
85 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, Jan to J. R. Keenan, August 9, 1915; Item 665, Box 16, Jan to P. O’Sullivan, Calgary, August [?], 1915.
86 DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1116, Dontenwill to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, Rome, November 22, 1915.
87 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, Jan to McNally, Calgary, August 7, 1915.
had “bitterly opposed the proposed loan” and had encouraged parishioners to press for the Ursulines’ reinstatement. On Saturday, July 31, Jan received a message from Hetherington — McNally’s secretary — stating that the bishop intended to pay a visit to Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart before Mass the next morning.

Hetherington’s message could not have prepared the pastor or his parishioners for McNally’s Sunday visit. After taking his position in the pulpit, the bishop read aloud from the anonymous ratepayer’s letter and then from Jan’s statement. He drew attention to the “wide discrepancy” between the two accounts and accused one of the authors of lying. Then, before a full congregation, McNally denounced the Oblates for their insubordination and scandalous behaviour. This unorthodox sermon prompted Jan to travel to Edmonton the following morning for an emergency audience with Grandin. Alarmed by Jan’s report, Grandin wrote to McNally requesting an explanation for the public spectacle. “Votre Grandeur comprendra facilement que pareilles déclarations faites publiquement dans l’église [sic] doivent me préoccuper,” insisted Grandin. “[Je] désire vivement savoir […] la nature des faits ainsi dénoncés du haut de la chaire. Il est de mon devoir de veiller [sic] ce que mes religieux remplissent fidèlement leurs devoirs envers leur Ordinaire et envers leurs paroissiens.”

McNally refused to justify his actions to Grandin. The bishop responded that he was “ready now or at any future time to render a full and clear account to my superiors who sent me here,” but not to the Oblate Vicar of Missions of Alberta. He then declared that he would no longer permit regular clergy to operate autonomously in his diocese:

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 [sic] of the Ordinary of the Diocese, to be applied for in each individual case.

89 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, Grandin to Stagni, Edmonton, August 18, 1915.
90 DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1116, Grandin to McNally, Edmonton, August 5, 1915; PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, Grandin to Stagni, Edmonton, August 18, 1915; DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1116, Dontenwill to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, Rome, November 22, 1915.
91 DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1116, Grandin to McNally, Edmonton, August 5, 1915.
92 DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1116, McNally to Grandin, Calgary, August 7, 1915.
Here was a clear expression of tension between episcopal authority and the independence of religious communities. By asserting his canonical right to select and to discipline the clergy of southern Alberta, McNally invalidated the Oblates’ long-established practice of recruiting and deploying missionaries as they saw fit. Grandin responded to this news on August 11, notifying McNally: “Je vais profiter de la réunion de nos Pères [scheduled for the following day] pour leur faire connaître le changement que Votre Grandeur apporte dans la discipline jusqu’alors en vigueur dans les diocèses de l’Ouest.”

Jan responded with considerably less restraint. On August 15, McNally received an anonymous letter accusing him of greed, duplicity, and sexual impropriety. The bishop convened an emergency meeting with Hetherington, Macdonald, and E. F. Ryan, a Calgary lawyer. After a close investigation of the typeface, watermark, and Gallicisms in the text, the four men concurred that Jan was unquestionably the author. McNally adjourned the meeting and telegraphed Grandin: “Your presence urgently needed here concerning your fathers. Kindly come without delay.”

Grandin took the night train to Calgary and appeared at the episcopal residence the following morning. There he found himself before a makeshift tribunal presided over by the bishop and comprised of Hetherington, Macdonald and Ryan. Grandin was refused the right to speak. The bishop read several charges against Jan and then passed sentence: the Oblates were to vacate the church and rectory of Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart by the following Saturday, August 21, 1915. Their jurisdiction would expire on Friday evening.

Grandin had been expecting such a development. In his campaign to consolidate episcopal authority, McNally had already struck two of Calgary’s religious communities — the Benedictines of Ampleforth and the Ursulines de Chavagnes. Oblates seemed the next logical target. “Nous savions parfaitement que nous ne pouvons nous attendre à rester longtemps à Calgary,” wrote Grandin to...
Apostolic Delegate Stagni on August 18. “[L]’exemple des Bénédictins [...] [et] des Ursulines nous montraient bien ce qui nous attendait, on attendait une occasion, elle s’est présentée et on l’a saisie avec empressement.”98 Grandin advised his priests to leave Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart quietly and without resistance. Accordingly, on August 20, Oblates relinquished the keys to their last foothold in the city.99 The following day, they sent their notice to the Oblate General Administration:

Nous, Oblats de Marie Immaculée du diocèse de Calgary, ressentons profondément l’humiliation que la Congrégation vient d’éprouver dans la personne de son représentant, le Révérend Père Henri Grandin, Vicaire Général des Missions, à l’occasion du renvoi des Oblats de Calgary [...] Vu les circonstances, nous verrions avec plaisir le prompt retrait de tous les Oblats du diocèse de Calgary, sachant que notre ministère va devenir de plus en plus pénible et difficile.100

This was not capitulation, but rather a tactical retreat. Since they had been granted Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart in perpetuum, Oblates were confident that McNally had exceeded his canonical authority. They therefore sought to defend their rights by invoking church law. On August 24, Hippolyte Leduc OMI wrote McNally informing him that his “tribunal ecclésiastique” had violated De amotione administrativa ab officio et beneficio curato — a decree of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation of the Vatican (1910). The tribunal had committed “une flagrante injustice” by ignoring the Oblates’ legal claim to Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart and by punishing an entire congregation for the alleged misdeeds of a single cleric.101

A similar charge was laid by the Oblate Superior General in Rome. On August 28, Grandin sent Dontenwill a detailed account of the expulsion and entreated him to take the case to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation. “[C]onfiant dans notre droit,” wrote Grandin, “j’en appelle à Votre Excellence de cette décision de l’Evêque de Calgary, vous priant de prendre notre cause en main, et de nous faire rendre la paroisse qui nous a été enlevée sans motifs suffisants.”102 Dontenwill agreed

98 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, Grandin to Stagni, Edmonton, August 18, 1915.
99 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, Naessens to McNally, Calgary, August 19, 1915; Item 6781, Box 166, Leduc to McNally, Saint-Albert, August 24, 1915.
100 DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1116, A. Blanchet, OMI et al. to Dozois, Macleod, August 21, 1915.
101 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 6781, Box 166, Leduc to McNally, Saint-Albert, August 24, 1915.
102 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, Grandin to Dontenwill, Ottawa, August 28, 1915.
that the Bishop of Calgary had committed “[une] violation de la plus élémentaire équité canonique et même de la stricte justice.”

Thus, on November 22, 1915, the Oblate Superior General filed an appeal to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation. His case hinged on the canonical principle of *titulo perpetuo* (perpetual title). Dontenwill referred to the agreement between himself and Legal that the Sacred Consistorial Congregation had ratified on May 5, 1909. This agreement had given Oblates *titulo perpetuo* to a central mission house in southern Alberta. According to Dontenwill, the Oblates’ title had been transferred to Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart when Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s was raised to the status of a cathedral. Therefore, by expelling the Oblates from Sacré-Cœur/Sacred-Heart, the bishop had infringed on the property rights of the congregation. Such an infringement could only have one acceptable form of reparation:

Cette réparation ne saurait être que la réintégration des Oblats dans la paroisse du Sacré-Cœur. Nous ne disons pas du P. Jan (ne voulant pas embarrasser la S[acrée] C[ongrégation] de son cas individuel), mais des Oblats. Si cette réparation n’était pas accordée, il nous deviendrait très difficile et presque impossible […] de maintenir nos Pères dans le diocèse de Calgary […] Cette réintégration de la part de l’Evêque ne diminuera pas son autorité, bien au contraire : elle lui rendra en autorité ce que l’expulsion lui a fait perdre.

Dontenwill’s argument revolved around the issues of episcopal authority and the rights of religious communities. He insisted that the two did not exist in an antithetical relationship. Secular and regular clergy could collaborate profitably, provided that firebrands like Jan be kept under control. Significantly, Dontenwill made no mention of French-English conflict in the Diocese of Calgary. He presented the Oblates’ expulsion as the upshot of a jurisdictional dispute, not as an indication of ethno-linguistic conflict.

While the Sacred Consistorial Congregation deliberated over Dontenwill’s appeal, McNally ordered the Oblates to relinquish Saint Patrick’s parish in Lethbridge, together with its dependent missions. On December 13, 1915, the bishop sent an eviction notice to the Oblate Vicar of Missions of Alberta and declared his intention “to place the said parish and missions in charge of the clergy of the diocese of Calgary.” The Oblates’ charge was to expire on Saturday, January 16, 1916.

This news came as a shock to Grandin. He had not expected the

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103 DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1116, Dontenwill to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, Rome, November 22, 1915.
105 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 665, Box 16, McNally to Grandin, Calgary, December 13, 1915.
bishop to instal secular priests beyond Calgary’s city limits. Believing that Lethbridge could only be served by a polyglot and bi-ritual clergy, Grandin had anticipated that Saint Patrick’s and its dependent missions would remain securely in the Oblates’ care. Two years earlier, a confident Grandin had reported to the Oblate General Administration: “Je ne crois pas que […] Mgr. McNally pense à nous prendre Lethbridge […] L’Evêque ne trouvera aucun séculier qui consentira à faire ce que nos Pères font […] [I]l faut parler français, anglais, allemand et ruthène pour desservir convenablement cette ville et ses dépendances, et on ne trouve pas tous les jours des linguistes capables de parler toutes ces langues.”106 From Grandin’s perspective, Oblates were indispensable in Lethbridge due to their specialized skills and their adaptability to the changing exigencies of the local laity.

Grandin therefore refused to surrender Saint Patrick’s to secular clergy. On Christmas Eve, 1915, he sent a bold message to the Bishop of Calgary and vowed that the Oblates of Lethbridge would hold their ground:

Je regrette de ne pouvoir me rendre aux désirs de Votre Grandeur en ce qui concerne la paroisse de St. Patrick de Lethbridge, mais tant que je n’aurai pas reçu de Rome le conseil ou l’ordre de retirer nos missionnaires de cette ville, ils resteront à leur poste […] [J]e ne puis ni ne veux céder à la pression que Votre Grandeur voudrait exercer sur moi. Au dessus du conseil de l’Ordinaire de Calgary, il y a un tribunal déjà saisi de nos reclamations et dont le jugement réglera nos droits respectifs. J’attends ce jugement, et jusqu’à ce qu’il soit rendu, je résisterai par tous les moyens de droit à toute tentative d’expulsion […]107

Oblates now stood in open opposition to the Bishop of Calgary and invoked the higher authority of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation — “[l]e tribunal déjà saisí de nos réclamations.” Grandin insisted that there was no tenable justification for expelling the Oblates from Lethbridge and assured McNally that “la paroisse de St. Patrick et les nombreuses missions qui en dépendent sont desservies aussi convenablement qu’aucune autre mission de son diocèse.”108 Convinced that these missions would suffer under secular clergy, Grandin held fast to the hope that the Sacred Consistorial Congregation would recognize the importance of preserving the Oblates’ ministry.

Shortly after reissuing his eviction notice on January 10, 1916, McNally received a message from Apostolic Delegate Stagni ordering him to

106 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 889, Box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, December 10, 1913.
107 DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1114, Grandin to McNally, Edmonton, December 24, 1915.
108 Ibid.
undertake no further action against the Oblates until the Holy See had rendered its verdict. In response to this communiqué, McNally embarked on a journey to Italy with the intention of defending his actions before the Sacred Consistorial Congregation. He sojourned in Rome for the remainder of the winter and the entire spring, not returning to his diocese until mid-July. During this period, McNally met formally with Dontenwill and Gaetano Cardinal De Lai, prefect of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation. The outcome of their meeting was a mutual agreement signed by all three parties on June 2, 1916:

(1) Les Oblats continueront d’administrer “ad nutum Sanctae Sedis” les deux paroisses suivantes:
   (a) de S. Patrick, à Lethbridge,
   (b) de S. Michel, à Pincher Creek.
(2) Les Pères Oblats desserviront tous les postes qu’ils occupent actuellement, ainsi que les différentes missions dépendantes des deux paroisses sus-mentionnées, jusqu’à ce que l’Évêque de Calgary puisse leur substituer, dans ces desserte, des prêtres séculiers, ou que, de leur côté, les Oblats soient dans la nécessité de s’en retirer […]
(3) La Congrégation des Oblats desservira les Missions des Réserves suivantes : Pieds Noirs, Piégeois, Gens du Sang, et pourvoira aux visites nécessaires de la Réserve des Sarcees, aussi longtemps que l’Ordinaire aura besoin d’eux pour ces services.

The agreement set clear limits on the respective powers of the Bishop of Calgary and the Oblate Vicar of Missions. Neither could replace or remove Oblates without giving due notice — “à temps et dans les formes voulues” — to the other party. Essentially, this arrangement preserved the clerical distribution that had existed immediately prior to McNally’s departure for Rome: Oblates would continue to care for rural parishes and missions, while secular clergy would administer Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary, Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart, and Saint Joseph’s (formerly Saint Benedict’s) in Calgary. McNally may have decided against

109 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 666, Box 16, McNally to Grandin, Calgary, January 10, 1916; Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, p. 117.
110 “Returns After a Long Illness,” Calgary News-Telegram, July 18, 1916; Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, p. 117.
111 Hamelin and Gagnon, Histoire du catholicisme québécois, p. 110.
112 DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1115, “Convention faite de commun accord entre le Révérend Monseigneur Augustin Dontenwill, Supérieur Général des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, et le Révérend Monseigneur Jean [sic] T. McNally [sic],” signed Dontenwill, McNally, and De Lai, Rome, June 2, 1916. See also Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, p. 239.
113 DCA, OMI and Bishop McNally, 38.1115, “Convention faite de commun accord.”
114 Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, pp. 156–157.
pressing his claim on Saint Patrick’s after receiving an undated petition, signed by nearly 300 parishioners, entreating him not to remove the Oblates as “the interests of the parish . . . cannot be entrusted to better hands than theirs.” The effect of this petition on the bishop’s thinking is unclear, but his acceptance of the above-mentioned terms suggests a keen awareness of the linguistic requirements of his diocese. McNally retained the services of Oblates in areas with particularly large non-English-speaking congregations — Lethbridge, Pincher Creek, and First Nations reserves. After ratification of the agreement, Saint Patrick’s received an anglophone pastor, James Francis McCaffrey OMI, but its outlying missions remained in the care of the French missionaries Pierre-Marie Cozanet OMI and Jules Bidault OMI and the Polish Silesian missionary Anton Sylla OMI. Oblates continued to administer the parish until 1990. Quebec-born missionaries Léandre Pilon OMI and Alfred Demers OMI remained in charge of Saint-Michel and its dependent missions. The parish would not pass into the care of secular clergy until 1967.

Beyond the terms of the agreement brokered in Rome, the Bishop of Calgary endeavoured to retain the services of Oblates in several small communities with non-English-speaking residents. During his long absence overseas, McNally instructed his deputy, Vicar General Hetherington, to ensure that Oblates continued their pastoral visits to German-, Polish-, and Ukrainian-speaking congregations near Beiseker, Tide Lake, Anthracite, Bankhead, Exshaw, Gap, Castle Mountain, and Gleichen. This was entirely consistent with the bishop’s ongoing efforts to erect new parishes and to procure ethnic clergy for Polish- and Ukrainian-speaking laypeople throughout his diocese. McNally even covered Sylla’s travel expenses to and from Polish-speaking settlements

116 For information on the Oblates’ tenure of these parishes and missions post-1916, see Knowles, Winds of Change, pp. 180–183.
120 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 71.220, Item 666, Box 16, Hetherington to Grandin, Calgary, March 9, 1916; Item 666, Box 16, Grandin to Hetherington, Calgary, March 14, 1916; Item 666, Box 16, Grandin to McNally, Edmonton, December 29, 1916; Sylla, Memoirs, pp. 38–39, 54, 57, 97–104; Carrière, Dictionnaire biographique, vol. 4, pp. 262–263; Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, pp. 438–441.
121 Sylla, Memoirs, p. 39; Knowles, Winds of Change, p. 404; McGowan, “A Portion for the Vanquished,” p. 230; Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross, pp. 185–186.
west of Calgary. “To me personally, the Bishop was very kind,” recalled Sylla in his memoirs. “From 1914 up to 1917, he provided me with a pass on the CPR line in southern Alberta.” Concurrently, McNally oversaw the French-language missions of Léon Doucet OMI and Gustave Simonin OMI to newly arrived French-Canadian settlers at Cluny and Ouelletteville, near Blackfoot Crossing. Thus Oblates continued to tend their multi-ethnic and multilingual flock in southern Alberta after 1916, but they did so under the supervisory authority of a local bishop.

**Conclusion**

References to ethno-linguistic conflict are conspicuously absent from Oblate commentary on the origins of the Diocese of Calgary. This absence suggests that Oblates in southern Alberta were not conscious participants in a struggle between French and Irish clergy. Far from constituting a monolithic “French” faction, Oblates had developed a unique collective identity as members of a multi-ethnic, multilingual, and bi-ritual missionary corps. Since the 1890s, they had recruited Polish, German, Belgian, French, Irish, and Canadian clergy in response to the rapid ethno-linguistic diversification of the local laity. Concurrently, they had striven to de-gallicize their ministry in response to the declining presence of francophones in southern Alberta (as French-Canadian and Franco-American immigrants were generally channelled northward into the prairies). De-gallicization entailed the suppression of French-Canadian expressions of Catholicism — particularly the soutane — and the barring of francophone missionaries deemed excessively partisan. It also disposed Oblates favourably toward the appointment of an “Irish” bishop. Oblates anticipated that such an appointment would advance their campaign to dissociate the Church from its most conspicuously French-Canadian trappings. McNally was therefore perceived as a potential collaborator in a process that Oblates themselves had initiated. After his enthronement, the bishop showed little inclination to adopt a more thoroughgoing policy of anglicization. On the contrary, he perpetuated most of the Oblates’ linguistic strategies and retained their services in missions and parishes with sizeable non-English-speaking populations.

Rather than conceptualize their conflict with McNally as a struggle between ethno-linguistic factions, Oblates considered themselves victims of an episcopal assault on the autonomy of religious communities. They perceived the Bishop of Calgary as an autocrat bent on centralizing ecclesiastical authority by reining in regular clergy and installing secular

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122 Sylla, Memoires, p. 82.
personnel under his direct supervision. This perception was informed by the experiences of English-speaking religious in urban parishes — notably Richard McGrath D’Alton OMI (Sainte-Marie/Saint Mary’s parish), the Benedictines of Ampleforth (St. Benedict’s parish), and the Ursulines de Chavagnes (Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart parish). While discerning a general pattern, if not a coherent policy, behind McNally’s treatment of regular clergy in urban Calgary, Oblates did not openly challenge the bishop until they felt that their continued presence in rural missions was at issue. Their expulsion from their central mission house (Sacré-Cœur/Sacred Heart) and their near expulsion from Lethbridge prompted urgent appeals to the Holy See and a firm refusal to submit to episcopal bullying. Underlying this resistance was the conviction that Oblates alone possessed the requisite skills and international connections to tend the multilingual and multi-ethnic flock scattered throughout southern Alberta. They alone could sustain a missionary campaign that extended — as Grandin had once declared — to “toutes les nations du monde.”

124 PAA, OMI Collection, Accession 84.400, Item 888, box 30, Grandin to Dozois, Edmonton, March 9, 1913.