

Joseph Israel Tarte: Relations between the French Canadian Episcopacy and a French Canadian Politician (1874-1896)

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No political history of French Canada after Confederation is complete if it fails to discuss the relations of French Canadian politicians with the French Canadian episcopacy. Here, political issues find their proper perspective and the influence of the one element upon the other comes to light. Especially is this so when the politician involved is Joseph Israel Tarte, the pugnacious editor of *Le Canadien* and perhaps the most astute politician of his era. Confronting him, at times, though not often, agreeing with him, and constantly battling him, were a battalion of some of the most formidable churchmen in Canadian history, churchmen with the courage, dedication and initiative which produce saints and pioneers.

It is hardly necessary to point out that the discussion of such relations is a difficult task. This difficulty is accentuated when the historian is a French Canadian and a Roman Catholic. Inspired by respect for his subject, he is bound to be affected by the divisions and needless arguments which sapped the vitality of his people and his Church. Certain politicians will impress him by their fiery dedication, the wealth of their genius and the depth of their comprehension. Others will strike him as demagogues who hid self-seeking aims under the protective mantle of respectful obedience.

The bishops themselves present him with a startling problem and unless he is willing to consider them only as historical entities he may as well abandon this task and chose another topic of discussion. A Laflèche, a Bourget, or a Langevin may demonstrate the perfect picture of holiness and detachment from the things of the world; yet the historian cannot escape the conviction that in spite of all their sanctity they were responsible for a great misrepresentation in Canadian history. He may be tempted, if not determined, to insist that the bishops were not indulging in politics when they mercilessly attacked Liberals. However, he will find it almost impossible to reconcile this idea with the historical facts; many of the episcopacy and clergy, as Rome so often charged, failed to treat both political parties with the same impartiality.

This writer believes that the causes of the politico-religious difficulties of the later half of the nineteenth century are to be found first, in the necessary strategy of political warfare, secondly, in a false conception of the place of the Roman Catholic Church in Confederation, and thirdly, in a struggle for power and independence between the ecclesiastical and political authorities.

It is unfortunate for a Roman Catholic historian to have to record that bishops became the tools of politicians. For years the Liberal party cowered under threats of extinction, excommunication and sinful alliance. The bishops were condemning a moral evil when they condemned Catholic Liberalism, but their refusal to see a difference between the liberalism of Laurier and the liberalism they were condemning left them vulnerable to charges of “*inégalité de traitement*” and of deliberate attempts at “*confusion*” in their repeated determination to equate the French Canadian Liberal party with the destructive liberalism of Europe.¹ Forced to overlook the Conservative’s strategy of using doctrinal pronouncements for political purposes, the episcopacy slowly became identified with the Conservative party and thus lost much of the moral and spiritual leadership it was meant to exercise.²

The second reason stated above would also account for the division in the episcopacy itself. Archbishop Taschereau of Quebec and Bishop Emard of Valleyfield realized the peculiar position of the Church and refused to participate in the conflict and upheaval which a definite and uncompromising episcopal position would cause. This, the liberal position, if one may call it that, was basically the position assumed by the majority of the English-speaking bishops who attributed the rise of anti-Catholic sentiment among Protestants to the “*devious policy*” of the Ultramontane bishops.³

As for the struggle for power and independence, it will be seen to have arisen out of the determination of French Canadian politicians and journalists to be masters in the few fields of intellectual endeavour left to them. Few politicians were willing to be dictated to, especially when the entire Protestant population had their eyes riveted upon them and when the dangers and fear of a religious war and a loss of French Canadian influence in all parts of the Dominion appeared to be the only outcome of episcopal dictation.

This paper will attempt to demonstrate these three recurring themes in the politico-religious conflict, the first two in relation to Tarte’s ultramontanism and the last in the light of his later liberalism. Tarte is in many ways a typical French Canadian politician seeking independence of action. Since he was an Ultramontane in the first years of his public career and became a Liberal in the later ones, he represents both sides of the conflict. As an Ultramontane he accepted the policy of episcopal and clerical intervention in politics which he later challenged, combatted and finally renounced.

Joseph Israel Tarte became an Ultramontane in the spring of 1875. Prior to this date he had been a close follower of Sir Georges Etienne Cartier and had accepted his political philosophy which implied a respect for the Church, but not

¹ Episcopal Archives of Montreal, Eugène Lafontaine to Archbishop Bruchési, June 24, 1896. (Episcopal Archives of Montreal hereafter cited as EAM).

² Archives of the Bourassa Family, Bourassa to Bishop Emard, April 1, 1912.

³ EAM., The Archbishop of Toronto to the Archbishop of Montreal, November 10, 1915.

a servile obedience to it. From this philosophy he had been converted, as he wrote to Archbishop Taschereau, “par des études dans lesquelles j’ai été guidé par des prêtres dévoués qui s’intéressaient à moi.”⁴ Deeply religious, he succumbed to this influence and decided that conservatism was in reality ultramontanism and the Liberal party, liberalism.⁵ His ultramontanism included the dedication, the zeal and the limitations which characterized all Ultramontane politicians. It is in Tarte’s participation in the struggle over clerical intimidation of voters and in his editorials and pamphlets, that his services to the “good” cause may best be studied.

Three elections were contested because of clerical intervention: Charlevoix and Bonaventure in 1876 and Berthier in 1880. The most important of these was Charlevoix and it is here for the first time that Tarte displayed the ability which was to make him a formidable journalist, just as the electoral campaign prior to the contest had made him an accomplished political organizer.

In January 1876, Hector Langevin, who had succeeded Cartier as the head of the French Canadian Conservative party, was elected in the constituency of Charlevoix. Tarte, who was in charge of the campaign, questioned the Liberals’ political philosophy and associated it with the Catholic-Liberalism condemned in the episcopal letter of September, 1875. In this letter Catholic-Liberalism was defined as the philosophy which proposed that: “Il ne faut tenir aucun compte des principes religieux dans la discussion des affaires publiques.... Le clergé n’a de fonctions à remplir qu’à l’Eglise et à la Sacristie.... Le peuple doit en politique pratiquer l’indépendance morale.” The bishops also affirmed their prerogative to intervene in politics by their solemn declaration: “Il y a des questions politiques où le clergé peut et même doit intervenir au nom de la religion” and they reserved to themselves the right to condemn a politician and even a political party. Insisting that Catholics had no right to forbid the Church “le droit de se défendre, ou plutôt de défendre les intérêts spirituels des âmes qui lui sont confiées,” they declared that since the Church was composed of the clergy, to deny the latter this right was to refuse it to the Church.⁶ It was thus apparent to their Excellencies that Catholic-Liberalism was being carried on in Canada. No sooner had the letter been issued than it was applied against the Liberals who argued relentlessly that their party was political liberalism and not the condemned Catholic-Liberalism, but with no success.

Parish priests of Charlevoix helped the Conservatives immensely as they transformed the pulpit into a political tribunal and called the benedictions of heaven on those who voted for the “good” candidate, Langevin, and threatened the followers of P. Tremblay, the Liberal candidate, with the maledictions of hell

⁴ *Le Canadien*, April 5, 1877

⁵ *Ibid.*, March 20, 1875.

⁶ “Lettre Pastorale des Evêques de la Province Ecclésiastique de Québec,” September 22, 1875 in *Mandements, Lettres Pastorales, Circulaires et autres documents publiés dans le Diocèse de Montréal*, VII, 209 ff.

and eternal damnation. In retaliation the Liberals threatened to contest the validity of the election before the Courts of Justice, and they proceeded to do so as soon as Langevin was elected. F. Langelier, one of the best legal minds of French Canada and a professor at Laval University, agreed to argue that the clergy of Charlevoix had been guilty of *influence indue spirituelle* through their intimidation of the voters. Tarte, could not, of course, accept the charge that to preach, an exercise of priestly duty, was in effect intimidation; and so the battle began.

Tarte rejected Langelier's assertion that the clergy had taken part in the election in favour of a particular party. He claimed in his newspaper that if the Conservatives had preached such novel nonsense as the Liberals, the Church would not have hesitated to use her authority to crush the party. To him the justification for the participation of the clergy in politics resolved itself in one fundamental question: "Le vote est-il un acte susceptible d'être bon ou méchant?" Answering the question in the affirmative, he was able to argue that someone, therefore, had the duty "d'éclairer les consciences" when voters were about to exercise their prerogative. This duty fell to the Church which had been founded to lead men to their eternal destinies. This mission she accomplished through her bishops and priests, whose responsibility it was to counsel their flock against a certain course of action, to make laws and to apply sanctions. Thus it was admissible that a priest had the right to say to a penitent or to preach from the pulpit that certain acts were sinful. On the other hand, no one could seriously hold that "le juge civil viendra se poser en face du prêtre et répondre: Vous ministre de Jésus-Christ, vous qui avez la mission de conduire les consciences, vous vous êtes trompé, il n'y a pas péché dans l'acte que vous représentez comme tel à cet homme." And since Catholic-Liberalism and political liberalism were, in his eyes, the same thing, the clergy were perfectly justified in condemning it and those who disobeyed them.⁷

Tarte's articles became so violent that Langelier threatened to have him arrested for intimidation of witnesses and contempt of court. Tarte refused to be deterred and answered Langelier with even more violent articles.⁸ In August Langelier's patience was exhausted. On the twenty-first the Court issued the warrant for Tarte's arrest but on account of the illness of Justice Routhier, his case was delayed until the thirtieth. He was then sentenced to fifteen days in jail or to a forty-dollar fine. Tarte insisted on the jail term. To friends who wished to pay the fine, he declared: "Ce n'est pas une question d'argent, on doit le comprendre."⁹ However the cold dungeons of La Malbaie remained closed to him. After a moving departure from Quebec he arrived at the place where he was to be imprisoned, only to discover that some solicitous friend had paid his fine.¹⁰

⁷ *Le Canadien*, August 9, 1876.

⁸ *Ibid.*, see the article of July 10, 1876.

⁹ *Ibid.*, September 1, 1876.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, September 4, 1876.

Thus Tarte was deprived of his martyrdom.

Tarte, not content with attacking Langelier and the Liberals, proceeded to question the orthodoxy of the teaching of the University. It was a fixed idea with the Ultramontanes that Laval was the breeder of Gallicanism and liberalism. The idea of contesting elections for *influence indue* was said to have originated there,¹¹ and no memorandum to the Holy See on the politico-religious conflict was complete unless many sections and appendices were devoted to the evil influence of Laval. Bishop Laflèche of Three Rivers led the attack on the University and it was even said that when he dashed to Rome in 1883 he brought with him “trois mille livres pesant de documents pour appuyer son mémoire et terrasser l’Archevêque et l’Université.” This prompted the old Archbishop of Quebec to admit candidly: “Si cela est vrai ... la fin du monde arrivera avant qu’on ait étudié tout cela.”¹²

Even though Tarte declared that: “nous n’attendons en aucune manière attaquer l’enseignement de l’Université,”¹³ he had, nevertheless, written an article in which he seriously questioned it:

Je suis père de famille: de mes lecteurs, beaucoup ont ce bonheur; voudrions-nous confier l’éducation de nos enfants à des professeurs qui font ouvertement la lutte contre les principes immuables de la vérité catholique? Pour moi, jamais je ne consentirai à exposer mes enfants au danger d’un contact constant avec des hommes que je sais professeur des idées fausses sur l’Eglise et la société...¹⁴

The Archbishop, considering the article as an affront to his supervision of the University and as an attack on its soundness of doctrine, could not possibly ignore Tarte’s remarks. He cancelled his subscription to *Le Canadien*. The faculty of the University and the members of religious houses did likewise. To Tarte there remained but one course of action, an appeal to Rome.¹⁵ The Roman authorities duly read his defense and then relegated his documents to the already high mountain of papers relating to the Province of Quebec. It would appear that in these troubled times the Catholic population of Quebec gave more trouble to the papacy than the rest of Christendom.

In November 1876, Justice Routhier announced his decision regarding the Charlevoix trial.¹⁶ Routhier stated that the law defined *influence indue* as the attempt by force, intimidation and threats to prevent an elector from voting or to

¹¹ Collège Ste Marie Archives, M. Bellenger to M^{gr} Laflèche, May 22, 1877

¹² EAM., Mg^r Taschereau to M^{gr} Fabre, May 9, 1883.

¹³ *Le Canadien*, July 28, 1876.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, July 6, 1876.

¹⁵ See Tarte’s letter to Cardinal Franchi published in *Le Canadien*, September, 1876.

¹⁶ A. B. Routhier was an Ultramontane who had taken an important part in the drafting of *Le Programme Catholique* in 1871.

compel him to vote against his persuasion. This was *influence indue temporelle*. Nowhere in the law was there mention of *influence indue spirituelle* and therefore in the eyes of the Court it did not exist. Since preaching was one of the most important functions of the clergy, he declared, the law was not construed to limit its liberty and its application. The priests of Charlevoix were fulfilling their priestly duties when from the pulpit they declared liberalism an evil which Catholics could not fall into. That Tremblay was associated with what they were condemning was no fault of theirs. Routhier accordingly rejected the petition and declared Langevin elected.¹⁷

The Liberals sensing that their very existence depended upon a clarification of the issue of *influence indue* appealed to the Supreme Court. There in February 1877, the decision of the Ultramontane judge was reversed and Justice Taschereau, the brother of the Archbishop of Quebec, declared that the sermons of the clergy had to be considered as “actes d’influence indue de la pire espèce.” The Court felt that “un système général d’intimidation a été poussé, et l’on ne peut considérer que les électeurs ont eu le libre exercice de leur franchise.”¹⁸ Thus Langevin was found not to have been elected.

This was a severe blow to the Ultramontanes. Yet Tarte limited his remarks to declaring that the Supreme Court, being a Liberal creation and staffed with Liberals, would obviously pronounce itself in favour of the Liberal candidate. Not content with finding political implications in the decision, Tarte hinted that the Archbishop of Quebec and the priests surrounding him might have exercised pressure on justice Taschereau. The Archbishop publicly censured him, which prompted Bishop Laflèche to call Tarte: “Le plus courageux défenseur de la vérité.”¹⁹ However, Tarte recanted and in a letter to the Archbishop apologized, declaring himself an Ultramontane whose first duty was to proclaim submission to religious authority.²⁰ His private apologies were repeated publicly in an editorial in which he confessed that in his defense of religious principles he had committed errors which he would now mend “en faisant mieux” and placed “au service de l’Eglise ma bonne volonté et mon travail” should these be of any use.²¹

The decision of the Supreme Court necessitated a new election. The issues involved were the same as in the previous one, and though there was talk of protection, the railway project and general criticism of Liberal policies, essentially the election revolved around the relation of religion to politics and the

¹⁷ Son Honneur le Juge Routhier, *Jugement – Contestation de l’Election de l’Hon. Hector Langevin* (Quebec, 1876).

¹⁸ Jugement of the Supreme Court quoted in R. Rumilly, *M^{gr} Laflèche et son Temps* (Montreal, 1938), p. 113.

¹⁹ Episcopal Archives Rimouski, M^{gr} Laflèche to M^{gr} Langevin, April 18, 1877.

²⁰ Letter to Archbishop Taschereau published in *Le Canadien*, April 5, 1877.

²¹ *Le Canadien*, April 6, 1877.

role of the clergy in the political life of the province.²² Tarte even wired Langevin: “Traitez plus la question de l’influence indue, c’est important et il n’y a pas de danger de se compromettre.”²³ The Archbishop of Quebec forbade his priests to intervene but Tarte advised the electors to go and consult their *curé*. There was no doubt in his mind that the priests would tell the voters that “voter cette année pour M. Tremblay, c’est pire que l’an passé.”²⁴

In spite of Tarte’s efforts Langevin's majority decreased from two hundred and eleven to sixty votes. The difference was hard to explain and Tarte did not attempt to do so. It is conceivable that the sermons of the clergy had been more influential than Routhier was prepared to admit. In the campaign of 1877 the clergy remained silent on the question of liberalism and the results were startlingly different.

By this time the position of Archbishop Taschereau had altered considerably. The episcopal *Mandement* of 1875 had propelled a fierce Protestant reaction. The Liberal Prime Minister writing to Edward Blake a few days after it had been issued was well aware at whom it was directed and concluded that if the “Liberal Roman Catholics are trampled down by clerical despotism the Protestant wire fence will not long defend liberty of thought and action or Protestant rights in Quebec.”²⁵ Huntingdon, a Cabinet Minister from Quebec, saw grave dangers in the episcopal declaration. He was convinced that the time had arrived “for an English point of view, to resist the pretensions of the clergy,”²⁶ and shortly before the end of 1875 he delivered a public address in which he professed his faith in liberalism and refused to accept clerical intervention and direction in politics.

To prevent the dangers of a religious war descending upon the country and to better the Liberal position, Joseph Cauchon, the editor of *Le Journal de Québec*, a Liberal Cabinet Minister and a skillful politician, advised Archbishop Taschereau that Catholic-Liberalism and political liberalism were not identical. He also hinted that a definite and categorical statement by the Church authorities on liberalism would be dangerous to French Canadian interests and harmful to their place in Confederation.²⁷ Under his influence and that of priests surrounding him, the Archbishop decided that the interpretation given to the *Mandement* of September 1875 was erroneous and that the episcopacy would do well to reconsider its position. Accordingly he wrote to all the bishops of his

²² *Ibid.*, March 25, 1877.

²³ Archives de la Province de Québec, Chapais collection, Tarte to Langevin, March 6, 1877.

²⁴ Quoted in Rumilly, *Laflèche*, p. 114.

²⁵ Public Archives of Ontario, Blake Papers, Mackenzie to Blake, September 28, 1875.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Huntingdon’s son to Blake June 1, 1876.

²⁷ Public Archives of Ontario, Mackenzie Papers, see the Joseph Cauchon Correspondence.

province:

Grand nombre de personnes ont compris que le mandement collectif du 22 septembre dernier, est dirigé contre le parti ministériel fédéral. D'autres le nient. On demande pourquoi les Evêques de la Province Ecclésiastique de Québec ne se prononcent-ils pas catégoriquement ? M^{gr} Lynch s'est déclaré ouvertement partisan de ce ministère et il est probable que son sentiment est partagé par ses suffragants et par les Evêques de la Province d'Halifax....

Le parti ministériel fédéral est-il condamnable et condamné? Quels seront les conséquences d'un *oui* ou d'un *non* ? Voilà un redoutable problème qui se dresse devant moi. J'ai beau prier et méditer, je n'en vois pas encore clairement la solution. Je suis peut-être pusillanime, on m'accusera peut-être de tendances libérales, comme on l'a déjà fait; je me résignerai volontiers à supporter pour un temps ces injustes soupçons, de peur d'être obligé à regretter plus tard d'avoir conduit la barque à un abîme sans fond.²⁸

In their replies the bishops refused to accept their Archbishop's leadership and advice. All understood by the letter of September, if not a definite condemnation of the Liberal party, at least a condemnation "en autant qu'il est imbuë de ces erreurs."²⁹ As for the attitude of the English-speaking bishops, Bishop Moreau of Saint-Hyacinthe found that "leurs nationalités, leurs moeurs, leur discipline et leur manière de voir et de faire sont différentes des nôtres et peut-être trouvent-ils comme certains Evêques des Etats-Unis que les Evêques du Bas Canada sont trop *sacristains*."³⁰ Archbishop Taschereau refusing to be intimidated, issued a *Mandement* to his diocese on May 25, 1876 in which he categorically declared: "Nous ne venons pas N.C.F. vous dire de voter pour tel parti ou pour tel candidat, plutôt que pour tel autre." At the same time he forbade his priests to have anything to do with politics, or even to discuss them from the pulpit.³¹ The letter was seized by the Liberals as a defence against the continued and repeated attacks of the Conservatives who were infuriated by the Archbishop's action.

The Archbishop thus rejected the essential notion of French Canadian ultramontanism: the favoured position of the Church in Canadian Confederation. Ultramontanes believed that the Church in the Province of Quebec had been greatly sustained by Confederation. The division of powers between a central and provincial authority, the particular nature of the Quebec people, their Catholicism, their majority in the province: all these conditions made possible, in their eyes, a conception of government which was fundamentally that of the

²⁸ EAM, M^{gr} Taschereau to M^{gr} Fabre, March 3, 1876. Typical of the letters to all other Bishops.

²⁹ Archives of the Seminary of Three Rivers, M^{gr} Lafèche to M^{gr} Taschereau, March 26, 1876. Answer typical.

³⁰ Episcopal Archives of St. Hyacinthe, M^{gr} Moreau to M^{gr} Taschereau, March 8, 1876.

³¹ Collège Ste Marie Archives, *Mandement de M^{gr} Taschereau*, May 25, 1876.

middle ages. The *Programme Catholique* of 1871 which saw the birth of militant ultramontanism stipulated that “nous devons sans doute rendre grâce à Dieu de la pleine et entière liberté que la constitution de notre pays accorde, en droit, au culte catholique de se régir et de se gouverner conformément aux règles de l’Eglise.”³² This idea was never abandoned by the Ultramontanes even after 1874 when the *Programme* was no longer used as a political manifesto.

When he became an Ultramontane, Tarte accepted this interpretation and what it implied: namely, clerical intervention in politics. In open letters to Hector Langevin, in August 1880, he defended this idea and at the same time presented the Conservative party with a new philosophy and platform. He placed it in the defense of the clergy for:

Pour nous Canadiens-français la question des droits du clergé est la première en importance. C’est au clergé que nous sommes redevables de la force que nous avons acquise, et de la conservation de notre autonomie.... Le clergé fut le fondateur, le père de la nation canadienne française. Groupés autour de nos clochers nous avons progressé, grandi. Nous sommes devenus assez forts pour regarder sans frayer l’avenir, si nous ne démolissons pas les fondations qui soutiennent l’édifice que nous avons élevé au prix de tant de sacrifices et de labeur.³³

The same ideas were contained in a pamphlet Tarte published in the same year entitled: *Le Clergé, Ses Droits, Nos Devoirs*. After an historical sketch of the contribution of the Church to French Canada, he asserted that the province would remain French, “qu’en autant quelle sera attachée à l’Eglise qui l’a enfantée à la vie des peuples, qui a veillé sur elle avec toute la tendresse d’une mère au cœur pur et généreux.”³⁴ As a true Ultramontane, he advocated “l’union dans notre foi, le dévouement à nos institutions religieuses, un soin jaloux des libertés de notre culte, une inviolable soumission aux enseignements de Rome, une large place – la plus large – à la hiérarchie catholique dans notre organisation sociale.”³⁵

The above pamphlet was written in 1880. Three years later Tarte had abandoned ultramontanism and had been reconverted to the political philosophy of liberal-conservatism as exemplified by Joseph Adolphe Chapleau. The reasons for this change are difficult to assess, yet from the pages of *Le Canadien* the change of attitude which made it possible can be ascertained.

Tarte had been an intelligent and dedicated Ultramontane. He had battled relentlessly for its principles and philosophy. He had attempted to point out to

³² A. Savaète, *Vers l’Abîme*, (12 vols., Paris, 1912), II, 101.

³³ Open letters to Hector Langevin published in *Le Canadien*, August 4, 5, 6, 7, 1880. This particular letter is dated August 5, 1880.

³⁴ J. I. Tarte, *Le Clergé, Ses Droits, Nos Devoirs* (Quebec, 1880), p. 87. (35) *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Bishop Conroy, the Apostolic Delegate sent by Rome in 1877 to investigate the relations of Church and State, the dangers of liberalism. Tarte had also agitated in the legislature for an amendment to the electoral law which would make impossible the charge of *influence indue spirituelle*,³⁶ thus consecrating the principle of clerical intervention. Yet he had failed. The undaunted Irishman who represented the Pope scorned the Ultramontanes and ordered the episcopacy to “let political parties fight their own battles, and let the dead bury the dead.”³⁷ As for the amendment to the electoral law, Chapleau, the Premier, could not undertake it because “je suis forcé de reconnaître que les récriminations violentes, les représailles injustes, que notre action pourrait soulever chez nos frères séparés sont dangereuses pour notre société et doivent être évitées.”³⁸

However, Tarte could not disregard the damage which the unconciliatory ultramontane position caused. He saw that the people of the province had slowly become aware of a conflict and a division between the bishops. Newspapers quoted conflicting arguments, politicians questioned the orthodoxy of episcopal and clerical pronouncements and courts of justice appraised the moral impact of sermons. By 1883 all religious and political matters had become inextricably involved. The establishment of a university in Montreal, the division of a diocese, the sale of a railway, the dismissal of a Lieutenant-Governor brought on a political and religious war. Clerical intervention in politics had become a source of bitter conflict as parishioners walked out of churches,³⁹ priests were beaten⁴⁰ and bishops criticized on hustings and in newspapers. Meanwhile political intervention in ecclesiastical affairs endangered the security and autonomy of the Church, accentuating and publicizing the division among the French Canadian episcopacy.

Tarte saw his province divided by internal conflicts “qui ruinent ses forces vives” and made stable government almost impossible.⁴¹ The divisions between bishops, priests, institutions and political leaders suddenly appeared to him as a source of scandal, a waste of strength and energy. He was ready, therefore, to put an end to all these quarrels and when, in February 1883, the long awaited and apparently definitive papal pronouncement on the question of the university

³⁶ The letter of Tarte to Archbishop Taschereau and the latter’s reply (February, 1878) were published in *Le Canadien*, November 21, 1881. See also Tarte’s correspondence with Bishops Moreau and Laflèche in the Episcopal Archives of St. Hyacinthe and Three Rivers.

³⁷ Archives of the Seminary of Three Rivers, M^{sr} Conroy to M^{sr} Laflèche, April 2, 1878. The Delegate was also influential in the drafting of an episcopal letter in October 1877 which consecrated the principle of nonintervention.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapleau to M^{sr} Laflèche, April 26, 1881.

³⁹ Public Archives of Ontario, Mackenzie Papers, Cauchon to Mackenzie, January 17, 1876.

⁴⁰ For example: election of Bonaventure in January 1877.

⁴¹ *Le Canadien*, January 4, 1883.

was promulgated he was prepared to accept it.⁴² Unfortunately for the peace of the province he was one of the few who did, as the majority of the Ultramontane press and politicians denounced it on the grounds that Rome had been misinformed. Tarte in *Le Canadien* confronted them with the fallacy of their position.

He had always insisted that the first duty of an Ultramontane was obedience to the orders of Rome. Time and time again he had acted, as he said, as if “mon étoile polaire, c’est Rome: ma boussole, c’est le Saint Siège.”⁴³ On March 20, 1883 he delivered to the Ultramontanes what *La Patrie* called “un coup d’assommoir.” With great precision he revealed: “Roma locuta est.” The conclusion was inevitable: “causa finita est.” The task of all was now to obey: “notre devoir est tout tracé; il faut obéir.”⁴⁴ This theme was maintained from February onwards until the battle subsided. He insisted that the fomenters of sedition and revolt must be silenced, their influence destroyed and their “nefarious work” ended. Before God, before the Church, before their religious brothers, Trudel and *L’Etendard*, Bishop Laflèche and the *Journal des Trois Rivières*, Tardivel and *La Vérité* were intriguers who “par leur orgueilleux entêtement, ont amené la crise douloureuse que nous traversons.”⁴⁵ As bishop *ex partibus* he excommunicated all of them because “vous êtes la révolte dans la société religieuse et le désordre dans la société civile.”⁴⁶ Accused of being a traitor to his cause, he retorted that it was not he who was a traitor but they who in their pride had become blind to their first duty and who proclaimed to all “we shall not serve.”⁴⁷ For him ultramontanism had ceased to exist as a living political creed. It had given place to the “castors,” this “secte détestable et fanatique, séditeuse et intolérante.”⁴⁸

Tarte’s liberal-conservatism endured until 1891 when he joined the ranks of the Liberal party, and entered federal politics. It is not within the scope of this paper to relate in detail the personal reasons which prompted this change of allegiance. However the following considerations explain to a certain degree Tarte’s odyssey to the Liberal party, an odyssey which was not peculiar to him alone but also to an entire school of Canadian politicians. The Cartier school of

⁴² By this pronouncement it was ordered to cease all attacks against Laval University, confirmed Laval’s right to establish foundations outside of Quebec City and asked for the cooperation of all. Indirectly, it solved the question of influence undue, since the University was being attacked because of it. However there were further appeals to the Holy See and the question was not finally resolved till 1889. (See Rumilly, *Laflèche*, p. 189).

⁴³ *Le Canadien*, March 9, 1883.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, March 20, 1883.

⁴⁵ *Le Canadien*, August 22, 1883.

⁴⁶ *Idem.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, September 3, 1883.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, October 15, 1883.

politics to which Tarte was reconverted in 1883 had been affiliated with the other elements in the Conservative party through a compromise. This compromise, which recognized the duality of the Canadian heritage and the full participation by French Canada in the political life of the country, was seriously endangered during the years following Cartier's death. The appearance of Castorism, or political ultramontanism, the constant quarrels between the French Canadian ministerial representatives, the Riel crisis with its clash of race and tongue, scandals such as the McGreevy-Langevin affair which humiliated French Canada, delays in the solving of the Manitoba Schools question, the betrayal of promises and the temporary triumph of the Ultramontanes: all these greatly affected the solidarity of the French Canadian Conservative party and served to accentuate the need for a new political alliance. This school, faced with political stagnation and possible extinction, sought refuge within the ranks of the Liberal party. By 1896 their odyssey had been completed.

The French Canadian politico-religious crisis which had largely subsided after Tarte's reconversion had lived through the national disaster of the Riel affair and the excitement over the Jesuits' Estates Bill of 1889. In 1891 with the beginning of the agitation over the Manitoba Schools question, the conflict burst out anew with greater fury.

The Manitoba Schools problem is one of the greatest tragedies in Canadian politics. It was tragic in its consequences, tragic in its implications. It brought about a rift in Canadian national unity, embittered a whole generation and was, as Tarte so accurately remarked, but the beginning of a series of constitutional denials and betrayals. And all this because a majority had become a minority, because one political party was more interested in remaining in power than in doing justice and because another party was obsessed by the political implications of the problem. The human element only added to the tragedy. The prime ministers who succeeded one another after the death of Macdonald were indecisive. Fanatics reasserted their hatred of anything Catholic or French. Ministers hid under episcopal mantles, and Liberal leaders, hiding under the cloak of statesmanship, refused to assume any position.

It is not within the scope of this paper to present a case in favour of or against the politicians of the day who played a significant role in the tragedy. The question will only be examined in the light of the position Tarte assumed. While the hierarchy lost themselves in futile pronouncements on obedience and ultimate justification, while the great Conservative party cowered in indecision and impotence, and Laurier stood by silently, Tarte proposed, argued and threatened. His voice was firm and powerful and his energy decisive. Slowly under the barrage of his attacks French Canada regained hope, realizing that under the leadership of Laurier, their cause could be better served.

For six years while parliaments and legislatures, courts of justice and privy councils, caucuses and assemblies, bishops and priests, politicians and journalists, judges and citizens, debated the remedies, the delays of the government, the prejudices, the racial war, the tactics of the Opposition, Tarte was busily engaged in a war with the episcopacy. He accused the bishops of

betraying French Canadian interests and of offering shelter to the ministers. The war really began in March 1893 when Tarte opened the Manitoba Schools debate in the House of Commons. At that time he charged that prior to the election of 1891 Chapleau, then Secretary of State, had seen, in the name of his colleagues, Archbishop Taché of Manitoba who was then ill at the Gray Nuns' Hospital in Montreal. Chapleau had given the Archbishop "both private and formal pledges" that, after the election, the government would definitely act in this matter. His Excellency was prevailed upon not to agitate on this question during election time. To prove this point Tarte quoted from a letter of the Archbishop to a nephew of his dated August 20, 1892: "Sir John Thompson has pledged himself officially and publicly, others have done the same privately but solemnly."⁴⁹

Tarte repeated his charges against the Archbishop both in his newspapers and at the Liberal convention of 1893. He accused the government of bad faith and the Archbishop and indirectly, other influential members of the clergy, of having betrayed French Canadian and Catholic interests in the West by allowing themselves to be duped by the Macdonald government. Tarte attacked the government but excused the Archbishop on account of his old age and long sufferings.

However, the Archbishop refused to be so easily excused. In a letter to Tarte made public on July 5, 1893 he denied that any member of the cabinet had pledged the government "formally" to any course of action. Yet he did not deny having seen Chapleau in Montreal and having discussed the Manitoba Schools problem. As for his old age and great suffering, Taché thanked Tarte for his consideration, agreeing that "un demi-siècle de vie de missionnaire a sans doute amoindri mes facultés sans pourtant les éteindre: refroidi mon cœur sans le glacer..."⁵⁰ But the hard life "laisse à ma volonté assez d'énergie pour proclamer hautement que je n'ai jamais consenti et ne consentirai jamais à un compromis qui serait une faiblesse."⁵¹

Tarte received the letter as he was about to address a public meeting in Waterloo. He read the Archbishop's letter and explained to his audience that it did not deny what he had said and written. Never, he told his listeners, had he declared that "official" promises had been given by the government. Yet the Archbishop must have known that Chapleau was a member of the federal government even if he spoke "en son nom personnel."⁵²

Tarte did not engage in this open debate with churchmen for the sake of argument or because he had lost all the necessary respect which, as a member

⁴⁹ Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 1893, 1758 ff. Chapleau himself spoke of this in a letter to Thompson. See Public Archives of Canada, Thompson Papers, Chapleau to Thompson, December 29, 1892.

⁵⁰ Letter printed in *L'Electeur*, July 5, 1893.

⁵¹ *Idem*.

⁵² *Ibid.*, July 5, 1893.

of the Church, he owed to its lawful prelates. What he was interested in was in pointing out to the people, the electors, that in the final analysis the churchmen could not be the natural judges and arbitrators of the question. The Manitoba Schools problem was no doubt a religious problem, since it involved religion and morality; but the solution could only be political, arrived at by politicians in a spirit of compromise. As a Liberal politician he had to counteract the political effects of the bishops, who saw that their only hope resided in the Conservative government. Archbishop Langevin, who succeeded Taché in Manitoba, was also accused of deplorable diplomacy and of betraying the Catholic population of his province, since he was willing to be duped by a Remedial Bill which meant nothing because it was unworkable.

Shortly before the elections of 1896 the bishops of the province met in Montreal to issue directives to their people on the forthcoming elections. In the *Mandement Episcopal* made public on May 16 the bishops declared themselves the natural judges of the question, even though they did not wish “de s’infiéoder à aucun des partis qui combattent dans l’arène.” They concluded by stating:

C’est pourquoi, Nos Très Chers Frères, tous les Catholiques ne devront accorder leur suffrage qu’aux candidats qui s’engagent formellement et solennellement à voter au Parlement en faveur d’une législation rendant à la minorité catholique du Manitoba les droits scolaires qui lui sont reconnus par l’honorable Conseil Privé d’Angleterre. Ce grave devoir s’impose à tout bon catholique et vous seriez justifiables, ni devant vos guides spirituels, ni devant Dieu lui-même, de forfaire à cette obligation.⁵³

This was the famous pronouncement so long awaited and feared by the Liberals. As Tarte told J. Willison, the editor of the *Toronto Globe*, it was not “as wicked as it might have been, although it is doubtless directed against us.... We will be able to face the *mandement* without much loss, I think.”⁵⁴ E. Pacaud was as optimistic in his *l’Electeur*:

Nous ne pouvons nous défendre de donner expression au sentiment général de satisfaction qu’éprouve la population catholique. Les politiciens intéressés qui, d’avance se frottaient les mains de joie à la perspective que la moitié de la famille catholique serait blessée dans ses sympathies et ses convictions

⁵³ “Lettre Pastorale de NNSS les Archevêques et Evêques des Provinces Ecclésiastiques de Québec, de Montréal et d’Ottawa,” May 6, 1896. In *Mandements, Lettres Pastorales, Circulaires et autres Documents publiés dans le Diocèse de Montréal*, XII, pp. 196 ff. The Bishops had difficulty reaching unanimity. Archbishop Fabre and Bishop Emard refused to sign a first *Mandement*. Archbishop Fabre rallied to the other bishops but Emard only signed when this general statement was drafted. On this see Episcopal Archives of St. Hyacinthe, M^{gr} Moreau to M^{gr} Emard, May 9, 1896.

⁵⁴ Public Archives of Canada, Willison Papers, Tarte to Willison, May 17, 1896.

politiques, ont été désappointés.⁵⁵

The danger, however, did not lie in the mildness of the *Mandement* but rather in the interpretation given to it and the use which Conservative politicians made of it. They used it to demonstrate that the Church was solidly behind them in their efforts to solve the Manitoba Schools crisis. The Bishops, with the exception of Bishop Emard, gave it the most extreme interpretation possible. Even though the *Mandement* did not stipulate in exact terms what the legislation should be, there was no doubt in their minds that the remedial legislation as proposed by the Conservatives was the solution they wanted. It was “une faute grave,” as the Bishop of Rimouski told a parish priest, “pour un catholique de donner son vote à un candidat qui n’appuiera pas la loi réparatrice, acceptée par les Evêques, à l’effet de rétablir les écoles catholiques séparées du Manitoba.”⁵⁶ The bishops insisted on written and solemn declarations from candidates to this effect. How it was possible in a representative system such as Canada to exact such a formal promise was questioned at least by the Bishop of Valleyfield who felt it “bien difficile de faire fonctionner avantageusement un pareil système avec notre constitution.”⁵⁷

The Bishop of Three Rivers even went so far as to declare war on Laurier and the Liberal party by reviving the old charges of Catholic Liberalism. He accompanied the reading of the *Mandement* with a sermon which he called: *L’Application de la Doctrine Catholique à la Question des Ecoles du Manitoba*. Before a vast crowd assembled in his cathedral he attacked liberalism and the Liberals. He referred to a speech of Laurier’s in the House of Commons in which the Liberal leader had declared that, as long as he held public office, he would never judge a particular question from either the Catholic or Protestant point of view but rather would base his judgment on motives which could appeal to all men regardless of their religion.⁵⁸ This the Bishop declared to be “l’affirmation du Libéralisme condamné par l’Eglise la plus catégorique qui ait jamais encore été faite à ma connaissance dans une assemblée législative de notre pays.... L’homme qui parle ainsi est un Libéral rationaliste.” Anyone found voting for a party leader who professed such a doctrine, the Bishop declared, would be guilty of a mortal sin. Even those who were followers of this leader and worked for his cause were also guilty of sin unless they publicly disavowed him.⁵⁹ The sermon was published by most French Canadian newspapers and printed in a pamphlet which was widely distributed and used by the Conservatives to further their political cause.

The Liberals were aghast. They feared – and with reason – the conclusions

⁵⁵ *L’Electeur*, May 18, 1896.

⁵⁶ Episcopal Archives of Rimouski, M^{gr} Blais to M^{gr} Lebel, June 26, 1896.

⁵⁷ E.A.M., M^{gr} Emard to M^{gr} Fabre, April 23, 1896.

⁵⁸ Canada, House of Commons, Debates, 1896, 2759.

⁵⁹ Sermon printed in Rumilly, *Laflèche*, pp. 366 ff.

of this drastic sermon and personal attack on Laurier. *La Patrie* and *L'Electeur* and other Liberal newspapers assailed the Bishop relentlessly and at times even cruelly. They questioned his good faith and sincerity, as if it were possible for this narrow-minded, yet devoted churchman to be anything but honest and sincere in his convictions. The attacks of these newspapers only accentuated episcopal unity, for others hastened to the defense of their venerated brother and *doyen*. If Laflèche had seriously threatened their cause, the editors of the Liberal newspapers almost destroyed it.

Tarte in *Le Cultivateur*⁶⁰ attempted to quell the effect of Laflèche's sermon and yet at the same time to remain within the bounds of decency and respect which *L'Electeur* in its fury had neglected. He accepted the Liberal theory that the sermon was a political tirade, but "tous les citoyens sont libres, en ce pays, de faire la politique – les évêques comme les autres." Yet, "il est vrai qu'il n'y a pas longtemps encore, la Cour de Rome a cru devoir conseiller, en termes très clairs, au clergé catholique de s'abstenir d'ingérence dans les luttes politiques." With great deference he declared that it was not his duty or his intention to dictate a line of conduct to such a venerable Bishop. At the same time he asked the Bishop to realize that his sermon "augmente considérablement les difficultés déjà énormes qui entourent la question des écoles."⁶¹

The battle, the controversy, the appeals to race and creed continued until election day. Then on June 23, 1896 the Province of Quebec elected forty-nine Liberals and sixteen Conservatives. Jean-Baptiste had finally decreed that in political matters he was the supreme authority of his judgments and conclusions. The battle for political supremacy begun with the *Programme Catholique* in 1871 had finally ended.⁶² Exhausted after so many convulsions which had threatened to destroy their place in Confederation and had endangered the solid foundation of their faith, the people of Quebec turned to the task of reconstruction.

Millstead, August 31, 1958.

⁶⁰ *Le Cultivateur* was a weekly newspaper intended for rural consumption. It had a circulation of about forty thousand and played an important role in the Liberal victory in 1896. It was condemned in certain dioceses but reinstated during the mission of M^{gr} Merry Del Val in 1897.

⁶¹ *Le Cultivateur*, June 5, 1896.

⁶² Difficulties arose over the Laurier-Greenway settlement of the Manitoba Schools question in the fall of 1896. Rome sent an Apostolic Delegate who brought peace to the country and followed this mission with the Encyclical, *Atari Vos* published in January 1898. Thus ended the politico-religious conflicts of the nineteenth century.