

The Irish French Conflict in Catholic Episcopal Nominations : The Western Sees and the Struggle for Domination Within the Church

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Opponents of Catholicism have tended to depict the Catholic Church as a gigantic, monolithic structure responding to the dictates of the Pope. The pontiff has been regarded as a foreign sovereign, a despot who claimed supreme jurisdiction over all men and all nations in both temporal and spiritual affairs. Furthermore, since Catholics were not free to read, think or speak, they could not exercise the responsibilities of good citizenship. Zealous Protestants who believed these affirmations would have been shocked profoundly to discover that, far from being an ominous, monolithic institution, the Catholic Church has often been convulsed by internal rivalries. The areas of controversy have been as varied as the interests represented within the Church but in Canada it centered on the competition between French and English-speaking Catholics for positions within the hierarchy. So acute did this status rivalry become that to the French the term "*les Irlandais*" became synonymous with assimilationist or Anglicizer. To the Irish or the English-speaking Catholic, on the other hand, the French, their traditions and language, were an impediment to the full expansion of Catholicism in Canada.

The conflict for ascendancy within the Church was indicative of a keenly felt anxiety on the part of clerics and laymen concerned with the status of Catholicism in Canada. The clash between the French and English-speaking Catholic elements was in reality a microcosm of the polarization of views at the national level concerning the nature of the Canadian character and identity and the extent of cultural dualism in Canada. The emergence of an English Catholic community marked a turning point in Canadian religious and social history. Henceforth, the French would no longer enjoy an exclusive monopoly over the Church and its hierarchy and the outcome would be a bitter power struggle.

Language proved to be the most obvious source of contention between the French and Irish elements. The Irish were convinced that English would become the dominant language in Canada and they argued that Catholicism could progress only if the English language were accorded its rightful place

as a vehicle for religious instruction and services.¹ The Irish, as a result of their knowledge of the English language, contributed to making Catholicism more compatible with North American conditions. In Canada, for example, zealous Anglo-Protestants viewed Catholicism as an alien force because it was associated with the French and later on, the European immigrant. The Irish Catholic, because he shared the language and political traditions of the dominant élite and its anxieties concerning the assimilation of “New Canadians,” enabled English-speaking Catholics to be more readily acceptable as responsible citizens. For these reasons, Canadian politicians and parliamentarians found it easier to negotiate with English-speaking prelates on delicate and controversial issues involving the relations of Church and state. Nowhere is this more evident than in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century polemics surrounding separate schools and foreign language instruction. As Catholics, the Irish insisted on their rights to separate schools but the *raison d'être* of these schools was to impart an education based on Catholic principles and not to provide instruction in another language. The views of Irish Catholics on cultural dualism and foreign language instruction ironically paralleled those of the Anglo-Protestant ‘Canadianizers’.

The anti-French bias of the majority of Anglo-Protestants in Canada was a consequence of an anti-Catholic tradition inherited from Great Britain and exacerbated by pontifical pronouncements such as the *Syllabus of Errors* and the ultramontanism of French Canadian Catholicism. Thus, to be a Roman Catholic was to be suspect; to be a French-speaking Roman Catholic was to doubly suspect in the minds of the unsophisticated masses. Convinced that the French Canadian, through his language, religion, school system and church-state relations, was the antithesis of everything that the Empire represented, staunch Anglo-Saxons opposed any extension of the privileges accorded to the French in Canada. These sentiments were carried to western Canada by settlers from Ontario, a group that came to exercise a dominant influence on the West’s social and political life. There were many within the Anglo-Protestant population who felt that the West was a New Jerusalem which would one day hold the balance of power within Confederation and

¹ An eloquent plea on behalf of the English language was made at the Twentieth Eucharistic Congress in Montreal, September 10, 1910, by Francis Bourne, the Archbishop of Westminster. Bourne’s brief was refuted by Henri Bourassa in a stirring address which has become known as “le discours de Notre-Dame.” *Le Devoir*, “Hommage à Henri Bourassa” (2e éd., Montréal: n.p., n.d.). “L’Allocution de Mgr. Bourne,” pp. 138-144; “Le discours de Notre-Dame au Congrès Eucharistique de 1910,” pp. 145-159.

decide the ultimate destiny of Canada and the Empire.² Given the crucial importance of the West, it was felt that its institutions had to be Anglo-Saxon in character and that English had to be the dominant language.

The competing groups within the Church realized that the racial balance in the hierarchy would be decided by the creation of new dioceses in the West. French-speaking prelates traditionally had been in a majority in the hierarchy and in 1900, all the bishops in the West were French and suffragans of the Ecclesiastical Province of St. Boniface and its vigilant metropolitan, Archbishop Adélard Langevin, O.M.I. Despite legislation that had been very favorable to their interests, French Canadians had not come to the West in great numbers and, as the Territorial period drew to a close, they were a small minority in the prairie region. It was this ever increasing minority status and the consciousness of their past and traditions that made the French-speaking clergy so defensive and so suspicious and resentful of the influence of their co-religionists, the Irish. In 1911, for example, the French accounted for 72 percent of the Catholic population and the English for fourteen. The Irish, however, held five of the nine metropolitan sees and 15 of the 32 dioceses in the Dominion.³

The competition for domination within the Church was bitter and often reached scandalous proportions because it was a struggle to ensure the domination of one cultural tradition as opposed to another. The rapidly expanding Canadian West was to be the main battleground. One of the earliest skirmishes occurred in December, 1906, when a delegation of English-speaking Catholics from St. Mary's Parish in Winnipeg met with Archbishop Langevin and requested the appointment of English clergy for their parish, the creation of additional English parishes in the city and the establishment of an English language college under the direction of professors of that nationality. Furthermore, the delegates asked that Winnipeg be given an English bishop.⁴ Langevin was advised that English-speaking clergy were available in eastern Canada but that they would remain there because of the presence of the French bishops in the West. The

² Robert Sellar, editor of the *Huntingdon Gleaner*, saw the status of the West as a "commanding issue," and he argued that Britons were not to be prevented by the French Catholic clergy from establishing British principles on a firm foundation in the North-West. R. SELLAR, *The Tragedy of Quebec. The Expulsion of Its Protestant Farmers* (4th ed.; Toronto: Ontario Press, 1916), p. 374.

³ Archives of the Archdiocese of Regina [hereafter cited as AAR], Old Ecclesiastical Province of St. Boniface [hereafter cited as St. Boniface], "Quelques statistiques sur la population catholique du Canada," p. 1.

⁴ R. CHOQUETTE, "Adélard Langevin et l'érection de l'archidiocèse de Winnipeg," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, Vol. 28, Sept. 1974, p. 189.
J.M. REID, "The Erection of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Winnipeg" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1961), p. 13.

nomination of an English-speaking prelate, on the other hand, would entice Irish priests to come West and serve the needs of English-speaking Catholics as well as those of a rapidly expanding population that was adopting English as their language of communication. The English Catholic community also made its views known to Mgr. D. Sbarretti, the Apostolic Delegate, who was allegedly very sympathetic to their views. As a result of Sbarretti's intercession, the Irish in Winnipeg obtained the erection of two new parishes by 1908 and their confidence undoubtedly increased.⁵

More significant changes, however, were being contemplated in the Ecclesiastical Province of St. Boniface and, in 1910, Rome announced that Regina would be erected as a diocese. As metropolitan, Langevin was determined that Regina's first bishop would be a French Canadian but German and Irish Catholics also proposed candidates. The Irish soon withdrew from the contest and pledged their support to the German aspirant, Father F. Woodcutter, from Moose Jaw. Rumors soon began to circulate claiming that the appointment of a French-speaking prelate was not compatible with conditions in the new diocese.

The Archbishop prepared a memorandum for the Vatican and asked Saskatchewan's French Canadian Attorney-General, W.F.A. Turgeon, to state his opinions concerning objections that could be raised against the nomination of a bishop who was French Canadian but, nevertheless, fluent in English. Langevin claimed that Woodcutter's appointment would be a calamity for the diocese and that it would bring an end to French Canadian immigration to the area.⁶ Turgeon replied that he had heard of objections but he dispelled them as erroneous and unjust and claimed that Catholic and French interests were "intimately linked" in the new diocese.⁷ He added that his French Canadian origin had not been an impediment to success in public life and that the same was true for the province's Lieutenant-Governor, Amédée Forget.

In the meantime, confidential information concerning Langevin's actions was made public in the press. Montréal's *La Presse*, for example, related the opposition to the appointment of a French-speaking bishop. It also mentioned that a memorandum had been sent to Rome and that it had been signed by Langevin, Turgeon and Forget.⁸ As a result of this "indiscretion," the Vatican suspended the nomination pending further information and ordered that an ecclesiastical census be taken. Father H.

⁵ J.M. REID, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁶ Archives of the Province of Saskatchewan [hereafter cited as AS], Papers of the Hon. W.F.A. Turgeon [hereafter cited as Turgeon Papers], General Files, Langevin to Turgeon, Oct. 1, 1910, (Personnelle).

⁷ *Ibid.*, Turgeon to Langevin, Oct. 3, 1910, (Confidentielle).

⁸ *La Presse*, Oct. 27, 1910.

Lacoste, O.M.I., Vicar-General of the Diocese of Prince Albert, informed Turgeon of Rome's actions and added that Langevin "was moving heaven and earth" to put forward his candidate.⁹ For its part, the *Montreal Tribune*, a pro-Irish journal, doubted the authenticity of the original census and asserted that English-speaking Catholics comprised the majority in the area.¹⁰ The new enumeration, completed on April 19, 1911, revealed that the largest national element within the Catholic population was the French (15,964), followed by the Ruthenians (13,000), the Germans (12,470) and the English (4,211).¹¹

On June 23, 1911, the Sacred Consistorial Congregation named Olivier-Elzéar Mathieu, former Superior of Le Grand Séminaire de Québec and Rector of Laval University as first Bishop of Regina. Langevin later informed Mathieu that the comfort of his presence in Regina was well worth the four long years of negotiations that his appointment had entailed.¹² On another occasion, the Archbishop advised his suffragan not to overwork himself to the point of exhaustion and reminded him that: "C'est une tâche difficile de faire nommer un évêque à Régina par le temps qui court."¹³ The English-speaking faction, on the other hand, could not but view Mathieu's nomination as a serious reversal. *Roma*, an English Catholic journal in the Vatican, had expressed the hope that the Pope would name an English-speaking bishop for Regina and it claimed that the pontiff must have had excellent reasons for not doing so. The journal asserted that Quebec would remain French but that there was little probability a language other than English would be used in the West where population was increasing rapidly.¹⁴ For its part, Toronto's *Catholic Register* stated that French Canadians had exerted pressure upon Rome to secure the nomination for one of their own. According to the *Register*, Mathieu's appointment was a serious setback to attempts to secure the nomination of an English-speaking prelate in the Province of St. Boniface.¹⁵

As events were to prove, however, the *Register's* conclusions were premature. The question of dividing the Province of St. Boniface had been discussed by the French-speaking hierarchy on the occasion of Mathieu's

⁹ AS, Turgeon Papers, General Files, Lacoste to Turgeon, Nov. 10, 1910.

¹⁰ *Les Cloches de St-Boniface*, IX (Dec. 1, 1910), pp. 293-294.

¹¹ L.-P.-A. LANGEVIN, o.m.i., Mémoire confidentiel sur la situation religieuse et statistiques de la population catholique de l'Archidiocèse de Saint-Boniface (Saint-Boniface: n.p., May 18, 1911), p. 32.

¹² AAR, St. Boniface, Langevin to Mathieu, Aug. 4, 1912.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Langevin to Mathieu, March 6, 1913, (Personnelle).

¹⁴ *Roma*, July 22, 1911, cited in *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, Aug. 31, 1911.

¹⁵ *Catholic Register*, Aug. 10, 1911, cited in *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, Aug. 31, 1911.

consecration in Quebec City in 1911. The bishops had accepted the matter in principle but they affirmed their conviction that there was no hurry to proceed with the division.¹⁶ Early in February, 1913, Langevin advised Mathieu that St. Boniface had been divided and that, henceforth, there would be the Province of Edmonton and the Diocese of Calgary. The Archbishop had certain misgivings because it meant that beautiful, historic St. Albert would be abandoned in favor of the City of Edmonton but he accepted this as a consequence of religious progress.¹⁷ The French clergy, however, were far from satisfied with the way in which the division had been made. Langevin, for example, complained that contrary to tradition, Rome had hastened to make a decision and he regretted that courtesy and tact had been overlooked. It would appear that the details had been worked out in Rome and that Bishop Emile Legal of St. Albert, who became Archbishop-elect of Edmonton, had been ordered to keep the matter secret.¹⁸

The most controversial issue, however, was to be the nomination of a bishop for the new diocese of Calgary. In May, 1912, Langevin and his suffragans had put forth the name of a candidate and the Archbishop hoped that the Congregation of the Propaganda would demonstrate its confidence in the episcopacy of western Canada by appointing the individual that had been recommended.¹⁹ The speed and the secrecy with which Rome proceeded caught Langevin off guard and he had been unable to suggest the names of suitable candidates for the new diocese to Archbishop Legal.²⁰ Legal later informed the Metropolitan of St. Boniface that the selection of John Thomas McNally as first Bishop of Calgary had been made directly by the Holy See and that no other candidates had been considered. Langevin interpreted this action as a declaration of Rome's independence vis-à-vis the hierarchy and an indication of the importance that had been accorded to the requests of the Anglicizers within the Canadian clergy.²¹ Obviously very displeased by the turn of events, Langevin informed Mathieu that he did not feel compelled to congratulate the new prelate because McNally was neither his suffragan nor his neighbor.²²

McNally was the first English-speaking bishop to be appointed in the area once under the jurisdiction of the Province of St. Boniface. The fact that he was English was sufficient to make the French clergy suspicious, but the unusual circumstances behind his nomination, his personality and actions as

¹⁶ AAR, St. Boniface, Langevin to Mathieu, March 6, 1913, (Personnelle).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Langevin to Mathieu, Feb. 5, 1913.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, March 6, 1913, (Personnelle).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, May 31, 1912.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, March 6, 1913, (Personnelle).

²¹ *Ibid.*, April 14, 1913.

²² *Ibid.*, April 22, 1913.

bishop confirmed their worst fears. Within a short period after assuming the direction of his diocese, McNally succeeded in removing four French-speaking orders that had been established there and he became involved in a bitter quarrel with the Oblates.²³ After the erection of the diocese, the Oblates surrendered their parish, St. Mary's, to McNally and they founded a new one, Sacred Heart, in order that they might continue to exercise their spiritual duties in Calgary and have a central house to serve the Oblates in southern Alberta. Archbishop Legal had granted Sacred Heart to the Oblates and they asked McNally to ratify this gift and that it be made in perpetuity. If the new bishop agreed, the Oblates were prepared to construct a larger church in their parish.²⁴ In the meantime, a dispute arose between the separate school inspector who wanted to replace one of the sisters teaching in the convent in the parish on the grounds that she was incompetent, and the *curé* and some of the parishioners who wished to retain her services. McNally denounced the actions of the parishioners and their pastor as insubordination and on August 16, 1915, he advised the Vicar General of Missions in Alberta, H. Grandin, O.M.I., that the Oblates had five days in which to vacate Sacred Heart Parish.²⁵ The Oblates protested against their expulsion and humiliation to Mgr. P. F. Stagni, the Apostolic Delegate. Stagni informed McNally that he had acted within his rights as bishop when he dismissed the Oblates but that this procedure had not been wise. The Apostolic Delegate believed that few people would approve of McNally's conduct. He added "For my own part, speaking quite candidly and more as a friend than as a superior, I think it was a mistake."²⁶

A short time after delivering his ultimatum to the Oblates, McNally addressed a curious communication to the Apostolic Delegate in which he declared that his usefulness in Calgary was at an end and asked why Providence had ever appointed him to that office. If he had been selected to be a martyr, McNally asked why he had not been warned that he would have to submit to "whatever the Oblates or any other French community in this country chose to do to me." Furthermore, he claimed that since coming to Calgary, he had been subjected to the foulest personal insults ever hurled at anyone and that the Oblates had organized a war against him.²⁷

²³ M.B. BYRNE, *From the Buffalo to the Cross. A History of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary* (Calgary: Calgary Archives and Historical Publishers, 1973), pp. 112-19.

²⁴ Archives of the Diocese of Calgary [hereafter cited as ADC], Papers of Bishop J.T. McNally [hereafter cited as McNally Papers], IV, Grandin to McNally, March 23, 1914, p. 436.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Leduc to McNally, Aug. 24, 1915, p. 492.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Stagni to McNally, Sept. 3, 1915, p. 494.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, McNally to Dear Monsignore, Sept. 6, 1915, p. 500.

While events in the Diocese of Calgary were representative of the antagonism between French and English-speaking Catholics, the procedures whereby the Archdiocese of Winnipeg was created and detached from St. Boniface clearly indicate the intensity of the quarrel, the passions that it engendered and the influences that were brought to bear. While the Irish element in Winnipeg had succeeded in having two additional English parishes created in that city, they had not succeeded in securing the nomination of an English-speaking bishop. In 1914-15, they made their views and grievances known directly to Pope Benedict XV. They complained that the French clergy possessed a poor command of English and did not sympathize with the aspirations of Irish Catholics. The French were also isolated from the community at large and were not as influential among non-Catholics as were the English clergy. Furthermore, the Pope was informed that English was becoming the dominant language in the West and that alterations in Church administration had to be made to keep pace with changing conditions.²⁸

On June 18, 1915, the indefatigable Archbishop Langevin passed away after a lengthy illness and he was spared the humiliation of witnessing the division of the See of St. Boniface, the mother Church of Catholicism in the West. Langevin had succeeded in having his secretary, Mgr. Arthur Béliveau, named as auxiliary bishop and upon the death of the Archbishop, Béliveau became administrator of the Archdiocese. The attempt to secure the nomination of an English-speaking bishop in the Archdiocese was obviously causing great concern to Béliveau. In August, 1915, he wrote to the Superior of the *Collège Canadien* in Rome concerning allegations to the effect that there was not a sufficient number of English clergy in western Canada. Contrary to what the Vatican might have been led to believe, Béliveau asserted that the West was multilingual and that it would retain this status for quite some time. He was convinced that the future Archbishop of St. Boniface would be courting disaster if he lost track of this fact and imitated the behavior of some of the bishops of Ontario who sought to impose linguistic conformity on the faithful.²⁹ At first, Béliveau did not believe that Rome would give serious consideration to representations on behalf of an English-speaking bishop in Winnipeg. By October, 1915, however, he began to fear that the Vatican might be pressured into making a decision that was not in the best interests of the Canadian Church.³⁰

Two months later, in December, Béliveau's worst suspicions were confirmed when the Vatican announced the erection of the Archdiocese of

²⁸ J.M. REID, *op. cit.*, "Petition to Your Holiness." R. Choquette, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-200

²⁹ AAR, St. Boniface, Béliveau to Perrin, Aug. 19, 1915.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Oct. 5, 1915.

Winnipeg. This news certainly negated any comfort that the French could derive from the fact that Béliveau had been appointed Archbishop of St. Boniface or that Mathieu had been named Metropolitan of the newly created Ecclesiastical Province of Regina. The division of St. Boniface was to follow a line running along Red River and Lake Winnipeg. The area west of this line was to come under the jurisdiction of Winnipeg while the region to the east would remain attached to St. Boniface. These proposed boundaries imposed severe limitations on St. Boniface and placed a large number of French-speaking Catholics under the jurisdiction of an English prelate.

As could be expected, French Catholics were quick to censure the division of St. Boniface. Cardinal L.-N. Bégin informed Pope Benedict XV that while the English-speaking minority rejoiced as a result of the division, the French majority experienced a sentiment of “profound disgust.” The events that had taken place scandalized laymen in St. Boniface while in Ottawa the Apostolic Delegate declared that the matter did not concern him. Bégin regarded the division as a new and manifest injustice against the French element.³¹ Father G. Charlebois, O.M.I., Provincial of the Oblate order in Canada, described the erection of Winnipeg as an abominable injustice and a death sentence for French Canadians in Manitoba. Arguing that serious illnesses required strong remedies, Charlebois advised Béliveau not to accept the division as proposed by Rome and, furthermore, that all priests in the new archdiocese resign their functions.³² The Provincial’s brother, Ovide Charlebois, O.M.I., Vicar Apostolic of Keewatin, advised Béliveau not to accept his nomination. Bishop Charlebois informed the Apostolic Delegate of his feelings and the advice that he had given to the Archbishop-elect. Furthermore, he offered to resign if Rome or the Delegation wished to replace him with an Irish Catholic.³³ For his part, Béliveau was prepared to resign if that action could benefit the French Catholic cause and prevent Edmonton, Prince Albert and Regina from falling to the Irish in the future. Informing Mathieu of his dilemma, Béliveau asked him to consult with Quebec and Montreal because his resignation had to be supported by very categoric declarations “pour ne pas être un coup d’épée dans l’eau.” Béliveau placed the matter in Mathieu’s hands, claiming that he was too directly involved in the matter to make an impartial judgement.³⁴

In the end, Béliveau accepted the nomination and devoted his energies to securing an alteration of the interdiocesan boundaries and, hence, create two units along national lines that would be approximately equal in size.³⁵

³¹ *Ibid.*, Bégin to Notre Très Saint Père le Pape Benoît XV, n.d.

³² *Ibid.*, Charlebois to Mgr. et Cher Frère, Jan. 1, 1916.

³³ *Ibid.*, Béliveau to Mathieu, Jan. 13, 1916.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ R. CHOQUETTE, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.

At Béliveau's request, Cardinal Bégin asked Benedict XV to alter the boundaries so that St. Boniface could become a viable administrative unit. The Cardinal argued that if the Red River were used as a dividing line, the Archdiocese of Winnipeg would comprise 37,632 Catholics while St. Boniface would contain only 17,669 including 2,944 Ontarians who were included within its limits. Using the Assiniboine as the interdiocesan boundary, on the other hand, would create a more equitable distribution along national lines. Furthermore, it would not give the impression that St. Boniface was being sacrificed and that the division was but the first step in its eventual fusion with Winnipeg.³⁶ Bégin and Béliveau went to Rome to present their views and they succeeded in having the original boundaries changed in favor of the Assiniboine River as the southern limit for the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. While this line meant that 10,000 French-speaking Catholics north of the Assiniboine were left under the jurisdiction of Winnipeg, the numerous French parishes south of that river were incorporated into St. Boniface.³⁷

While the division of St. Boniface had profoundly shocked the French clergy, the nomination of A. A. Sinnott, Secretary of the Apostolic Delegation, as Archbishop of Winnipeg, was even more astounding. Cardinal Bégin referred to the promotion as being “unexpected.”³⁸ Even before these events had taken place, however, members of the French-speaking hierarchy were questioning the rôle and function of the Apostolic Delegation and they were convinced that the Delegate was promoting the English cause at their expense. Prior to the erection of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, the French bishops had met to discuss matters of mutual concern and they prepared a memorandum suggesting changes in policy which would result in a better entente between the Canadian hierarchy and the Holy See and its representatives.³⁹ The French clergy were critical of the structure and functioning of the Apostolic Delegation and they argued that a foreign prelate who resided only briefly in the country could not be a better judge of moral and religious matters than the bishops who had been born and raised there. Recent problems in Church administration in Canada and unfortunate episcopal nominations were attributed to the fact that Rome had consulted only the Apostolic Delegate. If the Vatican wished to restore the confidence of French Canadians in the Apostolic Delegation, it would have to replace the Delegation's secretary, Mgr. A. Sinnott, who belonged to a group of Irish clergy well known for its intrigues. If he were not removed, the public would be convinced that the Delegation was an instrument of Anglicization.

³⁶ AAR, St. Boniface, Bégin to Très Saint Père, n.d.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Béliveau to Mathieu, March 29, 1916.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Bégin to Très Saint Père, n.d.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Notes pour Mémoire (*pro-manuscripto*), I.

Furthermore, the Apostolic Delegate, Mgr. Stagni, severely admonished and reproached French Canadians but remained completely oblivious to the most inconsiderate writings and pronouncements of the Irish.⁴⁰

In addition to voicing their dissatisfaction with the Apostolic Delegation, the French clergy also criticized the conduct of the Irish bishops of Ontario in the controversy surrounding the teaching of French in that province. The French clergy argued that it was not the legal and heroic resistance of the Franco-Ontarians against Regulation XVII that was jeopardizing the existence of Catholic schools in that province; it was the alliance of Irish Catholics with the Orange Lodge and the treason and cowardice of the Irish bishops which threatened those schools. The persecution of French Catholics in Ontario and the division within Catholic ranks had been provoked and encouraged by Bishops Fallon of London, Scollard of Sault Ste. Marie, Macdonell of Alexandria, Dowling of Hamilton and O'Connor of Peterborough. It was none other than Archbishop Gauthier of Ottawa who declared that the bishops of Ontario had asked for the implementation of Regulation XVII. Furthermore, the Irish bishops had demonstrated that they were hypocrites, oppressors and assimilators by insisting that French Canadians accept an Anglo-Protestant inspector for their bilingual schools when the avowed purpose of that inspection was to eliminate the teaching of French.⁴¹

In an attempt to pacify Catholic factions in Ontario, the French clergy requested that the Vatican issue a directive stating that it was the right and duty of parents to raise their children as they desired and that no one, not even the clergy, had the right to prevent heads of families from having their children learn their mother tongue. Since it was believed that such a directive would be ignored by the "assimilative clergy and bishops," the French bishops asked that the Apostolic Delegation be instructed to make this injunction known to the clergy and the faithful and to ascertain that these instructions were being carried out.⁴²

The French bishops also suggested that Rome send a representative to visit Canada especially the province of Ontario, where in the interests of the welfare of Catholicism, it was necessary to rectify the errors made by the Apostolic Delegation in the past. They argued, for example, that the ecclesiastical map of Ontario had to be revised because the existing boundaries had been made to facilitate the monopolization of mitres and crooks. There were only 500,000 Catholics in Ontario and while more than one-half were French-speaking, the three Archbishops were Irish. Furthermore, there was a need for only two metropolitan sees in Ontario: Toronto

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, II.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, III.

⁴² *Ibid.*

for the English and Ottawa for the French.⁴³ The French hierarchy also proposed that the Diocese of London be divided and that a new see be erected at Sandwich or Windsor. The diocese would comprise 30,000 Catholics, most of whom would be French-speaking and it should have a French prelate. Bishop Fallon would be left with an equal number of English Catholics and tranquility would return to the unfortunate Diocese of London.⁴⁴ For his part, Cardinal Bégin later advised the Pope that if it had been deemed appropriate to divide St. Boniface to remove an English minority from the jurisdiction of a French metropolitan, it should be equally proper to remove a French majority from the jurisdiction of a bishop who was a “violent anglicizer.”⁴⁵

As a result of representations made by the rival elements in Canada, Benedict XV, in September, 1916, issued an encyclical dealing with the question of language in Canada. *Commisso divinitus* urged the bishops of Canada to meet and discuss the points of contention and arrive at an equitable solution based uniquely on the welfare of Catholicism and the salvation of souls. However, if the hierarchy were unable to resolve their differences, they were to submit the matter to the Holy See. In the meantime, the Pope asked Catholics and the Catholic press to exercise moderation and he urged the clergy to become bilingual and to utilize whatever language was necessary to minister to the faithful.⁴⁶ The encyclical then turned to the more tangible manifestation of the language question, the Ontario school controversy. It recognized that the Government of Ontario and English-speaking Catholics had the right to insist that English language instruction meet certain standards. On the other hand, the French had the right to insist on a suitable level of French language instruction in separate schools. Realizing that the acceptable balance between French and English language instruction would ultimately be decided by the state, the Pope declared that the hierarchy should strive to promote a spirit of moderation and ensure that each party receive that which was “just and equitable.”⁴⁷

While *Commisso divinitus* may have contributed to a pacification of animosities in Ontario, the competition for positions within the hierarchy did not abate. In February, 1920, Archbishop Mathieu was advised that Rome would nominate an Archbishop for Edmonton and that this appointment would be made regardless if the incumbent, Mgr. Legal, were alive or dead. Mathieu’s correspondant urged him to put forth the names of suitable

⁴³ *Ibid.*, IV.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Bégin to Notre Très Saint Père le Pape Benoît XV, n.d.

⁴⁶ *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, XV (Nov. 15, 1916), “Lettre de S.S. Benoît XV sur la Question des Langues au Canada,” pp. 338-341.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

candidates and to come to Rome as soon as possible.⁴⁸ Archbishop Béliveau was concerned with the state of Legal's health and he feared that the Vatican might attempt to place an English auxiliary in Edmonton.⁴⁹ Legal died on March 10, 1920, and shortly after his funeral, Mgr. Gabriel Breynat, O.M.I., Vicar Apostolic of Mackenzie, urged Mathieu to press for the nomination of a French-speaking successor. Breynat insisted that Rome should be made aware that the French hierarchy did not desire the appointment of a candidate who was a "passionate nationalist."⁵⁰ A few days later, Béliveau informed Mathieu that Archbishop Sinnott was presently in Rome and that unless the French had spokesmen to counter his influence, their cause was hopeless. Béliveau sensed that this was a turning point in the influence of the French hierarchy in the West and that decisive action was needed.⁵¹ For his part Cardinal Bégin, reminded the Pope that it was the French who had evangelized the West and that they should not be dispossessed of the fruits of their labours and heroic apostolate. If Edmonton passed to an English bishop, the Irish would have seven archbishoprics and the French only four. According to the Cardinal, this would be a regrettable anomaly in a country where the majority of faithful were French-speaking.⁵²

In the meantime, the English were also making their views known. Bishop McNally informed Cardinal Sbarretti, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation, that Catholicism had not been an effective force in northern Alberta because the Church had been identified too closely with the French whereas the majority of the population was English-speaking. McNally argued that this situation would prevail so long as the archdiocese was under the direction of a French-speaking prelate and he asked Sbarretti that this be kept in mind when "French names are presented for succession to the See of Edmonton, or indeed, to most of the Western Sees when they become vacant ..."⁵³

The following year, in 1921, H.J. O'Leary was appointed Archbishop of Edmonton. The loss of Edmonton was, as Béliveau had remarked earlier, a turning point in the influence of the French. In the late 1920's concern was being voiced over the state of Archbishop Mathieu's health. The question of a successor to the See of Regina became more acute in December, 1928, after Mathieu had suffered a heart attack. While on a visit to his native France, Raymond Denis, president of *L'Association Franco-Catholique de la*

⁴⁸ AAR, St. Boniface, Cloutier to Mathieu, Feb. 18, 1920.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Béliveau to Mathieu, Feb. 23, 1920.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Breynat to Mathieu, April 1, 1920.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Béliveau to Mathieu, April 10, 1920.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Bégin to Sa Sainteté Benoît XV, April 5, 1920.

⁵³ McNally to Sbarretti, March 27, 1920, cited in M. BYRNE, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.

Saskatchewan, discussed the matter of episcopal nominations with Cardinal Dubois, the Archbishop of Paris, and Aristide Briand, the French Foreign Secretary, in the hope that they might be able to influence Rome.⁵⁴ Upon returning to Saskatchewan, Denis wrote to P. Taittinger, a member of the French National Assembly, asking him to have Briand use his position and influence to secure the appointment of a French-speaking coadjutor for Mathieu. Denis stated that Mathieu would not accept an English coadjutor and that the Vatican would not impose one on him.⁵⁵ Denis also brought the concerns of French Canadians to the attention of Philippe Roy, Secretary of the Canadian Legation in Paris. Roy, in turn, discussed the question of Mathieu's succession with the French Ambassador to the Vatican and with Briand.⁵⁶

On October 26, 1929, Archbishop Mathieu passed away and the question of a successor was brought to the fore. Archbishop O'Leary of Edmonton and Bishop J. T. Kidd of Calgary went to Rome where they discussed the matter of the vacant see with officials in the Vatican.⁵⁷ Bishop F.-X. Ross of Gaspé and F.-X. Clouthier of Trois-Rivières also went to Rome to discuss the same topic.⁵⁸ For its part, the *Montreal Gazette* announced that l'abbé Vachon of Laval University would be appointed Archbishop of Regina.⁵⁹ In the meantime, Reverend Albert Rouleau, a priest in St. Anne's Parish in Calgary wrote to inform Prime Minister R. B. Bennett that there were political, ecclesiastical and racial questions that had to be considered in appointing a bishop. Rouleau stated that a French Canadian with a Scotch name had been appointed Archbishop of Ottawa to "diplomatically satisfy factions there" and he suggested that the nomination of "an English-speaking conservative with a good French name would pacify the concerns of Church and State in Regina." Rouleau believed that a word to the Apostolic Delegate along with one from his cousin, Cardinal Rouleau, and Bishop McNally might obtain the nomination for him.⁶⁰

Mathieu's successor was J. C. McGuigan, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Edmonton. McGuigan's nomination was reportedly

⁵⁴ R. DENIS, "Mes Mémoires," *Vie Française*, XXIV (jan.-fév. 1970), pp.143-144.

⁵⁵ Papers of l'Association catholique franco-canadienne de la Saskatchewan, File 85, Denis to Taittinger. Dec. 8, 1928.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Roy to Denis, Jan. 9, 1929.

⁵⁷ *Regina Daily Star*, Nov. 18, 1929.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Dec. 9, 1929.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1929.

⁶⁰ Public Archives of Canada [hereafter cited as PAC], Papers of the Rt. Hon. R.B. Bennett [hereafter cited as Bennett Papers], Rouleau to Bennett, Feb. 17, 1930, 381278.

engineered by the Apostolic Delegate, Mgr. Cassulo, who was not very favorable to French Canadian interests.⁶¹ French Catholic interests in Saskatchewan were given token recognition by detaching Gravelbourg from the Archdiocese of Regina and erecting it as a separate diocese under a French Canadian bishop, Jean-MarieRodrigue Villeneuve, O.M.I. The erection of the Diocese of Gravelbourg was allegedly a consequence of the efforts of the French Embassy in the Vatican.⁶²

During this competition for episcopal nominations, it was not unusual that prominent statesmen, even staunch Protestant ones, were asked to lend their support to one side or another. In 1932, for example, Prime Minister Bennett sent a confidential communication dealing with the religious situation in Canada to Sir John Simon, the British Foreign Secretary. Bennett stated that the three previous cardinals had been French Canadian and that there was a tendency in discussing religious matters to treat the terms Roman Catholic and French Canadian as synonymous.⁶³ Furthermore, the French tended to remain separate from the other elements of the community and this was not conducive to unity or harmony. The time had come when the head of the Canadian Church should use his influence to promote national unity and Bennett believed that this goal could be realized only if the next cardinal were selected from the ranks of the English-speaking hierarchy. The Prime Minister put forth the names of two suitable candidates: Archbishop Sinnott, the bearer of the confidential message to Simon, and Bishop McNally of Hamilton. Bennett suggested that the Foreign Secretary advise the British Chargé d’Affaires in the Vatican that the appointment of either Sinnott or McNally as Cardinal “would be most acceptable in Canada.”⁶⁴

On the same day that he made his views known to Simon, the Prime Minister also wrote to Cardinal Sbarretti, the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation. He informed the former Apostolic Delegate to Canada that the stabilizing influence of the Church was urgently needed in this period of economic distress. In Canada, however, there was no Cardinal to provide leadership and the Church was unable to fulfil this rôle. Anticipating that a Canadian Cardinal would soon be appointed, Bennett, in the interests of Canada, ventured to make a suggestion.⁶⁵ He affirmed that the French were a minority in Canada and that they strove to identify themselves with the Catholic Church to the exclusion of other groups. Consequently,

⁶¹ R. DENIS, “Mes Mémoires,” *op. cit.*, XXIV (jan.-fév. 1970), pp. 143-145; XXIV (mai-juin 1970), p.259.

⁶² *Ibid.*, XXIV (mai-juin 1970), p. 259.

⁶³ PAC, Bennett Papers, Bennett to Simon, April 23, 1932, 381279.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 381280.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Bennett to Sbarretti, April 23, 1932, 381307.

non-Catholics tended to identify the Church with the French element and to view it with “suspicion and distrust.” The Prime Minister viewed this state of affairs with apprehension and he believed that the Church could be the most “potent factor” in the unification he desired. In the past, the head of the Church had always been chosen from the ranks of one section of the population and the Church’s influence had been lessened because everyone regarded it as a French institution.⁶⁶ On the other hand, if the head of the Canadian Church had the sympathy and confidence of the country at large, the influence of the Church over a troubled society would be increased and it would contribute to the pacification and welfare of Canada.⁶⁷ In a separate communication to Sbarretti, the Prime Minister described Sinnott and McNally as “the two most outstanding prelates in the Canadian Hierarchy and the most capable of filling the high office in question.”⁶⁸

After receiving Bennett’s letter, Sir John Simon asked the British Chargé d’Affaires to give the Vatican some indication of the Prime Minister’s views on the appointment of an English-speaking cardinal. After receiving the diplomat’s reply, the Foreign Secretary informed Bennett that the matter was complicated by the fact that Pope Pius XI reserved the right of making nominations for himself. Furthermore, the Pontiff was not amenable to suggestions or advice even from cardinals.⁶⁹ The Chargé d’Affaires reported that English-speaking Canadians had more influence at the Vatican than did French Canadians. Bishop McNally, who spent a lot of time in Rome, was said to have “much influence” with the Secretariat of State and he was also very close to the Pontiff. The fact that the Pope had consulted occasionally with McNally caused great consternation to the French-speaking prelates who feared that their lack of influence would be reflected in less ecclesiastical preferment. The Pope was aware of this and Simon believed that he might be inclined to appoint a French-speaking cardinal to compensate the French element “for real or imaginary grievances.”⁷⁰

Bennett’s intercession on behalf of Sinnott and McNally was not successful and Archbishop Villeneuve of Quebec was created Cardinal in 1933. This reversal did not deter the Prime Minister from making further representations on McNally’s behalf. After the death of Archbishop N. McNeil of Toronto, Bennett again wrote to Sir John Simon concerning a successor. The Prime Minister stated that there had been considerable

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 381308.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 381309.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Bennett to Sbarretti, April 23, 1932, 381303.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Simon to Bennett, June 10, 1932, (Personal and Most Confidential), 381282.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 381283-284.

agitation by Ontario Catholics concerning the proportion of taxes received for the maintenance of their educational institutions. The Prime Minister described the Archdiocese of Toronto as the most important English-speaking see in Canada and its metropolitan would exercise considerable influence over the English Catholic population of Ontario.⁷¹ Claiming that he had no personal stake in the matter and that he wished only to avoid a division along religious lines in Ontario, Bennett stated that Bishop McNally would be the most suitable candidate for Toronto. Furthermore, he believed that McNally's appointment would be advantageous to Canada because his "experience, ability and tact" would prevent existing differences from resulting in public agitation.⁷² For his part, Simon wrote to Sir Charles Wingfield, the British Minister to the Vatican asking him to bring to the attention of the Holy See the arguments which Bennett had made in favor of McNally. Wingfield, in turn, made the Prime Minister's views known to Cardinal Sbarretti.⁷³ Despite the assistance of the British Foreign Office, Bennett did not succeed in promoting McNally's candidacy and Archbishop McGuigan of Regina was transferred to Toronto.

In conclusion, the rivalry between French and Irish Catholics was acute because the essence of the conflict went beyond episcopal nominations. The issue at stake was the nature of Canadian society and the rôle of French Canadians within that community. The French were a minority within the total population and they were conscious that their relative numbers were decreasing with every passing year. This placed the French at a disadvantage in presenting their claims and, hence, they became very defensive. Simultaneously, the French, the founders of the Canadian Church, saw their control over the Church threatened by an aggressive group which spoke the language of the majority and which displayed little respect for their culture and institutions. In this confrontation, French Canadians were the victims of their historical past. The legacy of *la survivance* made it impossible for them to view English-speaking Catholics as anything but assimilators and Anglicizers. The unfortunate actions of some of the Irish clergy confirmed the worst suspicions of French Canadians. In the final analysis, both the French and English-speaking clergy were convinced that their policies were in the best interests of Catholicism in Canada. The protagonists were influential prelates in the Church and if their actions at times do not befit the dignity of their office, it must be remembered that they were also mortal men and, consequently, subject to all the frailties that that status entails.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Bennett to Simon, Oct. 11, 1934. 381298.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 381299-300.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Simon to Bennett, Oct. 23, 1934, 381310.